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Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 23, 2025

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay before the House, pursuant to subsection 94(2) of the Access to Information Act and subsection 72(2) of the Privacy Act, the reports of the Auditor General of Canada on the administration of these acts for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), these reports are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

[English]

INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay before the House, pursuant to subsection 94(2) of the Access to Information Act and subsection 72(2) of the Privacy Act, the reports of the Information Commissioner of Canada on the administration of these acts for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2025.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), these reports are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) and consistent with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Republic of Poland on the Protection of Classified Information”, done at Warsaw on January 16, 2025, and the treaty entitled “Agreement between Canada and

the Portuguese Republic on the Protection of Classified Information”, done at Lisbon on September 16, 2025.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am here this morning to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, in relation to the motion adopted on Tuesday, September 16, regarding Canada's immigration system.

LIAISON

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Liaison Committee, entitled “Committee Activities and Expenditures: April 1, 2024 - March 23, 2025”.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the following two reports of the Standing Committee on National Defence. The first report is entitled “Gaps to Fill: Housing and Other Needed Supports for Canadian Armed Forces Members and Their Families”, and the second report is entitled “Rebuilding Trust: Transparency and Accountability in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces”.

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

[Translation]

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-245, An Act to amend the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (non-application in Quebec).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to introduce a bill to exempt Quebec from the application of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. It is clear that Canadian multiculturalism is directly at odds with Quebec's integration model, interculturalism.

Routine Proceedings

By reducing the people of Quebec to just another minority, the Canadian doctrine takes a simplistic view of Quebec. It denies that there is a majority host society. It denies the duty to integrate. It denies the existence of the Quebec people. The Canadian model basically trivializes and isolates communities, while, in contrast, the Quebec model seeks to promote a progressive cultural convergence through contact and exchanges between newcomers and the host society. Under the Quebec model, it is not a question of rejecting otherness, but rather of adding it to who we are.

Canada treats Quebec like nothing more than an administrative entity, but we are much more than that. We are a nation that aspires to govern itself.

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

* * *

● (1005)

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-246, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (consecutive sentences for sexual offences).

She said: Mr. Speaker, for over a decade, Liberal justice policies have increasingly favoured criminals, therefore undermining the safety and dignity of victims and communities alike. Nowhere is this more painfully evident than in the case of sexual assault. Sexual violence is one of the most devastating violations a person can suffer. It strips away their dignity, their safety and their trust, yet multiple sexual assaults are often treated as if they are one offence, therefore minimizing harm, weakening deterrence and eroding public trust.

Since 2015, sexual assaults have increased nearly 75%, and offences against children by 120%. Liberal reforms have repeatedly prioritized repeat offenders, sending the wrong message that protecting predators matters more than protecting Canadians—

The Speaker: There is a point of order from the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, you have commented on brevity during the introduction of private members' bills. We are finding that introductions are becoming more and more political. The statement that was just made is an excellent demonstration of this. I think you need to go back to the Standing Orders and provide a comment on how private members' bills are supposed to be introduced.

The Speaker: Typically, we are aiming for interventions of about 60 seconds when introducing a private member's bill, and the hon. member had not reached the 60-second mark. She has a bit of time left, but not much more.

The member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola is rising on a point of order.

Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, the member politicizes just about everything, so the member for Lethbridge should be able to start from the top. In my view, that was a deliberate attempt to interrupt. She was not able to say what she needed to say to the Canadian public in one stream of thought, and she is entitled to start again.

The Speaker: I will give the member a bit more time, but not from the top.

Please, go ahead.

Rachael Thomas: Mr. Speaker, my point is clear that for over a decade, Liberal justice policies have increasingly favoured criminals and undermined the safety and dignity of victims and communities alike. The bill I am bringing forward today seeks to put victims ahead of criminals, which is where we need to land as a country. Liberal reforms have repeatedly prioritized repeat offenders, sending the wrong message that protecting predators matters more than protecting Canadians, and this practice is wrong and must end.

My bill would amend the Criminal Code to require courts to impose consecutive sentences rather than concurrent ones for sentences for sexual offences. With my bill, each crime would carry its own penalty and each victim would receive the recognition they deserve.

It is long overdue that we put victims ahead of criminals, and I hope I can count on all members of this place to agree with that.

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

* * *

● (1010)

[Translation]

PETITIONS**PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to table today a petition signed by hundreds of people who point out that persons with disabilities deserve to have a dignified life.

Unfortunately, the new Canada disability benefit does little to address poverty. In addition, this benefit is tied to the disability tax credit. Part of the problem is that only 1.6 million Canadians have access to the disability tax credit, while there are roughly 8 million Canadians with disabilities. This is a significant discrepancy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a threshold of \$2,000 a month was recognized as the bare minimum needed to survive. These individuals are asking that the Canada disability benefit be increased to \$2,150 a month and that this benefit be decoupled from the disability tax credit in order to ensure broader accessibility.

[English]

WILDFIRE RESPONSE

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to table this petition on behalf of petitioners from my riding of Courtenay—Alberni, who are on the front line of wildfires this season. They highlight that the increase in intensity and cost of wildfires in Canada, not just in British Columbia but across the country, requires bold and timely action.

Without a national air tanker fleet, each province must weigh the cost of purchasing or contracting aviation resources, with no guarantee that resources will be available when and where they are needed most. Fighting wildfires and addressing the climate crisis demands a wartime level of effort and commitment. Other countries retrofit retired military aircraft for aerial firefighting and providing rapid response capability and national resilience.

The conversion of Canada's retired CC-130 Hercules fleet into state-of-the-art air tankers would protect communities and critical infrastructure, and it would help meet climate commitments by reducing catastrophic carbon releases from wildfires.

The petitioners cite that they are calling on the government to work in partnership with the private sector, in collaboration with potential first nations partners, to retrofit a portion of Canada's retired CC-130H Hercules fleet into large air tankers for wildfire suppression; deploy these aircraft as part of a strengthened national wildfire response capacity, to be shared with provinces and territories and, where appropriate, to be available for international humanitarian and emergency response missions; and, finally, prioritize this made-in-Canada solution, which leverages Canadian engineering and global expertise and delivers clear benefits in protecting lives, communities and the environment.

HEALTH CARE

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I table a petition from residents who are genuinely concerned about health care, in terms of everything from dealing with credential recognition to the treatment that nurses and health care professionals get in facilities, capital infrastructure and so much more. They are asking for a higher sense of co-operation between the different levels of government, in order to be able to achieve the type of health care that Canadians expect to see.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Points of Order

POINTS OF ORDER

SCHEDULING OF COMMITTEE MEETING

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Madam Speaker, last Tuesday, a video was shot in a vacant committee room. I was involved in the video, as were my colleagues from the justice committee who are from the Conservative Party. In that video, we drew attention to the fact that although this was a regular day to hold a justice committee meeting, there were no Liberals present at this particular meeting and no member from the Bloc Québécois.

The truth of the matter is that opposition members do not set the schedule for the justice committee. It is done by the Liberal Party. The video had unintended consequences for the Bloc Québécois and, in particular, my colleague and friend, the member for Rivière-du-Nord, for which I apologize.

The fact of the matter is that they control the agenda. We were ready to conduct a meeting on that particular day, but the Liberal Party did not appear.

[Translation]

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to thank my colleague for his initiative. On September 16, the members for Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, York Centre, Brampton West and Elgin—St. Thomas—London South made a video in a House of Commons room when the committee had not been convened. We had had discussions about it among the parties.

Although the committee had not been convened, the video could give the impression that government and Bloc Québécois members were not at work when we actually were. Obviously, people are not going to show up for a meeting if the committee has not been convened. We have a lot of other things to do.

I would like to thank my colleague for acknowledging the harm that this has caused because it is very important that we be vigilant, that we protect parliamentary privilege and, most importantly, that we avoid misleading the public. It is important that we, here in the House, share common values, including respect for the work of all members, and that we are careful not to spread misinformation.

I would like to send a message to everyone in the House: We are here to work for the common good. I would encourage us all to refrain from making personal attacks and disparaging our opponents, and instead focus on debating the substance of the issues and our political positions. Of course, we will have disagreements, but we will also often be able to reach a consensus. Let us work for the common good while respecting our colleagues.

I would like to once again thank my colleague for acknowledging this, and let us remain vigilant going forward.

Business of Supply

● (1015)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I think it is important to recognize that the meeting was actually scheduled for the Thursday, not the Tuesday. The member apologized, and I appreciate and thank him for raising the incident, but in his concluding remarks, he still suggested that the Liberals did not show up. The Liberals did not show up because there was no meeting scheduled; it was not until Thursday.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[Translation]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY****OPPOSITION MOTION—CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF QUEBEC AND THE PROVINCES****Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ) moved:**

That the House:

- (a) call on the government to fully withdraw from the legal challenge of Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State before the Supreme Court;
- (b) call on the government to withdraw its factum filed on September 17, 2025, with the Supreme Court contesting Quebec's right to invoke the notwithstanding clause; and
- (c) denounce the government's willingness to use the Supreme Court to take constitutional powers away from Quebec and the provinces.

He said: Madam Speaker, before I begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Jean, House leader for the Bloc Québécois.

I am pleased to speak today to this motion, which I am honoured to move on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. It has three very clear components that we will have the opportunity to examine. Before we begin the debate, however, I would like to remind members of a few things that I feel are important.

First, the dreaded notwithstanding clause, which the government considers an atrocity, a sword of Damocles hanging above the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is actually the very thing that enabled the Liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau to patriate the Constitution without Quebec's consent in what was called the "night of the long knives". Without the notwithstanding clause, there would have been no agreement with the provinces, and René Lévesque would not have been sidelined. Why is that?

In fact, this provision assures the provinces that the federal government and its charter are not at a higher level, that the federal charter does not override the will of the provinces and that the parliamentary sovereignty of the provinces is in no way in question. The notwithstanding clause allows the Quebec, provincial and federal governments to pass laws notwithstanding section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Section 33 states the following:

● (1020)

(1) Parliament or the legislature of a province may expressly declare in an Act of Parliament or of the legislature, as the case may be, that the Act or a provision thereof shall operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of this Charter.

(2) An Act or a provision of an Act in respect of which a declaration made under this section is in effect shall have such operation as it would have but for the provision of this Charter referred to in the declaration.

(3) A declaration made under subsection (1) shall cease to have effect five years after it comes into force or on such earlier date as may be specified in the declaration.

(4) Parliament or the legislature of a province may re-enact a declaration made under subsection (1).

(5) Subsection (3) applies in respect of a re-enactment made under subsection (4).

Nowhere is there any mention of pre-emptive or non-pre-emptive or curative use. Nowhere is there any mention of a limit on renewing the notwithstanding clause. It is simply a tool.

My first reminder is this: The Quebec government has the right to use the notwithstanding clause as it sees fit, within the limits of its scope, of course. It is not up to Ottawa to impose its views on Quebec.

My second reminder is this: Since the 1960s, secularism has been a fundamental component of Quebec society. The province began by secularizing education with the creation of the ministry of education. Classical courses were then replaced by CEGEPs. Teachers traded in their cassocks for trousers and their headdresses for hairstyles. Secularization continued until a constitutional amendment put an end to the religious school boards, replacing them with linguistic school boards.

Over the past 20 years, there has been debate about reasonable accommodations, the Bouchard-Taylor commission was established, there were public consultations on the charter of values that went on for months, there was the debate about Bill 21 and, more recently, the Pelchat-Rousseau committee considered the limits of the Act respecting the laicity of the State.

For the past 60 years, Quebec has thoughtfully examined the question of secularism, it has laid the foundations of Quebec society, for the separation of church and state, with French as our common language, equality between men and women, and the recognition of a shared historical heritage.

Also for the past 60 years, Ottawa has tried to sabotage Quebec's efforts by challenging the way we do things. Even now, the House of Commons begins its day's work with a prayer. It is one thing if this government is unwilling to act or is indifferent when it comes to protecting secularism, but what it is doing now is far worse. It is trying to weaken Quebec secularism, literally acting as judge and jury, scorning Quebec's choices from the moral high ground it has taken. Ottawa simply does not like the choices made by Quebec society.

That leaves us here today with this motion that is asking three things of the federal government. First, that it not challenge Quebec's choices in the Supreme Court. Second, that it keep its comments to itself. Third, that it give up on the flawed notion of using this provision to weaken the powers of Quebec and the provinces.

' The Attorney General of Canada had not submitted his factum when we drafted this motion. The information we had was that Ottawa would only challenge the use of the notwithstanding clause, but not the Act respecting the laicity of the State. We thought this was rather absurd. We felt that without the notwithstanding clause, a series of legislation, such as the Act respecting the laicity of the State and legislation to protect the French language would end up in court. For several months, we thought that Ottawa would go to the Supreme Court to undermine secularism in Quebec, but we were wrong. The federal government is going to the Supreme Court to take away the tools that enable Quebec to set rules and safeguards in the society in which we live together. We call on the government to withdraw its challenge to Bill 21.

I would go further and say that when the Canadian Constitution was repatriated in 1982, the government of Trudeau senior inserted section 33 on the notwithstanding clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to isolate Quebec.

• (1025)

He introduced ironclad constitutional protections to ensure that things would remain the same. I would remind members that constitutional amendments require the support of the House, the Senate and seven provinces representing at least 50% of the population. What the Liberal government is now doing is to replace parliaments and representatives of the Canadian people with a few judges appointed by the very government. This is an attempt at a constitutional coup. If the government is uncomfortable with the notwithstanding clause, which clearly appears to be the case, it should invite elected representatives to a constitutional conference. This debate should take place in parliaments and not in court. It should be between representatives of the Canadian people, and not between judges and lawyers.

The Liberals claim they are defending the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; however they are skirting the democratic process when they ask the Supreme Court to limit section 33. The use of Bill 21 as a pretext to ask the Supreme Court to amend the Constitution shows the Liberals' misuse of the notwithstanding clause. They claim that the use of the notwithstanding clause needs to be restricted, under the pretext that what those evil Quebecers are doing with laicity is appalling. That is what the government is trying to say.

It does not like Quebec's choices, and it wants to take away the tools that allow Quebec to make its choices. This is a political battle; it is being waged in the political arena, not the legal one. This debate must take place here, in the provincial legislatures and with the Quebec National Assembly. One of the arguments in favour of the notwithstanding clause was that the provinces did not want government by judges. Now, by challenging this provision, the government is ignoring the will of the provinces. Indeed, it has asked the Supreme Court to get involved in politics and amend the Constitution, changing its intent. It is undemocratic.

The government must withdraw, withdraw its factum and, once and for all, forget about this bad idea to use the Supreme Court to weaken Quebec and the provinces.

Business of Supply

Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. He knows very well that Canada is made up of several provinces and territories.

In his opinion, are there any limits when it comes to the provinces using the notwithstanding clause?

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, despite my white hair, I am afraid I am too young to have drafted the notwithstanding clause. The clause's limits are set out in the act that includes this provision, and none of those limits are like the ones that the current government wants to propose.

Do the provinces have limits? They do not have any more than Quebec or the federal government. Section 33 exists, and it can be amended only through the consent of elected officials, not through a Supreme Court decision.

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are faced with a Liberal government that is currently trying to create a crisis, and that is really very disappointing. I would like to ask my Bloc Québécois colleague a somewhat technical question.

Does the time-limited nature of the notwithstanding clause help protect the Constitution as a whole?

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but there is some confusion there. My colleague is right; section 33 does not help protect the Constitution. Section 33 enables the provinces, Quebec and the federal government to pass legislation that goes against, or does not take into account, the specifics of section 2 and sections 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It does not protect the Constitution, but it protects the right of Canadians and their leaders, in the various legislatures, to work despite the restrictions imposed by the charter.

• (1030)

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague on his excellent speech. It was clear and straightforward.

Everyone knows that the reason for this legal challenge is the Act respecting the laicity of the State that was passed in Quebec. Could my colleague share his comments on the government's hypocrisy in taking a blanket approach to limiting the notwithstanding clause?

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, that is a good question. I mentioned it briefly in my speech. It has become clear that it is not just the Act respecting the laicity of the State, but all the laws in Quebec and all the Canadian provinces that are being jeopardized by the current government's legal challenge.

The government is saying that the notwithstanding clause must be regulated, that its use must be limited. However, in Quebec alone, without the notwithstanding clause, the Charter of the French Language would be out the window; laws protecting children who can testify out of court would be tossed aside; the lack of lawyers in small claims court to allow people to represent themselves at a lower cost would never be addressed.

Quite a number of laws have been passed because it is possible to opt out of the charter. This is the problem we have both elsewhere in Canada and in Quebec. Everything will—

Business of Supply

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the notwithstanding clause is a tool that is constitutional, legal and legitimate in many cases, including the ones that he just mentioned. However, in recent years, we have seen the notwithstanding clause being used more and more, in some cases in a heavy-handed way, especially when it is included in the bill itself. The provincial governments say that they are suspending fundamental rights and freedoms and that there is nothing the federal government and the courts can do to stop them. This has us concerned.

We saw Doug Ford's Conservative government invoke the notwithstanding clause to suspend education workers' right to strike. This is a slippery slope that New Democrats do not want to go down.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, I cannot do anything about the Ontario government's slippery slope, but it is questionable. The important thing to understand about the pre-emptive use of section 33 is that it is neither preventive nor curative. That is how the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is set up.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that the notwithstanding clause is not written into the bill. The legislation will remain in force unless and until the Supreme Court rules that it is no longer in force and that it is invalid. When that happens, the government will just add the notwithstanding clause and it will come back into force. The legislation will therefore remain in force the entire time. The problem is that some people will have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars challenging it, engaging in a years-long legal battle and creating chaos in society just to reach the same outcome.

In its wisdom, if any, the government of the day allowed the use of the notwithstanding clause from the outset, and I believe that we must continue to do so—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): We have to resume debate.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this important motion, and I want to thank my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord for moving it today so that we can debate it. I also thank him for his very enlightening speech.

Like him, I will take the liberty of rereading the motion for the benefit of everyone here and the many people who I know are tuning in at home.

That the House:

- (a) call on the government to fully withdraw from the legal challenge of Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State before the Supreme Court;
- (b) call on the government to withdraw its factum filed on September 17, 2025, with the Supreme Court contesting Quebec's right to invoke the notwithstanding clause; and
- (c) denounce the government's willingness to use the Supreme Court to take constitutional powers away from Quebec and the provinces.

The Attorney General of Canada filed his factum challenging Bill 21 with the Supreme Court. He will say that is not accurate, but it is. He is challenging Bill 21. He can say that he is simply chal-

lenging the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause, but since he is doing it in the context of the challenge to Bill 21, he is clearly challenging the Act respecting the laicity of the State.

The member for Beloeil—Chambly, who is also the leader of the Bloc Québécois, likes to say that foresight of consequences is part of intent.

The Attorney General is therefore indirectly challenging Bill 21, which was passed in 2019. If the Supreme Court were to agree with the Attorney General's argument that the notwithstanding clause can be used only for a period of five years, the consequence would be that Bill 21 could be struck down. In any event, it would no longer be protected by the notwithstanding clause. Foresight of consequences is part of intent, and it is our opinion that challenging the secularism law is also part of the Attorney General's intent, even though he does not say so in so many words.

It is important to keep this in mind when reading the Attorney General's factum. The Liberal government's position is that the use of the notwithstanding clause is a step towards the end of freedoms. In its view, the notwithstanding clause is an undemocratic weapon with the potential to wipe out freedom of the press, unions and freedom of religion. It believes that when the notwithstanding clause is invoked, journalists can be silenced, churches can be shuttered and organized labour can be outlawed. My colleagues may think I am delusional, that I am fantasizing and making things up, and I can understand that, but I am going to cite a passage from page 12 of the factum:

The loss of means essential to the exercise of a right or freedom could produce effects that would subsist beyond the expiry of any declaration under s. 33. For example, the freedom of the press, guaranteed under s. 2(b) of the *Charter*, could disappear if independent newspapers and media were prohibited from carrying on business for a prolonged period. Similarly, freedom of religion, guaranteed under s. 2(a) of the *Charter*, could disappear if places of worship were declared illegal for a prolonged period. And freedom of association, guaranteed in s. 2(d) of the *Charter*, could disappear if all trade unions were declared illegal and prohibited from engaging in any activity for a prolonged period.

According to the Attorney General, the notwithstanding clause could open the door to a dictatorship, as if Quebec had nothing better to do at night than dream up ways to get around sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Attorney General's choice of examples is not insignificant. The Attorney General mentions places of worship to send the rather bizarre message that Quebecers are so anti-religion that they might go so far as to ban churches, synagogues and mosques. That is practically what the Attorney General is telling us. That is the not-so-subtle subtext of this Liberal pamphlet.

However, it does not take the notwithstanding clause to weaken newspapers, unions, and rights and freedoms. The federal government is able to do this without resorting to a notwithstanding clause. The government is in the process of hypocritically taking away federal workers' right to strike, as we can see from its excessive use of binding arbitration and section 107 of the Canada Labour Code.

As a reminder, I would point out that Quebec passed its own anti-scab legislation in the late 1970s, while the federal government has only just done so 45 years later. Incidentally, we could talk about all the gaps and loopholes in that bill, but we would need a whole other sitting.

• (1035)

The Bloc Québécois introduced at least 11 bills along those lines, and all of them were defeated. Ottawa is telling us that the notwithstanding clause can be used to ban trade unions. Ottawa is also using newspaper arguments, even though its failure to take action is primarily responsible for the closure of the majority of regional newspapers in Quebec and Canada. The federal government cloaks itself in its vision of freedom of worship, yet it does nothing to crack down on hate speech under the guise of preaching. There is no excuse for these examples in a matter that concerns Quebec legislation. These examples should make us leery, and that is exactly what Quebecers should be.

The factum of the Attorney General even goes as far as to talk about executions and slavery. The Factum states, "...a statute that invokes s. 33 to allow arbitrary executions or slavery would violate a constitutional limit...". The Attorney General is telling us that a statute that would use the notwithstanding clause to allow firing squads and slavery would be going too far. We may agree, but why should his factum include unrealistic things, if not to demonstrate that the use of the notwithstanding clause is necessarily in conflict with the values of justice and democracy? In reading the factum, it is hard to believe that the notwithstanding clause has been in effect for the past 43 years. One has to wonder how people have survived this far, where the gulags are and how we have managed to protect our rights.

This government, which is lecturing Quebec and provinces, has just introduced Bill C-5, a bill that states that all other legislation does not apply to specific government projects. It is a piece of legislation that circumvents all other legislation. Is this what respecting the spirit of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom means? It can certainly not be said that the government is leading by example. This is the government that was negligent in invoking the Emergencies Act and suspended fundamental rights, which are also guaranteed in the charter, for some time. This is the same government that is condescendingly judging Quebec, a generous and welcoming society, and which suspects us of being xenophobic and racist and of having authoritarian inclinations.

This factum is an insult. It says more about how the federal government views Quebec than it does about secularism and the use of the notwithstanding clause. We are asking the government to withdraw from this case and take its surreal factum with it. We recognize that it has the right to try to review the notwithstanding clause, but that would require an amendment to the Constitution, which would be done by negotiating with Quebec and the provinces in the context of constitutional talks. As my colleague who spoke before me pointed out, this is not a matter to be debated before the courts. If the government wishes to debate the use of section 33, we would be happy to sit down with it. Then it can talk to us all it wants about slavery, firing squads, child exploitation and dictatorships, and at that point, we will ask it to try to be serious.

Business of Supply

I would like to remind the government about something else concerning section 33. The government contends that this section is to be used in a temporary, time-limited manner. It is telling us that the charter, which forms part of the Constitution, is unconstitutional and that subsection 4 of section 33 has no application. In any event, its notion of the permanence of the law is arguable. We are legislators. The government makes laws. Laws can be changed, amended or repealed, if that is the will of the elected representatives, which, in turn, reflects the will of the people, a will that is equally subject to change. When this government talks about the permanence of a law, it is talking about a concept that is foreign to politics. We have the power to amend anything, including laws that use the notwithstanding clause. If the Attorney General does not like laws that use the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively, he should just support a party that is opposed to this, or follow Pablo Rodriguez' example and run in Quebec.

One thing is clear: This debate is not one that should happen in a courtroom.

• (1040)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think we should have some concern and thoughts about this not being just a Quebec issue. This is an issue that affects all provinces.

It would be reasonable for us to pose the question my colleague asked: Are there any situations in which the Bloc believes the notwithstanding clause should be used?

Back in the eighties, I was very proud to witness our nation signing the Charter of Rights. I felt very good about that and how the notwithstanding clause came about in the first place. However, I am very concerned about the need to ensure there is a sense of fairness. I was in the Manitoba provincial legislature for almost 20 years. I am concerned about what the Bloc is saying we should or should not be able to do.

[Translation]

Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary just demonstrated that the Attorney General's position goes well beyond the specific question of secularism. What he really wants is to deprive the provinces of their autonomy, which they won in a hard-fought battle during constitutional negotiations around section 33.

On the issue of excessive, pre-emptive or disproportionate use of the provision, this is a matter for the provincial legislatures, which are subject to a tool that, despite its flaws, is the best we have, namely, democracy. The way to overturn a government's decision is to call an election and remove that government.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, does the Bloc Québécois member agree that the Liberal Prime Minister is trying to manufacture a crisis to avoid talking about the real crisis that is happening here in Canada with respect to crime, the economy and immigration, a crisis that Quebecers are also facing?

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• (1045)

Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, and I am happy he asked it in excellent French.

The government never misses an opportunity to deflect. However, our role is to hold it accountable for all of its actions, and we can do so on several fronts. That is what we are trying to do today. We can talk about how the provinces need to be able to make their own decisions, and we can simultaneously hold the government accountable for its bad decisions on housing, immigration and the economy. As the saying goes, we can walk and chew gum at the same time.

That said, I agree with my colleague that the government never misses an opportunity to sweep some of its failures under the rug.

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I am somewhat surprised that the Bloc Québécois motion calls for the Attorney General of Canada to withdraw his factum in a case where the notwithstanding clause affects not only the provinces, but also the Government of Canada. It also affects the House of Commons and the Senate too. It can be used.

Does the Bloc Québécois believe that the Government of Canada should not intervene when there is a conflict between decisions made by the Quebec Court of Appeal, the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal and the Superior Court of Quebec on the use of the notwithstanding clause?

Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, we are not saying that the government should not disagree on the notwithstanding clause. It absolutely has the right to do that. However, if it wants to get rid of it, it should hold constitutional talks instead of using the courts to sidestep what could be a very meaningful political debate. We think that is cowardly, and that is what we are speaking out against.

If the government wants to discuss the notwithstanding clause, it should invite us to constitutional talks. We will certainly have a few minor requests to make.

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, does the member believe that removing the time-limited aspect of the notwithstanding clause will lead to a constitutional amendment without any national negotiations?

Christine Normandin: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I missed the beginning of the question, but I think I got the gist of it, and I just answered it, in part. The courts should not be tasked with examining the use of the notwithstanding clause. We are not saying that there should not be any discussion on the notwithstanding clause. We are saying that the government is using the wrong forum.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

When I gave my speech, you signalled to me that my 10 minutes were up when, according to the timer that I set before I began, I still had some time left. What is more, you interrupted me. With all due

respect, I am not saying that you do not have the right to do that. It is fine, but that also made me lose some time.

I just rose to ask my colleague some questions. You gave both the Liberals and the Conservatives two chances to speak, but you did not give us any.

Is there a problem with me participating in the debates of the House?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): With regard to your speaking time, I am sorry, but I have to follow the timer that I have in front of me. It is the only one I have. With regard to the interruption, I interrupted you because a member rose and I thought that she was rising on a point of order, which did not turn out to be the case. As for this time, I did not see you until it was too late and I had already given the floor to the Conservative member.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I rise in the House today, I want to convey just how important the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is to me and to my identity as a Quebecker and a Canadian. I will also explain why it must be protected.

Like so many women before me, my mother and my grandmother fought for equality before the law. To give a little background, my grandmother owned several newsstands in Montreal. She was an entrepreneur. She had employees. However, the law at the time prohibited her from having a bank account. It had to be in her husband's name. She also did not have the right to vote.

Considering what is happening south of the border these days, it is more important than ever to protect the rights and freedoms enshrined in our Constitution and in the charter. Legislatures must not be allowed to limit these rights without any oversight or without a court being able to examine exactly whether the limits are justified.

It was Simone de Beauvoir who said that it only takes a political, economic or religious crisis for women's rights to be called into question. She also said that we must remain vigilant throughout our lives. That is exactly what I am doing today. I rise in the House to defend the rights and freedoms that my grandmother and generations of women in Quebec gained at great cost. I rise to support our government and to prevent cracks from forming in the protection and guarantees afforded to us by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I am talking about women's rights, of course, but also the rights of minorities and workers, as my colleague previously mentioned.

I take the floor today to support the important role played by the Attorney General of Canada when he appears, through counsel, before the highest court in the country, the Supreme Court of Canada, to provide his legal viewpoint on constitutional questions, including the protection of our hard-won rights and the definition of the limits of section 33 of the charter, the notwithstanding clause, that we were just now discussing.

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The constitutional limits set out in section 33 prevent the notwithstanding clause from being used to amend or abolish the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter. Indeed, unfettered use with no limitations of any kind would be the same as saying that our rights and freedoms can be reduced to nothing. The courts have the responsibility of ensuring that the use of a notwithstanding clause is limited, respected, and exceptional.

Our constitutional democracy is based on balance. I am going to keep coming back to this concept of balance. This essential balance lies at the heart of our democracy. Parliament and the provincial governments have broad latitude to enact laws in the public interest within their respective jurisdictions, but that latitude is not absolute, and in a way that is the matter under debate here. The principle of parliamentary sovereignty has always been framed within the Canadian constitution, which includes a charter of rights and freedoms. The notwithstanding clause cannot override the jurisdiction of a court to find that rights and freedoms have been unreasonably limited within the meaning of section 1 of the charter.

It is important to remember that our country is governed by the rule of law and that the Constitution is the supreme law of Canada. In our federal system, it is the Constitution that confers legislative powers on Parliament and the provincial governments.

● (1050)

As the Supreme Court has said, the Constitution binds all governments. Their sole claim to exercising legitimate authority is grounded in the powers conferred under the Constitution and cannot come from any another source.

In our system, federal, provincial and territorial governments strive to co-operate for the greater good of all the people they represent and their communities, whether provincial, territorial or local. Disputes may arise from time to time as to whether one level of government or another has overstepped the bounds of its constitutional authority. The courts are there to rule on these disputes according to legal principles. Our courts appreciate efforts to promote co-operation between the different levels of government, and of course, to preserve provincial autonomy, which is important to mention because it is a feature of our federal system.

As the Supreme Court has observed, the desire to protect provincial autonomy reflects both a commitment to accommodate diversity within a country by granting significant powers to provincial governments and a broader constitutional goal of maintaining a balance between unity and diversity. There is unity in diversity. I believe that this value is at the heart of our democracy and our country. It is also at the heart of the charter.

There is also a constant need for balance between other constitutional principles and values. Parliamentary sovereignty has to be balanced against the protection of minorities, as enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian Constitution has always reflected a commitment to respect minorities, as historically evidenced by provisions in the Constitution Act, 1867, and the Manitoba Act, 1870, relating to linguistic rights and denominational schools. When the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force, additional protections, including fundamental rights and freedoms, legal rights, the right to equality, and a

broader range of language rights were entrenched in the Constitution.

The Attorney General of Canada played a key role both before and after the charter came into force to ensure these principles, such as parliamentary sovereignty, were balanced within the overall framework of the Constitution, including the protection of minority rights and fundamental protections in the charter. For instance, the Attorney General appeared before the Supreme Court in *Attorney General of Quebec v. Blaikie et al.* and the 1979 case *Attorney General of Manitoba v. Forest* on the subject of the constitutional right to use French and English in the statutes, legislatures and courts of Quebec and Manitoba. The Attorney General also intervened in the matter of the Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards in 1984 and has done so in many other cases since then to assist the Supreme Court in interpreting the right to education in the minority language. This right is now enshrined in section 23 of the charter and in its application in several provinces.

As the chief justice of the Superior Court of Quebec, the late Jules Deschênes, noted when granting intervener status to the Attorney General of Canada in the Quebec Association of Protestant School Boards case in 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a constitutional instrument that applies everywhere in the country, and the Attorney General of Canada naturally has an interest in ensuring the sound administration of the charter throughout the entire country.

● (1055)

The Constitution provides a stable and balanced legal framework for democratic governance and the protection of all of our fundamental rights and freedoms. Parliament and the provincial legislatures are sovereign in their respective areas of jurisdiction, as conferred on them by the Constitution and insofar as they do not contravene other provisions. Since 1982, the charter has formed an integral part of the Constitution and it guarantees the rights and freedoms set out therein, subject, of course, to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

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It is true that, in the compromise reached with the provinces to finalize the patriation of the constitution in November 1981, the notwithstanding clause was added. It allows Parliament or a provincial legislature to enact, on an exceptional basis, legislation that applies notwithstanding certain rights. It was said that section 33, the notwithstanding clause, would preserve a modicum of parliamentary sovereignty in exceptional circumstances. However, the balance inherent in the constitutional framework would be disrupted if the exception were to become the rule, so that instead of upholding the central idea of the charter, which is a sort of solemn *Magna Carta* intended to constitutionally protect and guarantee the fundamental rights and freedoms of Canadians, the provincial legislatures systematically invoked the notwithstanding clause as a means of completely circumventing the charter and denying the courts any possibility of speaking to the matter. This would not respect the underlying structure of our Constitution and the primary objective of having a Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrined in our Constitution. The notwithstanding clause, found at the end of the charter, would reduce the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter to nothing, to a mere legal fiction.

The growing temptation to use the notwithstanding clause in an attempt to prevent judicial review of the legislative action in light of the charter's guarantees threatens our fundamental rights and values, and it threatens the balance between parliamentary sovereignty and other constitutional principles, such as the separation of the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The fundamental principle of the separation of powers gives us a strong and independent judicial branch and underscores the legitimate role of the courts in the interpretation and application of the provisions of the Constitution, including the charter.

The House has a long tradition of abiding by the inherent constitutional convention of *sub judice* by refraining from debating legal matters that are before the courts. As the Supreme Court noted in *Canada v. Vaid* in 2005, "[i]t is a wise principle that the courts and Parliament strive to respect each other's role in the conduct of public affairs." Parliament refrains from commenting on matters before the courts under the *sub judice* rule, and the courts refrain from interfering with the workings of Parliament or a provincial legislature.

In the case of the appeal launched by the English Montreal School Board and other parties, the factum of the Attorney General of Canada in his role as an intervener does not challenge the validity of the Act respecting the laicity of the State. In light of the increasing use of the notwithstanding clause, meaning section 33 of the Charter, the Attorney General invites the Supreme Court to clarify the constitutional limits of this power. This is very important for the rights and freedoms of all Quebecers and all Canadians.

• (1100)

At its core, this argument is based on the principle that the Canadian Constitution strikes a delicate balance between legislative authority and our fundamental rights. Although Parliament and the provincial legislatures have broad discretionary power to pass legislation in their respective areas of jurisdiction, parliamentary sovereignty has always been subject to the Constitution, including since 1982 when the charter was enacted. This appeal provides an

opportunity to reaffirm the balance that is at the heart of our democracy.

The Supreme Court of Canada is the general court of appeal for Canada, and as the highest judicial institution in the land, it will be well served by the Attorney General of Canada's intervention as it reviews the charter guarantees and the use of the notwithstanding clause. Canadians and Quebecers expect nothing less.

• (1105)

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ) Madam Speaker, in her speech, my colleague across the way claimed to want to defend women's rights by attacking the notwithstanding clause. I find that odd because it is well known that Quebec's state secularism law clearly indicates that the equality of men and women is non-negotiable. My colleague wants to indirectly fight against Quebec's state secularism law, which enshrines women's rights.

She also says that she wants to protect workers' rights, even though her own government has intervened countless times to prevent workers from going on strike and exercising their rights. Worst of all, she also cited the *Blaikie* decision, which was one of the first times the Supreme Court weakened Bill 101 in Quebec. I do not understand.

What she is basically saying is that she wants the Supreme Court to create a constitutional amendment. That is what the federal government is demanding. It wants to the Supreme Court to change the Constitution to further weaken Quebec. What is my colleague ultimately hiding? What Quebec legislation does she want to attack? What other legislation does she not like? How concerned should we be about her work?

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, because it gives me a chance to reiterate how important this is.

I am a Quebecer, I am proud to live in a province that supports women's rights, but I have some concerns. I see what is happening in the United States, and I want to ensure that our rights and freedoms, which are set out in the Constitution, in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, will always be respected.

Obviously, exceptions can always be made in any legislative assembly or provincial law, but I do not want the use of the notwithstanding clause to undermine our fundamental rights and freedoms. These rights must be subject to judicial review, when a decision is made to restrict them.

[English]

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Madam Speaker, no party has divided Canadians more and created more polarization than the Liberal Party of Canada.

Canadians are facing a number of crises that the Liberal government has created: a food crisis, an inflation crisis, a crime crisis and an immigration crisis. We are also facing an unemployment crisis and a youth unemployment crisis at recessionary levels.

Why is the Liberal Prime Minister trying to distract Canadians and trying to create a national unity crisis when Canadians are expecting us to come together to solve the problems the Liberals themselves have created?

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, I am very proud to live in a country that is united in its diversity. This government has always been there to protect our Charter of Rights. It is so dear to us, and as I said, generations of Canadians have fought to have it. By protecting the charter, we are protecting our unity. This is more important than ever as we live in a global and changing world. In other parts of the world, rights and freedoms are being eroded, so it is even more important than ever to be united and to defend what is most dear to us, which is our Charter of Rights.

[Translation]

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am always happy to rise on behalf of the people of Pays-d'en-Haut.

I am a proud Quebecker, and I am also concerned about the growing use of the notwithstanding clause.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague to explain how the Attorney General of Canada's intervention could prevent the erosion of rights and freedoms enshrined in the Canadian charter.

• (1110)

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It is important for the Attorney General to intervene. Unfortunately, we are seeing more and more legislatures invoking the notwithstanding clause to limit our fundamental rights and freedoms. Perhaps it is justified, but it is up to the court to decide.

The Attorney General's intervention will prevent a serious breach of our rights, prevent the exception regarding the notwithstanding clause from becoming the rule and ensure that our rights and freedoms continue to be protected.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I would like to pick up on what the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères said in his question.

The parliamentary secretary responded that there was a risk of violations based on what is happening in the United States, but that is precisely the crux of the issue. We are currently seeing a rise in religious influence on the government in the United States. That is why the principle of secularism involves not attacking the rights of individuals to practise their religion. The parliamentary secretary also invoked rights and freedoms. It is more a matter of remembering that there should not be any connection between church and state. What is more, Quebecers' money is being used to challenge this fundamental principle, the consequences of which are being seen in the United States. Quebecers' money is being used to challenge a law passed by the Quebec National Assembly.

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to hear my colleague reaffirm that the situation is worrisome.

Again, as Simone de Beauvoir said, we must always remain vigilant. We must never take our rights for granted. Right now, our

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rights are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

It is important not to create a back door that could be used to circumvent the protections and guarantees provided by the charter. That is the risk governments run when they pass laws using the notwithstanding clause to avoid judicial scrutiny, which would determine if those rights are being unjustifiably curtailed. We can agree on that.

However, the way to do that is to protect the charter and set limits and guidelines in case someone tries to ignore the rights and freedoms enshrined in the charter.

[English]

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Madam Speaker, right now, there is a wave of unity across the country. Canadians of all stripes from all regions have realized that the Liberal government has failed in reining in crime and has failed by allowing immigration to run rampant in a reckless way. Canadians are also in agreement about the many problems the government has caused on affordability.

When so many Canadians agree about the very real crises that Canada faces, why is the Liberal government trying to create division and a national unity crisis?

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, we agree that Canadians are more united than ever in facing up to the impact of Donald Trump's tariffs on our economy. We have seen their enthusiasm for buying Canadian, their support for our businesses and organizations and their support for the Prime Minister. It is very important that we stand united behind him, because we are facing historic economic challenges. As Simone de Beauvoir also said, when there is an economic crisis, women's rights are put in jeopardy. It is very important that we unite behind the charter.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague quotes Simone de Beauvoir extensively. I would like to congratulate her for that. Kudos to her. However, she should be aware that women in Quebec have been fighting hard to break free from religion. In the 1940s to 1950s, women in Quebec did not have the same rights as men, and they had to campaign for a long time and fight hard to replace religion with something else.

Now, what my colleague is saying is that developing the tools to break free from religion would be a setback. I struggle to understand her logic. Either she does not understand Simone de Beauvoir, or I do not understand her argument about feminism and the link she is making between feminism and the notwithstanding clause.

• (1115)

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, only women can truly understand the insecurity they feel and the importance of ensuring that their rights and freedoms are guaranteed by the Canadian charter.

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Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the many words the member has put on the record.

My concern is the issue of using the notwithstanding clause in a pre-emptive fashion. A good example of this at the national level is that, for the very first time in Canada's history, we have the Leader of the Opposition saying he will use the notwithstanding clause in order to bring in and support legislation.

I believe Canadians have a great sense of pride in the Charter of Rights and believe we should not easily overlook the Charter of Rights. Therefore, we all have a responsibility, no matter what province we are from, to take the notwithstanding clause seriously.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel: Madam Speaker, I agree.

The Attorney General's factum and intervention are intended to support the Supreme Court in interpreting the notwithstanding clause with a view to regulating its use and ensuring that, as I said earlier, our rights and freedoms are not eroded to the point where we no longer recognize them and they all but disappear in the long term.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will begin by reading an excerpt from the Attorney General of Canada's factum in the case we are discussing today.

The following excerpt is taken from the first paragraph:

In accordance with his role as intervener, the Attorney General of Canada takes no position, on any basis whatsoever, on the constitutional validity of the provisions of the *Act respecting the laicity of the State*. However, as s. 33 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is invoked with increasing frequency, it is important to consider whether there are constitutional limits on the use of this provision in addition to those outlined in *Ford v. Quebec*.

I think it is very important that we take stock and discuss this situation. This is really just another crisis that the Liberals are trying to manufacture to avoid talking about the real crises that they themselves have created and that the Prime Minister has inflicted on Canadians after 10 years of this wasteful, ideological and opportunistic regime.

Think of the opioid crisis, which is killing vulnerable Canadians at an alarming rate. Incidentally, I would like to thank all the Canadians and members of Parliament who have sent me messages of support since last week. It is important for me to mention this. Canadians across the country have been very kind about the statement I delivered regarding what happened to my son and about the bill that I tabled last week. I would like to personally thank each and every person who took a few moments to express their support.

Now let me get back to the crises created by this Liberal government, which the Prime Minister is desperately trying to sweep under the rug by creating another crisis, a constitutional crisis this time, to avoid talking about his results. In particular, let us talk about the cost of living crisis. Everyone here knows very well that the cost of living is skyrocketing thanks to inflation. I clearly recall what the Prime Minister said when he swore in his cabinet. He said that he would be judged by the prices at the grocery store.

I think the verdict is very clear. Food inflation is 70% above the Bank of Canada's baseline target. What does this mean? It means that beef is more expensive. It means that vegetables are more expensive. It means that the price of groceries is higher than ever. This week, I read about an elderly lady who has to make extremely hard choices due to the cost of groceries. She only eats two meals a day now. She cannot even remember the last time she had steak.

● (1120)

Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I can see why my colleague might think the government is trying to avoid the cost of living crisis, which is affecting people. However, I think that Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State and the fact that it is being challenged are important issues for Quebecers. I would politely ask my colleague to focus on the motion we moved today. I do not understand why anyone would see a connection between the price of peas and the laicity issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Jonquière knows that members are given a lot of leeway regarding the topics they discuss in their speeches.

I would remind the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière of the substance of today's motion. He has the floor.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, there is clearly a connection.

This Liberal Prime Minister made a lot of promises to Canadians. Now he is trying to further divide Canadians to avoid being held to account. The factum that was submitted to the Supreme Court is yet another attempt to divide Canadians, to pit them against each other so they forget about all the crises and the many promises this Prime Minister made to Canadians to get elected. Now he finds himself in the position of not having an answer.

That is the reality. That is the food crisis facing Canadians and Quebecers.

This elderly woman, the one I was talking about before my Bloc Québécois colleague interrupted, has to make very hard choices. She is going without food. She says she cannot remember the last time she had steak. That is the reality, despite this Liberal Prime Minister's promises to do things differently and end 10 years of chaos. He was supposed to restore order and lower the cost of living to an acceptable level. That, however, is not what happened.

There is no shortage of similar examples. Four million more people are using food banks in Toronto alone. It is mind-boggling. Rising inflation is forcing people to make hard choices. Families can no longer afford to fill their children's lunch boxes with the food they deserve. That is the reality. That is what Canadians want to hear about.

What solutions is this government bringing forward to end the Liberal cost of living crisis?

There is also another crisis, the debt crisis. Would members believe that this Liberal Prime Minister is spending more and spending faster than his predecessor, Justin Trudeau? It is true. He is spending more and spending faster than his predecessor, Justin Trudeau. We did not think it was possible. I think that if anyone had been asked before the election whether they honestly thought that a prime minister could spend more and spend faster than Justin Trudeau, they would not have believed it. However, that is what has happened. We are in a situation where the government desperately wants to sweep all this under the rug without tabling a budget. Imagine someone is getting ready to renovate a house. They tell the contractor they want a castle, but when the contractor asks if they can afford it, they say they will take care of that later. What will happen? Before the castle is even half built, the bailiffs will show up. They will seize everything, and the person will lose everything.

That is where we are headed. That is the kind of crisis the Liberal Prime Minister is creating by refusing to present Canadians with a budget. He promised us a budget in early fall because we were expecting one. Then it was changed to October. Finally, we found out it will be November 4, which is rather late because the year is already well under way. If we follow the usual schedule, it will be less than six months before another budget is presented.

• (1125)

Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

With all due respect to my esteemed colleague, he is getting a bit off topic. Today is the Bloc Québécois opposition day, and we are having a debate on the Act respecting the laicity of the State and on section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, its constitutionality and ways to amend it, among other things. I do not think that is what my colleague is talking about. I would be grateful if he would stick to the order of the day.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I take note of the hon. member's point of order. I pointed out earlier that members are given a lot of leeway regarding the topics they discuss in their speeches.

I invite the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière to use his remaining three minutes to speak to the substance of the motion.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, the federal government's intervention is clear: "the Attorney General of Canada takes no position, on any basis whatsoever, on the constitutional validity of the provisions of the *Act respecting the laicity of the State*." This is the position that the government took before the Supreme Court to avoid addressing the real issues affecting Canadians. It wants to create a constitutional crisis to prevent us from talking about the opioid crisis, the inflation crisis and the debt crisis.

To return to the matter of the budget, how much of our money will this Prime Minister have spent by the time he finally presents us with a budget? No one can say. However, the interim parliamentary budget officer has been quite clear, and I want to emphasize the word "interim" for reasons that will become apparent later on.

The interim parliamentary budget officer said last week in committee that he does not know whether the government currently has fiscal anchors. He told us straight out that the government does not

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know where it is heading. He said that, at this point, it is impossible for him and for us as parliamentarians to assess the likelihood or probability of the government hitting any fiscal target. He also said that we can bet our boots that we are going to be paying more for debt pretty quickly.

The only thing we knew for certain after the interim parliamentary budget officer's committee appearance is that we are going to be paying more for debt. The worst part is that the Liberal members of this committee are keeping him in a constant state of crisis by appointing him on an interim basis rather than confirming his appointment. Why? It could be because he has been highly critical of the government.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères is rising on a point of order.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Speaker, what is happening right now is really frustrating and insulting. I hope you will call my colleague to order because we are talking about an issue that is crucial for Quebec. The federal government is attacking Quebec's ability to decide its own destiny and make its own laws. My Conservative colleague, who is himself from Quebec, does not appear to have any interest in the matter and is not taking a position on today's motion, even though we have only one day to debate it.

When will my colleague talk about his position on today's topic?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): As the hon. member knows, the Chair has little authority to direct members' speeches as long as they remain more or less within the scope of the motion in question.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I forgot to mention that I will be sharing my speaking time with the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

One thing is very clear. I am explaining why the Prime Minister is trying to divert attention from the real issues affecting Canadians, issues that impact people's daily lives. That is the reality, and it is not for nothing that the preamble states that the government will not touch Bill 21. The goal is not to take a position on the issue, but to create a crisis that prevents us from talking about the other Liberal crises that have been affecting the country and Canadians for the past decade.

The Minister of Finance and National Revenue promised us a budget containing a generational investment, but, as he is so adept at doing, he will table a budget containing multi-generational spending and debt that citizens and young people will be paying off for generations. I want Canadians to hear that.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like my colleague to answer the question that I put to you earlier.

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I would like to know why, as a staunch federalist, but especially as a member of the Conservative Party, which always claims to be the most decentralizing party in Canada, he is not defending the rights of his province. He has an opportunity right now to prove it. The Liberal government says that it is going to attack powers that are already in the Constitution and that allow provinces to overcome possible federal overreach or certain constraints that the federal government could impose on the provinces.

Since the member supposedly supports decentralization, why is he not defending his province's power to enact its own laws?

• (1130)

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I will never put up with being told that I am not defending the interests of my province, the interests of the people back home and my constituents. That is not true.

When I talk about the mother who cannot afford to buy lunch for her children, when I talk about seniors who are forced to make tough choices, I am defending Quebecers who are struggling after 10 years of this Liberal regime. What I am doing is standing up for the people back home, the people of Beauce and the Appalaches region.

My colleague should wait to see the results of the vote tomorrow before making all sorts of claims and speaking nonsense.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague.

Is this the first time the government has tried to deflect attention from its terrible record on the cost of living and crime? For the past 10 years, I have noticed that every time the situation in Canada gets worse, especially when it comes to quality of life and the cost of living, the Liberal government finds a way to change the channel.

Does my colleague agree that this is the government's MO?

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, it has indeed been their MO for 10 years now. Sometimes the Liberals accidentally tell the truth. We saw that this past week with the Minister of Public Safety. It is coming back to haunt him now.

I must say that, unfortunately, when there are moments of lucidity like that, it is purely accidental. The Liberals usually want to cover things up and make sure the crises that they are going through and that they themselves created are swept under the rug.

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague opposite if he can think of a specific situation where the Conservative Party would use the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively, as the provinces are currently doing.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I would like to know if my colleague supports his Prime Minister's cover-ups, because for the last 10 years, we have seen a government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The member knows that he can answer a question or make a comment, but he cannot ask another question.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I was not asking a question, I was making a comment. Had you let me finish, you would have realized that I was actually about to make a comment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The member may resume his comment.

The hon. member from Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière.

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member knows that the Liberal government has been engaging in cover-ups for years. What I would like to know is whether the member and all other members of the Liberal Party agree that the government is leading us in a totally unacceptable direction due to the out-of-control debt, the inflation crisis and the crime crisis.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague that the cost-of-living crisis is a very important and worthy issue that we can talk about.

However, there is another very important issue, which is the survival of a minority nation and Quebec's ability to enact its own laws to regulate religion in its society. My colleague did not comment on that, so I will ask him a very simple question.

As an elected member from Quebec, does he believe, as I do, that Quebec is fully competent to respond, to make its own laws and to regulate religion? Does he believe that, yes or no?

Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, yes.

• (1135)

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for sharing his time with me today.

This is another engineered distraction on the part of the Prime Minister. He is trying to distract from his terrible record. Even though he has been in the role of Prime Minister for only a short time, he has an abysmal record and is desperately trying to change the channel for that. Let me just explain how I know this. It is an engineered distraction, because the Prime Minister has never expressed opposition to Bill 21 in Quebec.

We can look at the official submission. I have here a copy of the factum of the intervenor, the Attorney General of Canada. For anyone in the gallery or at home watching the debate, or any of the press, and trying to decide how to frame the conversation, let me read the opening line. This is the Attorney General of Canada's officially putting before the courts the position of the Government of Canada, the Liberal government, on Bill 21.

It is part I, section A, paragraph 1, line 1. I just want to stress that, because it is the opening statement, the thing that the government leads with in its court submission: "In accordance with his role as intervener, the Attorney General of Canada takes no position, on any basis whatsoever, on the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Act respecting the laicity of the State." It takes no position on any basis whatsoever. That is the government's position.

One might be left wondering what the purpose of the engineered distraction is. It is to distract from the terrible cost of living crisis that the Liberal government started creating 10 years ago, with tax hikes on hard-working Canadians and small business owners, the massive layering of regulations on the productive parts of the Canadian economy, the barriers to investment, the barriers to getting things built and the ban on shipping Canadian energy to other countries, while foreign oil and foreign resources come into our country.

Let me just go through a few of these crises so members can properly understand why the government is so desperate to have this debate instead of a conversation about the hardships that Canadians are facing. The Prime Minister famously said that he would be judged on the prices at the grocery store. That is what he said during the election campaign. What has happened to prices at the grocery store? Food inflation continues to rise; it is now 70% above target. Food prices are 40% higher since the Liberal government took office.

The Prime Minister is making the Trudeau debt crisis even worse. Remember, Justin Trudeau racked up more debt in the short time he was in office than all the other prime ministers combined. Consider World War I, World War II and the Great Depression; Canada faced all those crises, but it took Justin Trudeau to massively rack up the debt.

Since the Prime Minister took office, federal spending is up 8.4%. Do people remember what he promised during the election campaign? He put in writing, in black and white, when he was going to voters for their vote, a written guarantee to them that he would cap the deficit at \$63 billion. Spending has gone up by 8.4%.

The Prime Minister had the King of the United Kingdom come all the way from London. The King graciously accommodated that request and came to the Senate and read the throne speech. In that throne speech, there was a commitment to cap spending at 2%. Just 48 hours later, the government tabled its spending estimates and blew past that. What was the point of inviting His Majesty all the way across the ocean to come read the speech if it was not even worth the paper it was printed on? Let that go down in history as the shortest-lived Liberal promise ever: 48 hours, a new world record.

• (1140)

I am embarrassed on behalf of the government. I know the Liberals are not embarrassed, because one has to have shame to be embarrassed, but I am embarrassed for them that they had His Majesty come over and participate in that kind of bait and switch for Canadians.

Let us talk about the take-home pay crisis. The first people who suffer when inflation rears its ugly head are people who live paycheck to paycheck, people who have shift work, people who

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have to have second jobs to make ends meet. This is because when the government creates an inflation crisis, there are some winners and there are a whole lot of losers.

The winners are the people who get the new money first: the asset managers, the hedge fund operators and the big banks. They get the new money before anybody else does, so they can buy up assets before prices go up. However, the hard-working person in a hotel, the plumber, the mechanic and the people whose wages do not keep up with inflation have to start paying all the increased prices before they are able to secure any kind of pay increase. Their paycheques have to go further. They work harder and are able to buy less.

Since the Prime Minister took office, there are now 86,000 fewer Canadians who even earn a paycheque. That is because 86,000 people have lost their jobs just since the Prime Minister took office. He promised the fastest-growing economy in the G7; Canada has the fastest-shrinking economy in the G7. Unemployment in the GTA is now 9%, with 365,000 people out of work. The youth employment rate is 53.6%. This is the lowest it has been in almost three decades. This means that just about half of young people in the workforce who are looking for work do not have jobs. The youth employment rate is the lowest in almost three decades. Canadian household debt is the highest in the G7. Bankruptcies are rising at the fastest pace since 2008.

It is not just the cost of living crisis that is causing so much hardship in Canada and that the government is trying to distract from; we have a crime crisis as well. We have a Liberal government that decided to instruct judges to give bail to some of the country's worst, most violent and repeat offenders. What does that mean? It means that now, when someone is being arrested for the 14th, 15th or 20th time, when they get booked by the police, they get back out on the street, often the very same day.

I have heard from police associations that say they will arrest somebody at about 5 o'clock or 6 o'clock in the evening whom they had already arrested that morning. Those dangerous and repeat offenders have been let out by the federal government, and Canadians are sick and tired of it. However, rather than take real action like adopting the Conservative "three strikes and you're out" policy, and rather than apologize to Canadians for all the lives that have been shattered by the criminals the government set free, the Liberals are blocking and obstructing legitimate attempts to fix the bail system and to bring in tougher penalties for dangerous and repeat offenders.

This is what the Liberals are doing. They have engineered a distraction from their terrible record: their terrible record on cost of living, their terrible broken promises on fiscal responsibility and their terrible record on public safety, letting crime and chaos reign in our streets by putting the rights of dangerous offenders ahead of the rights of law-abiding Canadians.

It is shameful, but the Prime Minister is employing the same tactic as his predecessor, Justin Trudeau: dividing to distract, distracting from his terrible record, and he is proving to be just another Liberal.

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Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a bit of a stretch, I must admit, in terms of the speech and what we are supposed to be talking about today, but let me continue with that stretch. The member opposite is exceptionally biased, and I am sure he will acknowledge that.

The reality is actually quite the opposite. We would love to be able to talk more about the things we are actually doing. We could talk about the 22 million Canadians who benefited from the tax break. We could talk about the build Canada legislation, not to mention the different projects, whether it is copper mines in B.C. and Saskatchewan, LNG in B.C., nuclear energy in Ontario, the Port of Montreal in the province of Quebec or the attention being given to Atlantic Canada and all regions. Attention to all areas of economic development while protecting the environment is something that is important to the government.

With respect to the motion the Bloc has brought forward, I am wondering whether the member could give his thoughts on, whether it is by the federal government, Parliaments or legislatures, using pre-emptive statements related to using the notwithstanding clause.

• (1145)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, the member makes an unfounded allegation that I could be biased when all I did was read statistics. Math has no bias. Numbers have no prejudice. They come into the world because of calculations.

Let me look at some of those calculations. Spending on consultants has gone up 37%, from \$19 billion to \$26 billion. Spending on bureaucrats by the Liberal government is up 6%, from \$59 billion to \$63 billion. There is no bias in that. Those are just numbers that we take from departmental websites and estimates and things like the Parliamentary Budget Officer's dispassionate, independent analysis of government spending.

The government members talk about how many Canadians are being affected by their policy. How about every single Canadian being affected by the inflation crisis that the current government caused?

[Translation]

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will bring my colleague back to today's debate. Since this morning, it has been difficult for the Conservatives to speak to this issue.

As my colleague, the member for Saint-Jean, said this morning, I think that we are perfectly able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We agree that we need to address the cost of living. However, I think that it is entirely legitimate to defend the right of Saskatchewan or Quebec to enact their own laws without being challenged.

Does my colleague think that we here in Parliament are capable of considering the cost of living while also defending the right of a province, in our case Quebec, to enact its own laws without being challenged by the federal government?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, we have already shared our opinion on the Liberal strategy of creating a diversion so that Canadians do not think about their terrible track record.

I apologize to my colleague for not having the French version of the text. However, in the English version, the government's position is clear.

[English]

It states, "In accordance with his role as intervener, the Attorney General of Canada takes no position, on any basis whatsoever, on the constitutional validity of the provisions of the Act respecting the laicity of the State."

[Translation]

That is clear. We need to talk about the motivation behind this Liberal strategy: The Prime Minister does not want Canadians to be talking about the cost of living crisis, the inflation crisis and the crime crisis as they sit around the dinner table.

The Conservatives are pointing out this Liberal government's motivations.

Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think that one of the major crises that the Liberals are currently trying to cover up and sweep under the rug by sowing division and trying to further divide Canadians is the debt crisis.

I heard the finance minister say that this budget will be a generational investment. Just imagine a budget with the kind of spending that even Justin Trudeau would not have thought possible.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this new Liberal cover-up.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right, and the government is right too: This will have generational impacts. That means generations of Canadians into the future will be paying back the debt that the current government is racking up, including the interest on the debt, which goes to bankers and bondholders. That is not what Conservatives want to see happen.

[Translation]

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by asking "what is up with them?" or, to put it more informally, "have they lost the plot?"

The factums submitted by the government's lawyers include statements that would shock even the most radical people across the border. I will elaborate on that later.

In more polite terms, the government has made a fool of itself, but in doing so, it has highlighted the profound cultural, traditional and historical differences between Canada and Quebec. It has highlighted a difference in perspectives, or a difference in models, between Canada's model of multiculturalism and Quebec's model of "interculturalism". The first is a conqueror's model that seeks to erase not all differences, since there are some that are useful in many other provinces, relative to Quebec, but only those differences that point to ways in which the conquered people did not want to assimilate and be absorbed by the conqueror. However, the action taken aligns with the reading of a constitution that reflects the intent of the legislator, the government at the time, which was the government of Trudeau senior.

There is something a bit insulting about saying that they did not understand their own Constitution, or that they were dishonest or incompetent. In many ways, that statement would apply more to the current government when it comes to these matters.

The Constitution reflects the intent of those who signed it. We cannot rehash, assume, concoct, fabricate, or otherwise make wild assumptions about the legislative intent. Nor can we ask a judge to do so. The intention was written; it was signed; and it was imposed on Quebec, which has never, under any government, endorsed that Constitution.

Let us review a little history, beginning in 1760.

For some 200 years, the French in New France were essentially cut off from the French in France. During the 20th century, the intellectual elites and the artists, when they came on the scene, shared a dream that would persist until very recently, the dream of reconnecting with France. However, in the 1950s, French Canadians were people who worked for English bosses and were controlled by them because they had very little control over their own economy. They were also controlled by a long-standing tacit agreement between the Church and the English authorities who had told the Church it could retain its authority if it kept the people in line.

Then came the Quiet Revolution. During the Quiet Revolution, French Canadians, who would later become Quebecers, took charge of their own destiny using the means at their disposal. Obviously, we must mention the first major step toward taking ownership of our economic tools, namely the nationalization of hydro-electricity by René Lévesque during Jean Lesage's government.

Numerous institutions followed, including Bill 101—which I would classify as an institution—the Charter of the French Language, as well as some exemplary, extraordinary institutions that are absolutely fundamental to the history of Quebec, such as the education system, with the comprehensive high schools and CEGEPs that were founded and the network of universities that was built from the ground up. Today, that network not only makes Quebecers proud, but also gives them access to an education system whose quality and graduation rates are on par with the rest of the western hemisphere, whereas Quebec used to be at the very back of the pack.

These are revolutions in terms of the role of the state, both economically and in all respects.

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• (1150)

The late Guy Rocher played an instrumental role in many of these developments. It is important to point that out. He played a huge role in drafting the Charter of the French Language, in creating our network of schools and universities and in establishing the basic concepts that gave rise to a Quebec-specific vision of state secularism. With that, we became Quebecers.

Try as they might to make us into federalists, we are proud Quebecers through and through.

The Canadian government has used the same strategy for a long time, and it will not change. Its strategy involves exploiting Quebec society's incomparably generous and welcoming attitude toward newcomers, both in number and in deeds, in order to turn Quebec society into an increasingly weakened minority within the Canadian majority. Its strategy also involves using the fiscal imbalance to place Quebec and all the provinces under economic subjugation in order to centralize power, and the despicable Bill C-5 is just one example of that. If there were no fiscal imbalance, there would be no Bill C-5. Ottawa's centralizing vision is as simple as that.

However, secularism is an essential legacy of our emancipation. Canada brings its multiculturalism to bear through the charter and the courts, and it has given itself tools to do so, the main one being a reference to the Supreme Court. The government is funding those who wish to challenge Quebec values all the way to the Supreme Court.

This is a toxic subject in Quebec. It is dangerous for multiculturalists. There is an enormous amount of support for the separation of church and state, which is what we are talking about here. Most parties agree on that. Things get more complicated when we add unsuccessful immigration to the mix of Canadian multiculturalism. This is a recent connotation that did not exist when this value first emerged. Today, it has become ideological for the Liberals and a way to get votes.

Basically, for the Liberals and for neo-liberalism in general, immigration is about welcoming people who are both producers and consumers. These people are simply seen as economic variables. The Liberals are not worried about how they contribute to what could be a collective identity. They are not looking for people to participate in a common culture, which is obviously always changing, as was the case for the culture in Quebec, which welcomed Irish people, Scottish people and all the other waves of immigrants. There is no common language base in Canadian multiculturalism because it goes without saying that English has a rather strong draw.

There is no value associated with or required for the claim of equality, because, of course, Canada claims to defend equality for everyone. In defending equality for everyone, it tolerates and perhaps even promotes behaviours and values that literally deny gender equality. Furthermore, the strategy involves persuading newcomers that Quebecers are xenophobic enemies who engage in hostile identity-based racism. That is rather offensive.

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Clearly, nothing could be further from the truth. However, no one wants to attack Quebecers directly over their values and their language, because support for sovereignty is growing and the next Quebec government will likely be a sovereignist government.

Now I am getting to the challenge. There is talk about putting limits on the use of the notwithstanding clause. There is talk about the “before”, meaning pre-emptive use. In reality, pre-emptive use does not exist in the Constitution. No doubt some legal expert on the other side came up with a brilliant idea one day. His friends patted him on the back and said that surely he did not have the guts to say it. Well, he did have the guts to say it, and pre-emptive use is now part of the narrative. Section 33 is clear. It says what it needs to say and is consistent with the intent.

• (1155)

What about the “after”? Again, it is written very clearly. The clause is in effect for a five-year period, which is renewable, with no limit on the number of times it can be renewed. There is no moral judgment or motive imputed to this. It preserves the sovereignty of Quebec's National Assembly and the provincial legislatures. I would remind members that a parliament is always sovereign in its decisions and prerogatives.

There is more. If the government wins at the Supreme Court and succeeds in limiting the use of the notwithstanding clause and blocking the Quebec value of state secularism, it will also win the challenge to Bill 96 on the language issue and once again limit the use of the notwithstanding clause for that and for everything else. It could be used against attempts to regulate trade unions in other provinces and anything else that might arise. The notwithstanding clause has been invoked or renewed well over 100 times in Quebec. It is the most powerful tool for centralization since 1982. Combined with the law resulting from Bill C-5, it is truly frightening.

However, it could have the opposite effect of what the government wants, particularly because, as I said, the Liberals seem to have lost the plot. They believe that the notwithstanding clause could theoretically let a Quebec government allow full-blown summary executions, use forced labour, or abolish freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. What kind of madness is this, particularly when we are talking about the most progressive society on the continent?

There is something idiotic about that. If I understand correctly, let us imagine that I am the Quebec government and that I pass a law that allows someone to be summarily executed, that allows forced labour and slavery or that abolishes freedom of the press. Their argument is that there is nothing to say that I am not allowed to do that. It says that I can do that for five years until someone challenges it. The federal government's reasoning is that a province could authorize summary executions for five years. I do not know who came up with that, but people seriously need to rush back to school. They would have to go back to school, because when it comes to nonsense, this takes the cake. Who is the genius who thinks that Quebec would swallow that? By the way, I would point out that Robert Bourassa and Jean Charest used the notwithstanding clause. I searched, but I could not find a Parti Québécois membership card on them. Every Quebec government since then has, in most cases, renewed the notwithstanding clause.

This federal government is using tactics very similar to those it criticizes the American right for: populism, the lowest common denominator, withholding information from the public, and social media-style spin that contains anything but information in most cases. In contrast to that, I would refer people to the report by Richard Rousseau, a brilliant synthesis that not nearly enough people know about or have read, unfortunately. Rousseau's report tracks the development of secularism as a value as Quebec evolved throughout the Quiet Revolution. Guy Rocher's influence shines through clearly. It is a thoughtful, smart analysis that respects the reader's intelligence.

As I said, Pierre Trudeau's intention is reflected in the Constitution. Any other interpretation, including that of his son or that of the government, is adding insult to injury. Only two prime ministers have ever suspended basic freedoms: Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1970 and Justin Trudeau in 2021.

The law resulting from Bill C-5 also allows for the suspension of any federal law that the minister decides to suspend, yet ridiculous accusations are made against us. The government of judges and of populism will not be the government of Quebec. We are the ones who are the most hostile to populism, demagoguery and extremism of all kinds.

• (1200)

Quebeckers are so tolerant that sometimes we step back and wonder whether we are too tolerant, before realizing that it is a good thing. That is what makes the incredible nation of Quebec so strong, so vibrant and so admirable.

Therefore, I am telling the government to have the courage to debate the issues of models, secularism, language and immigration. So far, this government has no more courage than the previous one. Last week, the Prime Minister told me that one of the government's responsibilities is to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is not the court's responsibility; it is the government's. The other side needs to grow a backbone, strengthen it a bit, sit down at a table and say that they want to have a conversation about the Constitution. I would like to be invited. I will clear my calendar. The government should do that rather than hiding behind judges.

I want to thank the government for showing us how it works and thinks. I would remind everyone that everything will work better once we are good neighbours who share certain affinities and challenges, but who are distinctly defined by differences that each of us chooses. At the end of the day, it comes down to the issue of individual rights versus collective rights. Imposing the supremacy of individual rights to an unreasonable degree is a divide-and-conquer approach. It fragments society. It turns society into a collection of individuals with total disregard for what they have in common, what they want to build in common and what dreams they have in common.

It is all the more surprising that the people taking the divide-and-conquer approach are wealthy and make up 80% of the population. It is unquestionably the philosophy of the weak.

I therefore call for a nation-to-nation dialogue between equals who will one day be bound together by treaties. Long live a free Quebec.

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• (1205)

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a Quebecker, I found it very interesting to listen to my colleague. I am a very proud Quebecker, and I listened carefully to his speech.

I would like to ask him a question that relates to the debate we are having, but it is a little more theoretical.

Is it important to ensure that rights remain rights, not only in Quebec but across Canada?

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I know that is not the intention of my colleague, the perfect gentleman I know him to be. However, there is such a thing as collective rights. If, through a combination of initiatives, solidarity and co-operation, up to and including burning to death in a church, Quebecers, or French Canadians, had not joined forces to assert the collective rights that unite us, without infringing on individual rights, there would be no such thing as a francophone Quebec nation and society today.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I hear the leader of the Bloc speak, I often like to refer to my ancestral roots in the province of Quebec. I am very proud of the fact that Quebec is such a distinct society in the way it has contributed to making Canada the best country in the world, from my perspective.

Having said that, as a parliamentarian who served in the Manitoba legislature for just under 20 years, I was able to observe what provincial jurisdictions have done. If, for example, the current leader of the Conservative Party was to use the notwithstanding clause on a crime bill, I suspect provincial legislatures would have something to say about it. As a parliamentarian—

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I must interrupt the hon. member to allow enough time for a response.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, Liberal governments tend to have the attitude where they presume and claim to be irrevocably morally superior from the outset: “I am a Liberal Canadian, you are worth less, and I control the federal Parliament, obviously, because the provinces are ethically and morally inferior to a federal Liberal”. We have been living with that for such a long time and we are sick of it. We apply the Constitution, we are entitled to do so, end of story.

• (1210)

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring things back down to earth. That is often necessary with the Liberals.

As the leader of the Bloc Québécois said, in the past 43 years, the notwithstanding clause has been used more than a hundred times. Even if we accept the crazy and illogical idea that it cannot be used pre-emptively, which was the reason it was created in the first place, why has this new legal idea has not been raised once before the courts in 43 years, until Bill 21, Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State, came along?

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, it is because they had not thought of it yet.

Basically, for some years now, the government has been trying to pit two visions against each other on the assumption that its own would win. It is not as silly as it sounds, because political games can pay off in Canada if they involve attacking Quebec's unique values. However, that will not work. The next government of Quebec is very likely to be a sovereignist government. The current Premier of Quebec was once a sovereignist, and only God knows what the wisdom of old age will show him one day.

Then, the government saw an opportunity to tackle this issue head on and kill multiple birds with one stone. It could crush secularism and, in doing so, crush protection for the French language and lots of other things by centralizing power right off the bat, in a permanent and systematic way, in the hands of the morally superior federal government, of course.

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his speech.

I must point out that the matter of whether the clause may be used pre-emptively does not even appear in the government's factum. It was not even raised.

The Bloc is calling on us to withdraw the factum filed with the Supreme Court, but there is a very important question that needs to be addressed. The Quebec Superior Court and the courts of Saskatchewan have rendered decisions that illustrate a different position from that of the Quebec Court of Appeal with respect to the declaratory power.

Will the Bloc leader acknowledge that the Attorney General of Canada must clarify the law for all Canadians?

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, I feel like telling them, with all due respect, to get a clue.

It is the job of judges, or the government, which will pay to hire lawyers to draft a document, which they should be very ashamed of, given the statements it contains about summary execution, freedom of the press and so on. There are some crazy things in it. However, if various bodies in Quebec and Canadian society want to go to the Supreme Court, I have said this consistently and I will say it again: I have nothing against that. That is what it is there for. However, the federal government is not supposed to adopt an ideological position and fund opponents of one or more laws duly passed by Quebec or the provinces.

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the Liberal government has managed to create a crisis to deflect from the real crises we are facing when it comes to inflation, debt and crime. None of these are being talked about.

Has my colleague from the Bloc fallen into the Liberals' trap by playing their game instead of talking about the reality Canadians are facing? We are going to spend all week talking about what we are talking about today.

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Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, has my esteemed colleague fallen into the multiculturalist trap that will kill Quebecers' freedoms?

• (1215)

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what my colleague is talking about today is secularism.

Since he wants the federal government to stay out of a situation that is directly related to the federal government, what would he think if other provinces were to use this clause, especially if it attacked the French language in Canada or Quebec? What would he say if that were the case?

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, the federal government is wearing a black and white striped jersey. It is sort of playing the referee. It figures that it is the one that upholds the Constitution, funds opponents, participates in the exercise of having prosecutors present arguments and engages in political propaganda. In fact, I can provide an example of that. The factum does not talk about pre-emptive use, but a heck of a lot of people on the other side of the House always act as though such use is one of the seven deadly sins.

The government is centralizing and giving itself a bunch of powers in the hopes of reaching the point of no return with Quebec before Quebec collectively comes up with the good idea to become independent.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and leader for his speech, which I really enjoyed.

Section 33 is a tool that makes it possible for certain laws to override provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Let us suppose that the Government of Quebec or another province passes a law that allows slavery. Does my colleague think that that government's legislation will be around for a long time because of section 33? What would be the consequences of passing such a law?

Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Speaker, we must read up on the specific application of the notwithstanding clause, but I feel I should tell my esteemed friend and colleague that there are many free and democratic societies around the world that, even without being monitored and crushed by Canada's moral supremacy, do not have the death penalty, do not interfere with freedom of the press and do not use forced labour.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to take part in this debate. Let me begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague from Mount Royal.

In this debate, it is very important to remember how we got here. We are here to discuss a motion presented by my hon. colleagues from the Bloc Québécois. There are three parts to this motion, the first of which “calls on the government to fully withdraw from the legal challenge of Quebec’s Act respecting the laicity of the State before the Supreme Court”. After reading the document submitted to the Supreme Court by the Attorney General of Canada, I can say that the government is not challenging the validity of Bill 21.

Second, the Bloc Québécois “calls on the government to withdraw its factum filed on September 17, 2025, with the Supreme

Court contesting Quebec’s right to invoke the notwithstanding clause”. Once again, we see in the factum that was filed that the government is not even challenging the right of a province to invoke the notwithstanding clause.

Third, the Bloc Québécois asks the House to “denounce the government’s willingness to use the Supreme Court to take constitutional powers away from Quebec and the provinces”. On this third point, the answer is no. However, some nuances are worth noting.

The federal government is actually taking the opposite approach: It is not seeking to prevent the provinces from using the notwithstanding clause. This clause is still useful, particularly when a bill passed by the Quebec National Assembly, another provincial legislature or even this Parliament conflicts with certain fundamental rights.

The genius of this is that it leaves open the possibility of using the notwithstanding clause in certain circumstances where it is necessary. Some people dispute this idea, while others believe that the notwithstanding clause should not even exist. I personally consider it a useful safety mechanism. When a Supreme Court ruling finds that a law violates fundamental rights, this provision allows legislators to find a solution. They can either amend their law to comply with the decision or seek a temporary compromise that allows them to pursue their objective without it becoming a permanent solution.

Now we are getting to the heart of the factum filed with the Supreme Court. This is a situation that affects several provinces. It does not only affect my beautiful province of Quebec, which I care deeply about. Quebec is my home, my homeland, the place where I chose to raise my family, my children and my grandchildren. As members may guess from my accent, my first language is English. However, I chose to integrate into Quebec society, particularly by learning to speak French fluently. I am a proud francophile, and I would like to emphasize that because Quebec is a place I care deeply about.

• (1220)

When basic rights conflict with a bill, we the people have the right to challenge it in court. That applies whether we are Quebecers or Canadians, should it happen in another province, as it did in Saskatchewan or Ontario, where bills that included the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause were introduced.

I think it is perfectly normal for people to do that. Some Quebecers will disagree with certain bills. That is their right. The government decided to shield itself from that challenge and to use the notwithstanding clause. I applaud that; I get it. However, if governments do this a lot, that raises a very legitimate question: What is the point of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms? What is the point if rights guaranteed in the charter can be nullified? What is happening here is that continual use of section 33 every five years will eventually result in no rights at all. That is why I think Quebecers and Canadians feel it is perfectly legitimate and reasonable to re-examine this issue, and that is the essence of the factum that was submitted.

I hope that the Supreme Court justices will take note and give Canadians and the government a road map on how to limit the use of this clause. I think that the rights that have been conferred on all Canadians by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are very important, fundamental rights. These rights ensure that we can live in a constitutional democracy, where decisions can be made and the majority can bring in legislation and, to a certain extent, protect minorities from laws that are harmful to their interests. I think that is the most important thing and that is why I completely understand why the Attorney General of Canada proposed this path.

In sum, I think that the response to two of the three parts of the motion moved by the Bloc québécois is that they clearly do not apply. For the third, we want to prevent back-door constitutional changes through the continual use of the notwithstanding clause. I think that is very important in a democracy. It is often said that we use this word somewhat reluctantly, but we have to look for compromises. That is important. That is what we do every day here in the House of Commons. We try to find compromises in order to bring in legislation that makes sense and that protects everyone.

• (1225)

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the reason why we are having this debate today, and my colleague did not mention this in his speech, is that Quebec decided to use the notwithstanding clause to implement the state secularism act to ensure secularism in Quebec. Quebec also used the notwithstanding clause to protect the French language in Quebec. It is funny, right? The Liberals on the other side of the House and all the governments before them never said that using the notwithstanding clause was wrong, until Quebec decided to use it to protect secularism and the French language in Quebec. That is the reality: We are dealing with complete hypocrisy, although no one will call it that.

In short, what is happening is that the Liberals are realizing that the notwithstanding clause bothers them and that it does not suit their purposes. The reality is that it was imposed by the other provinces—not even by Quebec, but by the other provinces—in order to ratify the Constitution that was imposed on us. Since the Constitution does not suit the government, is the government admitting that its Constitution is not so great after all? What it all boils down to is that, since the Liberals cannot unilaterally amend the Constitution, they are giving the Supreme Court a political role.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc colleague for his question. I do not want to raise the temperature on this any further, so I will just answer his question.

I do not think that the premise of his question is valid. The Canadian government firmly believes that the Government of Quebec has the right and the responsibility, as does the federal government, to protect the French language. However, when we see some provinces, such as Quebec, Ontario and Saskatchewan, using this notwithstanding clause to undo and adjust constitutional rights guaranteed by the charter, that is a problem, because it once again raises the question of whether rights exist if the notwithstanding clause is invoked.

Business of Supply

• (1230)

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a question.

Like him, I live in Quebec. We are proud Quebecers. Many of my constituents are concerned about the erosion of women's rights around the world. If we allowed the provinces, or any Parliament, to make invoking the notwithstanding clause the rule rather than the exception, would this put our rights in jeopardy?

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, but I cannot provide a specific answer.

I can say that, in theory, the pre-emptive use and constant re-invo-cation of the notwithstanding clause raises a problem: It basically denies the fundamental rights of people who need them. We cannot do that, because that would permanently infringe on rights, which amounts to a constitutional amendment through the back door.

[English]

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the factum that we are discussing today from the federal government is notable in that it explicitly says that it is not about Bill 21 but rather about section 33. The government chose to intervene solely on the issue of its arguments with respect to section 33.

I wonder if the member could explain why the federal government made that choice.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see that the official opposition has, for once, asked a question relevant to the debate that we are having today and not backing it on other issues. I thank the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for asking this question.

It goes right back to my speech, which said that the use of the notwithstanding clause is legitimate. The adoption of various laws in different provinces is also very legitimate. We are not contesting that. What we are contesting is whether one should use it in a preventative fashion and keep renewing the use of section 33. The question we are then left with is this: Do those rights exist anymore that were supposed to be guaranteed by the charter?

My reflection would be that, no, effectively it is a backdoor constitutional change that is eliminating rights that people should enjoy. There are opportunities for provincial legislatures and the federal Parliament to take a look at these laws, take a look at the decisions from the courts and try to come up with a compromise that can work this thing out.

[Translation]

Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleagues who moved this opposition day motion.

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I am pleased to speak in the House of Commons as a Quebecker because it is very important to show that Quebecers have a wide range of opinions on Bill 21 and the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause. The Bloc Québécois does not have a monopoly on speaking in the House of Commons on behalf of all Quebecers. The vast majority of Quebec members in this place are federalist members and sit on this side of the House. I wanted to mention that at the outset.

Also, the issue we are debating concerns the federal government's factum before the Supreme Court. This is not a debate on Bill 21. What we are talking about is a provision of Bill 21. This is the first time in 35 years that the notwithstanding clause and the means to use it are being challenged before the Supreme Court of Canada. The Attorney General of Canada must therefore be present in Canada's highest court, the Supreme Court of Canada, to protect the Constitution and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We adopted a charter of rights and freedoms because, as a country, we believed it was important to protect the rights of minorities, even if the majority in the country or in a province does not agree with protecting the rights of minorities. It is important to point out that the notwithstanding clause can be used by the Parliament of Canada or by the provinces, so this is an important debate for us as federal legislators. We chose to have a charter because we felt that certain rights were so important that they needed to be protected, even if the majority did not agree with protecting these minority rights. I also want to highlight section 1 of the Charter. It is not like the Bill of Rights in the United States. We have a limit. It says that legislators can pass laws that infringe on a right if they do so in a reasonable manner in a free and democratic society.

When section 33 is invoked, one inherently acknowledges that it is unreasonable in a free and democratic society to limit rights in this manner. The federal document presents three very important arguments.

The first is necessary because the Quebec Court of Appeal took a position contrary to that taken by the Saskatchewan courts and the Superior Court of Quebec on the issue of a declaration. The main role of the Attorney General of Canada is to ensure that there is no conflict of laws across Canada, that decisions by Canadian courts are not in conflict. That is why this provision is before the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Supreme Court of Canada has to tell us what the law is. Does it correspond to what the courts in Saskatchewan and the Superior Court of Quebec have said, that even if section 33 is invoked, there can be a declaratory judgment, or does it correspond with what was handed down by the Quebec Court of Appeal, which said that a court cannot examine the question of whether a right is being violated in a manner that is unreasonable under section 1 because the notwithstanding clause has been invoked?

The Attorney General of Canada comes into it because, in his role, he has to make arguments about whether we take the position of the Saskatchewan courts or the position of the Quebec Court of Appeal. That is as it should be.

I find it astonishing that the Bloc Québécois is telling us that the Government of Canada should not appear before the Supreme

Court of Canada, but that it is not saying anything about the other provinces that have intervened in the case. Is the Bloc of the opinion that it is okay for all of the provinces to intervene on this issue, but not the Government of Canada?

The Government of Canada's role is to protect the rights of everyone, including Quebecers and all minorities in the country. We cannot say that the Government of Canada should be there when we like its position and that it should not be there when we do not like its position.

• (1235)

I would like to talk about the three arguments that the Government of Canada submitted before the Supreme Court.

[English]

The first argument the government is making is that even if we use the notwithstanding clause, a court has the ability to declare that the law violates the charter, section 2 or sections 7 to 15, in a way that is unreasonable in a free and democratic society. Those are the only charter sections that we can use the notwithstanding clause on. It is important for the residents of that province to know what their government has done.

[Translation]

When a government uses the notwithstanding clause pre-emptively claiming that no rights are really being violated, it is not giving the public all of the information. If officials run for re-election, it is important that the public have the opportunity to say whether a government has unreasonably violated the charter. That is one argument before the court.

[English]

Another argument that the federal government is making is that we do not have the right to use the notwithstanding clause to violate a right other than those in section 2 or sections 7 to 15. For example, if we violate freedom of expression under section 2, but we also violate democratic rights under section 3 of the charter democratic rights, we do not have the right to use the notwithstanding clause to violate a right that is other than section 2 or section 7 to 15.

[Translation]

From time to time, a law is challenged under several sections of the charter rather than just one. Obviously, if one wants to invoke the notwithstanding clause, one cannot refer to a section that is not subject to the notwithstanding clause. This is an important argument to ensure that other rights are not affected because someone made a declaration that an act would operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of the charter.

• (1240)

[English]

The third argument is the most important argument the federal government is making in this case. It is that a right cannot be turned off in a way that we cannot turn it back on just as brightly. Just as how, if we turn off a light bulb, it comes back on and shines just as brightly, we cannot take a right under the charter and utterly obliterate it so that when we say we are no longer using the notwithstanding clause, the people affected no longer have the ability to do what they were doing before. That could happen either because of constant successive uses of the notwithstanding clause or because the right is obliterated in a way that is so unreasonable, it will ultimately deprive people of the permanent ability to exercise that right.

When arguments are used before the court to illustrate what those might be, nobody is talking about the Quebec government doing them. They are talking about any government, including the federal government, that could do those things. We are simply saying that there are grounds more than procedural ones for nullifying an exercise of section 33.

[Translation]

Lastly, with respect to the argument that we should not talk about this and that the Government of Canada should not file a factum with the Supreme Court because there are other issues in the country, I would simply like to say that there are obviously other issues in the country.

[English]

The people from the Department of Justice who worked on this factum were not doing things that they should not have been doing with this factum. Nobody is talking about the people in housing or economics doing this factum, so the arguments the Conservatives are using today are beyond belief.

[Translation]

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by wishing *Shana Tova* to my colleague from Mount Royal and to the entire Jewish community in Quebec and Canada who are celebrating the new year today.

I acknowledge the fact that my colleague and I will likely never agree on this type of issue. However, having worked with my colleague many times, I admire his openness to intelligent and lively debate. Even so, I have to say that outrageous and offensive statements were made in the factum filed with the Supreme Court and in the arguments made by some of his colleagues. Some of the examples they provided include summary executions, the suppression of freedom of the press, the rollback of women's rights and the rollback of access to abortion, even if those members later added that these were merely examples and that they were rather unlikely to occur.

When examples like these are given, does that not encourage fearmongering and exaggerated statements that could turn a certain segment of the population against the Bloc Québécois's approach?

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his kind words. I also want to wish the entire Jewish community in Canada a *Shana Tova*.

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When a factum is put before a court, it is a message to the judges. It is not meant for the public, and it is not about politics. The matter before the court is whether limitations on section 33 that are not procedural in nature are permissible. Examples are given to illustrate that there are things that can be done in legislation. These things are enormously problematic if invoked permanently, so section 33 should never be allowed to be used on a permanent basis. No one should have the right to use section 33 because it infringes on rights in a way that changes the Constitution, so it should not be used if that is not the intention. We are not saying that the government plans to do that. We are saying that there are things the government cannot do, even with section 33. I am talking about any government.

[English]

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put something to my hon. friend and get his feedback on it.

I think all of us agree in the House that human rights are important. We also agree that ideas about human rights are contestable. They are a matter of public debate, so things the member sees as being the implications of a belief in human rights might be different from what I or other members see as the implications of human rights. The reason our Constitution has section 33 is to affirm that the ultimate arbiter of questions that are contestable in the domain of human rights should be the elected legislature. This is what preserves the essential nature of a parliamentary democracy. Parliament, not courts, has the ultimate say on where we should go in defending human rights. The problem with—

• (1245)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I have to give the member time for a response.

The hon. member for Mount Royal.

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear a question in there, but let me just say, again, that I think it is really important. I appreciate the substantive question I am sure my colleague was coming to.

The government's factum does not contest the ability of a province or the federal Parliament to use the notwithstanding clause, although personally, my position has always been that we should not do so. The factum sets up three specific arguments, which I illustrated. I think they are very important, and we have made them.

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

There has been a lot of talk about the rights enshrined in the Charter and the importance of protecting them. In order to protect them, is it necessary to determine that, when a legislature invokes the notwithstanding clause, it must do so only under exceptional circumstances and in compliance with certain guidelines? Is it necessary to have a judicial review on this important matter?

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Otherwise, do we not run the risk of having the exception become the rule? In other words, the legislatures may no longer be required to comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with my colleague. Even if the notwithstanding clause is used legitimately, it is very important, if a right is violated in a way that is not reasonable in a free and democratic society, that a court is able to advise the people in this respect.

As we explained in the factum, it is very important for the court to study the manner in which this was done in order to rule on whether a right has been not only violated for a period of five years, but violated in a permanent and unacceptable manner.

Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj.

I would like to take us in a different direction with today's debate. I thought that it might be beneficial for a number of colleagues here, who regularly hear Quebec's grievances but are not familiar with our history, to learn a little more about our journey, which is so culturally different from Canada's. Together, then, let us go over the history of Quebec values, from their emergence to their affirmation, as well as the resistance they sparked.

From the Parent commission to Bill 21, including Bill 101 and its iterations over time, the most recent being Bill 96, Quebec embarked on a massive emancipation process in the early 1960s, a major undertaking that hit many an obstacle, as one might expect with such transformative societal reforms. Along the way, Quebec has constantly come up against opposition from Canada, whose multiculturalism model is simply incompatible with Quebec's legitimate aspirations.

This was the early 1960s. The Quebec of that era was a more traditional, mostly rural society, still dominated by the Catholic Church. Education was faith-based and inequitable, since it too was still dominated by the church, and it was not very accessible to ordinary people. It was in this context that Jean Lesage's government set up the Parent commission, which was tasked with reforming the education system. I would note in passing that seated at the table was sociologist Guy Rocher, who recently passed away and whose thoughts led to an almost unexpected consensus at the time regarding the importance of removing religion from education and health care.

The Parent commission marks the beginning of what is referred to as the Quiet Revolution, with bold reforms such as the creation of a ministry of education, CEGEPs, high schools and, especially and primarily, access to higher education for all. What we want is to bring Quebec out of obscurantism and allow our younger generations to aspire to the same heights as English speakers and the wealthiest members of society, who historically were favoured by the system at the time. In short, we want to give everyone an equal chance, whereas at that time in Quebec, as we know, everyone said that we were born to be nobodies.

Beyond the reforms, a true revolution in values took place. For the first time, Quebec was affirming fairly new principles, such as

secularism, equal opportunity and the primacy of knowledge. To support these principles, the government took over all public spheres from the church. The future of Quebec society would be built on our cherished values that define us. The Quiet Revolution never really ended, but some might say that it culminated in the 1970s, when a fervent nationalist movement swept Quebec. Quebecers became more confident. They stood up for themselves and went as far as electing a pro-independence government for the first time in their history.

On November 15, 1976, René Lévesque became Premier of Quebec along with 71 MNAs. In 1977, the Lévesque government passed Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language. Once again, Guy Rocher shared his wisdom and helped Camille Laurin draft legislation making French the official language of Quebec, at a time when anglicization was already threatening the cultural survival of francophones across the continent. Bill 101 became the cornerstone of Quebec identity. It affirms that French is not just a language, but also a vehicle to promote culture, solidarity and social cohesion.

One might have expected our neighbours to support and applaud such a wonderful emancipation of Quebec society, but no. On the contrary, this affirmation of identity was met with resistance from Canada. It did not take long for the Supreme Court to strike down provisions of the act, particularly those concerning unilingual French signage in Quebec. The federal government, which cares only about its "bilingual" and multicultural model, sees Bill 101 as infringing on the rights of anglophones.

This is evidence of the profound divide between our two visions of co-habitation. Quebec defends a common language to promote integration. Canada, on the other hand, promotes the coexistence of languages and cultures, in a disjointed melting pot. Let us just say that it is a brutal shock.

My colleagues have covered the subject at length and in depth, so I will gloss over a few episodes of our history, including the sad part in which the Constitution was repatriated; Jean Chrétien's great betrayal of René Lévesque; the arrogance of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who never quite managed to crush Quebecers beneath his haughty heel; the ensuing constitutional crises that led to the stolen referendum of 1995; and, lastly, the Quebec National Assembly's passage of the storied Bill 21, the Act respecting the laicity of the State, in 2019.

● (1250)

Bill 21 is part of this tradition of secularization that began during the Quiet Revolution. Bill 21 simply aims to guarantee the neutrality of the state and ensure a public space, free of visible religious symbols, in accordance with the model of society chosen by Quebecers.

However, yet again, Canada is opposed to this. The federal government criticizes the law and calls it discriminatory. Rights groups are challenging the law in court. Quebec expected that. The notwithstanding clause was not invoked without good reason.

What this shows is nothing less than an ideological divide. Quebec advocates active secularism, where the state imposes rules in the public space. Canada, on the other hand, favours permissive secularism, where religious freedom takes precedence over neutrality.

Over the decades, Canada and Quebec have developed increasingly divergent models of society. The Quebec model is based on the French language as the social glue. It is defined by the secularism of its state institutions. It promotes interculturalism, or integration around the common values of Quebec society, French, gender equality, secularism, and so on, and aspires to political and cultural autonomy.

The Canadian model claims to be bilingual, despite the fact that it is egregiously dominated by English. It is based on multiculturalism and centralization, and prioritizes individual rights over collective values.

These differences are not just theoretical; they also have a material impact on immigration, education, justice and citizenship policies. They fuel constant tensions between Quebec and the rest of Canada. These differences reflect a fundamental lack of understanding. Canada sees Quebec as one province among many, but Quebec is a distinct society, a distinct nation with its own values, its own history and its own trajectory.

Outsiders, at least those in the rest of Canada, often perceive Quebec values as backward or exclusionary, but Quebec is simply being true to its identity and its principles. We seek not to exclude anyone, but to unite everyone in a joint undertaking. We do not reject diversity; we place it within a coherent framework.

From the Parent commission to Bill 21, Quebec undertook a quiet but profound revolution. It redefined its values, affirmed its identity and tried to build a society in its own image. All along, it encountered constant opposition from Canada, whose multiculturalism model is simply not compatible with Quebec's aspirations.

This opposition did not hinder Quebec in the least. On the contrary, it strengthened Quebec's determination to define itself. That is because, basically, the backdrop to Quebec values is the idea of being a nation that aspires to be in full control of its own destiny. To those who say that the National Assembly's laws protecting Quebec values go too far, I would refer them to the recent report by the Pelchat-Rousseau commission, which states in its 50 recommendations that, in reality, not enough is being done. The progressive values of Quebec society need more protection. It is up to Quebec to provide it. Section 33 is an essential tool for protecting Quebec legislators from federal manoeuvres aimed at stifling Quebec's momentum towards freely defining its identity.

The Quiet Revolution never really ended, but some might say that it will reach its peak sometime after the fall of 2026. At that point, Quebecers will finally close the loop opened by giants such as Lévesque, Laurin, Parent, Parizeau, Marois and so many others, including Guy Rocher, whom I had the privilege of meeting over a meal last April. Guy Rocher shared with me that despite the obstacles, the passing years and the ebbs and flows of enthusiasm, our deep and fundamental values are never lost and never lose their

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purpose. They deserve our commitment and our fight as long as there are those who challenge them.

• (1255)

[English]

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if Bill 21 were the law of the land here in Canada, I would not be sitting in this place because I wear a hijab. I would not be able to be a teacher because I wear a hijab.

There are a lot of young girls aspiring to be lawmakers, bus drivers or school teachers. What would the hon. member like to say about the rights of those young girls aspiring to be sitting here?

[Translation]

Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent example of misinformation, disinformation, or simply misunderstanding what An Act respecting the laicity of the State is about. It prevents no one from running for office, winning an election, or sitting in Parliament.

The other thing that we need to stop is thinking that the act is holding back young women who wear the hijab and religious symbols in general, because the act is not intended for Muslim women only. It includes men and women in general. If my religion prevented me from practising a trade, maybe the principles imposed on me by my religion are what need to be called into question.

The act is a fundamental piece of legislation for protecting Quebec's values. It allows equality, fairness, and neutrality in all areas of government. We think it is completely logical and legitimate for Quebecers to have this kind of protection.

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech.

Montmorency—Charlevoix is the founding riding of Quebec and Canada. It all started in our riding. Our history is deeply connected to the reality of what it means to be a francophone. It is also connected to the entire English side, including through Murray Bay. How does my Bloc Québécois colleague think that Quebecers' strong identity can influence Canada? Given the current wave of uncontrolled immigration, how can Quebec's history help define what it means to be Canadian, protect our values and move forward? I think Quebec has a great deal to offer to history.

Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to see that the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix thinks that Quebec can contribute a great deal to the Canadian identity.

Personally, I do not see any point in showing anything to the rest of Canada, other than demonstrating that we are going to be excellent neighbours and partners in all aspects of society, whether in commerce or international trade. I understand that my colleague's federalist point of view suggests that Quebec could contribute to making Canadians better citizens. I personally think that Quebec will be a better state, a better nation, once we finally have all the tools of our autonomy, that is, pure and simple independence.

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Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, although this point has been made since the day started, I think it is important to raise it again.

Upon reading the brief submitted by the Attorney General of Canada with regard to the Supreme Court challenge of Quebec's legislation, An Act respecting the laicity of the State, one can detect something of a sanctimonious tone. The document seems to presume bad faith on the part of the provinces, Quebec in particular, as though they were dangerous. Conversely, the federal government portrays itself as a beacon of virtue, a bulwark against provincial abuse, including at the hands of the people of Quebec.

First, I would like to know whether my colleague shares that opinion. Second, in light of the past 150 years of history, is that what we are actually witnessing?

• (1300)

Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I was also blown away when I saw excerpts from this report, which mentions the possibility that a government could reinstate arbitrary executions and consider repealing freedom of the press.

My colleague from Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi said earlier that there was a danger of women's rights being rolled back. As my colleague from Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères implied, Quebec is the most progressive society in North America, certainly not one that could backslide to that extent. I think that using these terms, even if they are only examples of extreme cases, fuels fear and brings us back to the kind of fearmongering rhetoric that we have heard time and time again. The government has threatened to take away our passports, take away our army and even have Canadians invade Quebec, as if we would have nothing left to defend ourselves. Ridicule does not kill but, damn it, there are still limits.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for as far back as we can remember, Quebec has wanted freedom, the power to express its distinctiveness and the ability to make its own choices.

This desire for freedom and democracy was behind the Patriotes movement in the 1830s and the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. It is this desire for freedom and democracy that motivated the significant reforms made by René Lévesque's government starting in 1976, and more recently, Bill 21, concerning secularism, and Bill 96, which strengthens the protection of our French language.

Quebec is a people, a language, a territory with its own character and a nation with its own values.

Some, including me, feel that the only way for us to be free is to have our own country, an independent francophone state in North America that would give Quebecers full powers to govern their destiny. Quebec would be free to negotiate the treaties it signs with other countries, free to democratically determine the way it develops and free to protect its language and support its economy.

However, for others, Quebec should be able to adapt in order to grow within Canada. In their view, there would be enough room for Quebec's distinctiveness within the rest of Canada. For these people, the notwithstanding clause is precisely proof that Canada occasionally allows Quebec to assert its distinctive nature. The notwith-

standing clause is part of the Constitution, which allows a province, as well as the federal government, to pass a law without having it be reviewed by a judge. It is also called the parliamentary sovereignty clause, because it allows a legislature to vote democratically on a law that will not be subsequently overturned or struck down by judges.

This clause is limited. It only allows for exceptions to certain individual rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it is only valid for five years at a time. The Quebec government invoked the parliamentary sovereignty clause to protect the law on state secularism from any challenge. Since 1982, Quebec has used this clause on numerous occasions to protect laws passed by the Quebec National Assembly. It has used it to protect the French language and Quebec's national identity, but, more generally, Quebec has also used this clause to promote collective rights and social goals. For example, it has done so to provide benefits to the next generation of farmers, to promote the employment by the government of people from under-represented communities, to improve access to justice with the small claims court and to protect the identity of young people in youth court.

All these social advances, which Quebec wanted, were unable to be put forward because of individual rights enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Thus, the parliamentary sovereignty clause is a small window of freedom through which Quebec democracy can express itself. It is a way of resisting the uniformity imposed by the Canadian courts.

For René Lévesque, who suffered the night of the long knives when the patriation of the Constitution was negotiated, this clause was not enough. That is why Quebec, even though it is subject to it, never signed on to the 1982 Constitution. However, for several Canadian provinces, this was the compromise that made the Constitution acceptable.

Today, this Liberal government wants to shrink this small space of democratic freedom. It has asked the Supreme Court to limit how the parliamentary sovereignty clause can be used. Since it is not courageous enough to propose negotiating with the provinces, it is asking the judges to do its job. It argues that, without new limits, Quebec could commit dangerous abuses. This is an extremely condescending view of Quebec, and it is really nothing new.

It targets Quebecers because, if the Liberal government were truly concerned about the overriding of fundamental rights, it would start by cleaning up its own laws. It must be said that most bills of rights contain a notwithstanding clause. Quebec's has one, Alberta's has one, Saskatchewan's has one. Even the Canadian Bill of Rights contains a notwithstanding clause. It is a bill that applies to areas of federal jurisdiction. It was adopted in 1960 under the leadership of Mr. Diefenbaker, and section 2 contains a notwithstanding clause. If the federal government were so concerned about the possibility of this clause being used, it could have started by amending this law itself in the House of Commons.

• (1305)

However, what worries the government is not so much notwithstanding clauses in general, but rather the possibility that Quebec may express its difference. That is why the government only wants to define the parliamentary sovereignty clause that applies to Quebec.

To fully understand what is happening, let us take a step back. On November 20, 1981, during the debates surrounding the adoption of the parliamentary sovereignty clause, the Liberal Minister of Justice at the time, Jean Chrétien, addressed the House:

The purpose of an override clause is to provide the flexibility that is required to ensure that legislatures rather than judges have the final say on important matters of public policy...

It is because of the history of the use of the override clause and because of the need for a safety valve to correct absurd situations without going through the difficulty of obtaining constitutional amendments that three leading civil libertarians have welcomed its inclusion in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[...]

It should be clear, in conclusion, that the compromise reached by the Prime Minister with the nine Premiers [Quebec never signed on] maintains the principle of a full, complete and effective constitutional Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It does not exclude rights which have previously been guaranteed. In fact, the charter has been improved because unforeseen situations will be able to be corrected without the need to seek constitutional amendment. For those who remain concerned about the override clause, let me remind them that it has been said that "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance".

In this last sentence, Mr. Chrétien could have been speaking to those who are now members of the Liberal government.

Forty years later, the former prime minister still had not changed his mind. On April 19, 2017, he told the CBC that he was in favour of the notwithstanding clause because he believed that we need it and that we could not rely solely on the courts. He said that this was the reason why he was happy that we had a notwithstanding clause. In his view, judges know, when they make their rulings, that governments may object to them.

There is more. I will now quote Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who was also quite satisfied with the notwithstanding clause:

I must be honest and say that I don't fear the notwithstanding clause very much. It can be abused as anything can, but the history of the Canadian Bill of Rights Diefenbaker had adopted in 1960, it has a notwithstanding clause and it hasn't caused any great scandal. So I don't think the notwithstanding clause deters very significantly from the excellence of the Charter.

He went on to say that:

[I]t is a way that the legislatures, federal and provincial, have of ensuring that the last word is held by the elected representatives of the people rather than by the courts.

When former prime ministers Pierre Elliot Trudeau and Jean Chrétien are being quoted to defend provincial autonomy, things are not going well. That is because Ottawa's appetite for centralization is stronger than ever before these days.

We need to take stock of what is happening right now. This provision, which was not enough to convince Quebec to sign the 1982 Constitution, is now too important for Ottawa to tolerate. This space of democratic freedom for Quebec is now treated like a historic mistake that the federal government wants to correct.

Business of Supply

The more time passes, the more the federal government wants to shackle Quebec. This shows the real state of affairs. Canada is working against Quebec's distinctiveness. It will always push further and further. It will never stop. However, Quebec is a people, a language and a territory with its own colours. It is a nation with its own values, and one day, I am certain, a majority of Quebecers will agree that the only way to achieve true freedom is to be our own country.

• (1310)

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I like the quotation my colleague referenced: "The price of liberty is eternal vigilance." I am listening carefully. That is precisely why I am rising to ask him a question.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects a number of rights, including women's rights. We are in the Parliament of Canada. If a future Canadian government were to decide to limit these rights by invoking the notwithstanding clause, does my colleague think that there would be circumstances in which the judiciary might review this and set limits on these rights?

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Speaker, I took the time to read Jean Chrétien's comments.

Mr. Chrétien kind of answered my colleague's question by saying that the notwithstanding clause is a compromise. It is a compromise that Mr. Chrétien and Mr. Trudeau could both live with. What Mr. Chrétien said to those who feared that things would get too out of hand is that vigilance is always required and that there are ways for lobby groups to fight it out in the political realm.

What is happening here is quite scandalous. There is a notwithstanding clause, a limited option for democratic freedom that is used very sparingly. This government is going further than any other Liberal government to once again shut down this option for Quebec.

[English]

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his remarks. I particularly appreciate the depth of the historical references and the research he has done.

Turning to the situation and the serious challenges that we are facing today, including things like failure to get a trade deal, mounting federal debt, runaway costs and serious crime in our communities, I wonder if the hon. member agrees that the Prime Minister's decision to intervene here really risks creating a constitutional distraction at the very moment when we most need the federal government to be focused on more urgent day-to-day concerns.

[Translation]

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform my colleague, although I am sure she already knows, that Alberta currently wants to use the notwithstanding clause. It is considering it.

Business of Supply

What the government is doing here, like with this debate, is far from being a distraction. We are in the process of discussing to what extent the provinces will be able to decide for themselves how they want to live and how they want to act. If this debate continues in the direction the Liberal government is taking it, what will happen if the Supreme Court agrees with its argument is that the provinces will be less equipped to deal with all the challenges of our time, including the economic crisis.

Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in fact, I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the Liberals' hypocrisy in this debate.

The Liberal spin they tried to pass off is that they did not want to touch the issue of secularism, boasting about being the great defenders of Quebec. They hide behind this pretense to challenge the notwithstanding clause, implying, for example, that it could even be invoked to suppress the freedom of the press. However, they are the ones hindering freedom of the press by backing down on GAFAM and not adequately protecting local media. This hypocrisy shows, and the member for Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi seems to think so, that the Liberals still think that Bill 21 is a bad thing for women. Again, that is hypocrisy.

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Speaker, this government is obviously against the Act respecting the laicity of the State.

Essentially, with the path it is taking, it does not need to attack secularism head-on. That is what it decided. It said that there are several other parties before the Supreme Court who will do so. However, by attacking the notwithstanding clause, which was perhaps a way for the Liberals to avoid adding fuel to the fire, they are not only attacking the democratic decision that we made in Quebec on how we live together, but they are also attacking the power of Quebec and the provinces within Canada. That is even worse.

• (1315)

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Les Pays-d'en-Haut.

I rise today in response to a motion calling on the government to fully withdraw from legal challenges on Bill 21. The motion would have the House agree that the Government of Canada, the government of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, should not participate in one of the most important constitutional appeals to the Supreme Court in recent memory.

This case directly concerns Quebec legislation, of course, but the legal issues that it raises and that the Attorney General of Canada has addressed are of prime interest and deal with the role and importance of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in our modern governance system. The Supreme Court must determine what it means for the federal Parliament or a provincial Parliament to use section 33 of the charter.

Section 33 of the charter, known as the notwithstanding clause, has never been used at the federal level. Today, I would like to talk more about some of the less understood ways in which the government promotes good governance and the improvement of policies and laws under the charter. I do so to highlight well-thought-out practices that could be at risk if the use of section 33 were allowed to become more common and less taboo.

The point I want to make today is that the charter imposes a necessary discipline on government policy and law-making. This discipline would be lost if the use of section 33 became normalized. I will explain.

Let me explain. The charter is part of the Constitution and the Constitution is the supreme law of the land. That means that every law and every move the government makes must be charter-compliant. As a country founded on principles that include the rule of law, governments must be committed to ensuring that the measures they take and the laws they pass comply with the charter.

Prior to 1982, there is no doubt that governments recognized the fundamental value of a free and democratic Canada, a value that ultimately needed to be enshrined in the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter. After 1982, upholding these values became a constitutional imperative.

To be clear, respecting rights and freedoms does not mean never limiting them. Charter rights and freedoms are not absolute. Section 1 of the charter specifically sets out limits, which is very important, and guarantees rights and freedoms, subject to "reasonable limits" prescribed by the rule of law that can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

What are these reasonable limits that can be imposed on the rights and freedoms of Canadians? In essence, the standard boils down to a deceptively simple set of questions.

Is the government's objective sufficiently important to justify limiting a right? Is the limit a rational way to achieve that objective? In trying to achieve that objective, does the law use the option that causes the least harm to the right being limited? Finally, if the answer to each of these questions is yes, is the overall harm to the exercise or enjoyment of the right worth it when weighed against the benefits of the rights-limiting measure?

If so, then in Canada we consider such a limit to be reasonable, and, assuming that a government is well armed with supporting evidence, logic and reason, demonstrably justifiable as well.

When potential impacts on charter rights and freedoms are identified in the policy development process, governments need to carefully evaluate whether any limits on rights and freedoms are reasonable and can be demonstrably justified in Canada's free and democratic society.

As I just mentioned, this requires asking a series of questions that relate to the reasonableness of what is being considered.

• (1320)

Let us look at the first question: Is the government's objective in introducing legislation important enough to warrant limiting a right or freedom?

This can prevent governments from introducing trivial or merely symbolic legislation that would limit rights and freedoms.

The second question is whether the proposed means of achieving the government's objective is rational or, in other words, whether it is the right tool for the job. This prevents relying, for example, on "common sense" that may be unfounded or simply uninformed. Saying that public safety will be enhanced by doing a particular thing does not make it so, especially if the weight of evidence shows that such is not the case. If we are honest with ourselves, evidence-based solutions to certain problems are counterintuitive, and governing with respect for charter rights and freedoms helps us to recognize this and propose better and more effective approaches.

The third question is whether there is another effective means of achieving the important objectives, while lessening the harm to rights or freedoms. Meeting this standard requires assessing the various options available to advance an objective and choosing the most reasonable one that does the least amount of harm to Canada's fundamental values and to the Canadians whose rights and freedoms will be restricted.

The final question is whether the benefits of the legislation proposed to achieve an important objective outweigh the harms to the exercise or enjoyment of the right or freedom. That is the ultimate cost-benefit analysis, and it must be objective. This aspect of the section 1 standard prevents enacting legislation that has marginal benefits and real impacts on the rights and freedoms of Canadians. It does not tolerate legislation that disregards the rights and freedoms of individuals who may be unpopular, such as people charged with or punished for a crime, or laws that disregard the negative impacts on members of a minority group who have limited political power and little or fleeting public sympathy.

I think we can all agree that the questions the charter requires us to ask when considering new legislation are good, appropriate questions. We must ask these questions and evaluate their answers throughout the policy development process, from the initial departmental discussion about ways to solve a problem, to cabinet consideration of the options, to the drafting of a bill and, ultimately, to the most important stage, debate and passage of a bill by Parliament. Feeble answers to any of the questions should sound the alarm and lead to more in-depth study and consideration of alternatives.

When we get good answers to the questions that the charter forces us all to ask ourselves, we can adopt more thoughtful policies and better laws for Canadians. If we do not get good answers, and if the arguments and evidence in support of poorly crafted legislation are weak, the government should be held accountable for its choices.

This is what should worry us if section 33 becomes commonplace in Canada. Instead of thoughtful, reasoned, logical, evidence-based laws that limit rights and freedoms and are subject to robust checks and balances in the form of judicial oversight in the courts, section 33 eliminates this disciplined approach to law-making. The use of section 33 may amount to a crude assertion of power over the rights and freedoms of individuals in Canada that stands in direct opposition to the way federal governance has functioned for over 40 years.

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Although Canada is one of the best countries in the world to live in, we are far from perfect. We have made serious mistakes in the past. Prejudice and blind spots are an inherent part of being human, and they also exist in the institutions we create and operate. Here are a few examples of what we have done in the past: We imposed a head tax on Chinese immigrants, forced generations of indigenous children into residential schools and, in 1939, turned away Jewish refugees fleeing Germany aboard the *MS Saint Louis*. There may be some people who still believe that all of those decisions were right, but in general, as a nation, we have come to regret them and apologize for them. The discipline that the charter imposes on the government during the decision-making and legislative process helps prevent such tragedies from happening again in Canada.

• (1325)

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have never hidden it: They have always said that Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State bothered them. Quebec's laws defending French also bother them. Now they have realized that Quebec is using the notwithstanding clause to defend its identity, language and secular principles. Since the notwithstanding clause exists in the Constitution, they are stuck with it and are wondering what the solution is.

For them, the solution is to ask the Supreme Court to reinvent the law in their stead because they do not have the courage to amend the Constitution themselves. They know that they will get neither the support of 50% of the public plus one, nor the support of seven out of 10 provinces, as required by the procedure for amending the Constitution. Since they know that they will not be able to amend the Constitution, they are asking the Supreme Court to do it for them.

Does my colleague not think that this shows a lack of courage on their part?

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, I am a proud Quebecer. I come from a family in the Lower St. Lawrence and was raised by proud parents on a dairy farm, but that does not make me any less Canadian.

Today, we are talking about prejudice that could cause harm in the future. I come from the world of finance, and I can tell members that the past is no indication of the future. The actions we are taking today have an impact on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has been protecting us for 43 years. No one can predict what will happen in 10, 15 or 20 years. What we are seeing south of the border reminds us how important it is that we continue to safeguard the charter, which has protected us for 43 years, for all future generations.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is making a statement similar to the one made this morning by the member for Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi. They are arguing that implementing a policy that regulates religion is at odds with invoking the notwithstanding clause, which allows Quebec to follow its own political leanings. I find that quite surprising.

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Anyone with even a passing knowledge of Quebec history will quickly realize that Quebec needed to break free from religion and become secular in order to build a modern society. Perhaps my colleague can enlighten me on this point.

How could the notwithstanding clause become a threat to women's freedom, as the member for Pontiac—Kitigan Zibi said earlier?

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify a few points for my colleague. The Bloc Québécois is trying to bring the debate back to Bill 21 and religious freedoms. When I was a child, we went to church every Sunday. I was raised in the church. I have aunts who are nuns.

Now, I am before the House to talk about protecting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Bloc Québécois would love to reopen the debate on Bill 21 and stir up more controversy on this issue. I am a Quebecker, like my colleague. Do not forget that there are twice as many Liberal MPs from Quebec as there are Bloc Québécois MPs. Everyone knows that Quebecers are tired of controversy. They have no use for it. They want a responsible government that will protect their laws.

[English]

Kurt Holman (London—Fanshawe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is trying to create a crisis to ignore the real crisis Canadians are faced with. Canadians are thinking about the inflation crisis. Food inflation continues to rise 70% above target. Food prices are now 40% higher than when the Liberal government took office. The Liberals are creating a new crisis to distract from the problems they have created.

Will the Liberal government please tell Canadians, including the constituents of London—Fanshawe, how it will solve the ongoing inflation crisis?

• (1330)

[Translation]

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, we are not trying to create a crisis. Quite the opposite, in fact. We are not trying to create controversy, as I said earlier. The people who elected us with a clear mandate want us to protect them. That is what we are doing right now.

We are stepping up and standing up to defend our constituents from coast to coast to coast, right across the country. Yes, I am a Quebecker, but I am also a proud Canadian, just like my colleagues from Ontario and the Yukon, who are also standing up to protect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That is why I am here today.

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion moved by the member for Rivière-du-Nord, who is my riding neighbour.

To begin with, I want to remind the House that the question raised by this motion is not insignificant. It touches on one of the pillars of our democracy, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which applies to all Canadians. It also raises fundamental concerns related to the interpretation and use of the notwithstanding clause, an exceptional provision of our Constitution.

Our presence before the Supreme Court is not intended to reopen old debates. It is not in any way intended to pit Canada against the

provinces or to cast doubt on their legislative authority. Our participation in this appeal is intended to fulfill an important constitutional duty of the federal government: to uphold the rule of law, ensure the integrity of our Constitution, and protect the rights and freedoms we all share as citizens of this country.

There is nothing unusual or unexpected about Canada's participation in the appeal filed by the English Montreal School Board. By supporting the Supreme Court in this case, the government is simply doing what it has always done and will always do, which is to defend all Canadians, as is our responsibility and privilege.

Before going into detail on the case at hand, I would like to review the institutional framework surrounding the federal government's intervention before the Supreme Court. When the court is seized with constitutional and charter issues, the rules require that notice be given to the Attorney General of Canada and provincial attorneys general. In these circumstances, the federal and provincial attorneys general have the power and every right to intervene.

The Attorney General of Canada is frequently called upon to act as an intervener before the Supreme Court. This should come as no surprise. To defend the public interest, the Attorney General must have an opportunity to participate in cases that raise important constitutional issues, ensuring that the constitutionality of laws is fully and properly debated before the courts.

This role helps uphold the rule of law, ensures that the government's actions respect the limits set by the Constitution and the charter, and ultimately ensures that the rights and interests of all Canadians are protected.

I would like to stress the specific role of an intervener before the Supreme Court. As an intervener, Canada's main objective is to make a significant contribution to resolving complex legal issues that have major consequences for all Canadians. The government's goal is not to advocate for a particular outcome or to take a position on the validity of the disputed provincial law. Instead, its goal is to support the court by providing a useful and distinct perspective on the legal matters at hand, based on its constitutional responsibilities and its ability to provide a national and federal perspective on matters before the court.

For example, as a national government, Canada has a major interest in ensuring that the Constitution, the supreme law of the land, is interpreted and applied consistently across the country. As a national government, Canada also has an interest in promoting and protecting national unity, a role grounded in the principle of federalism.

Furthermore, as a national government, we have a clear interest in the rights and freedoms of all Canadians, regardless of where they live. The Attorney General of Canada has an important role to play in ensuring that minority rights are respected consistently throughout the country.

The Supreme Court of Canada has clearly indicated, particularly in the reference to secession, that respect for minorities is one of the underlying principles of the Canadian Constitution. That principle, along with federalism, democracy, constitutionalism and the rule of law, forms the foundation of Canada's constitutional framework.

As we know, this government has shown an unwavering commitment to defending the rights of linguistic minorities across Canada.

I would now like to illustrate how those principles actually apply to the case at hand today, that which involves the English Montreal School Board and other appellants. We have always indicated that, given the nationally important issues that this case raises, we would be there to defend the charter before the Supreme Court of Canada. That is exactly what we are doing today.

• (1335)

To be clear, many questions about how the Constitution is interpreted or applied are at play in this case. Several provinces, in addition to Quebec, as well as some 40 organizations, are already involved in this case, each presenting its own arguments on the issues. To me, that is the clearest indicator that this is a very important debate for our country and our federation.

That is why this government signalled its intention to intervene in this case last March and submitted its brief to the Supreme Court on September 17. In so doing, we are making the Government of Canada's voice heard in a debate that directly affects the interpretation and future of the charter.

This case is not limited to the immediate issues before the court. It touches on fundamental freedoms and rights, as well as the interpretation and application of the charter. I would like to clarify that the Attorney General of Canada's submissions are not aimed at the Act respecting the laicity of the State. They relate exclusively to the proper interpretation of the charter. The Supreme Court's decision will determine the conditions under which the federal and provincial governments may invoke the notwithstanding clause in the years to come.

The Attorney General of Canada is firmly committed to participating in these important national discussions, which could have repercussions for all Canadians. For that reason, the government will not withdraw from this debate before the Supreme Court. Doing so would be a dereliction of its duty to defend the charter and to help maintain a clear and consistent constitutional framework for the entire country.

It is in the interest of the court, the public and the Constitution for the government to contribute to this debate, particularly as it relates to the interpretation of section 33. As it has already stated, this government is very concerned about the increased use of the notwithstanding clause, namely, section 33 of the charter. The first

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word should not be the last in the dialogue between parliaments and the courts.

We are seeing the notwithstanding clause being increasingly invoked by parliaments across the country. We have heard from Canadians who are concerned about the appropriateness of invoking the notwithstanding clause in such a way. Again, our role is to provide helpful observations to the court on the interpretation of a provision of the Constitution, which in this case is the notwithstanding clause.

This contribution is intended to enrich the debate, not to single out a province or to challenge its ability to legislate. We respect the jurisdictions of the provinces, including Quebec, but respecting does not mean staying silent. When an issue concerns the interpretation of the charter, it is normal, critical even, for the Government of Canada to make itself heard.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the real question in today's debate is this, and I want to put it to my colleague: Will my colleague be happy if Bill 21 is struck down as a result of the federal government's intervention, its factum, before the Supreme Court?

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Speaker, that is not the issue here.

Bill 21 is not being taken before the Supreme Court. It is solely a question of the use of the notwithstanding clause. I believe that, when it comes to the Constitution, it is important to defend the rights of all Canadians.

• (1340)

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I are two of 44 proud Liberal MPs representing Quebec, which is twice as many as the Bloc Québécois. We are very proud to stand in the House during this very important debate.

Earlier, my colleague mentioned the importance of our citizens asking us, their MPs, to protect them against the erosion of their fundamental rights and freedoms. How will our government's intervention before the Supreme Court succeed in fulfilling this very clear mandate to protect the rights of all Canadians, including Quebecers?

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Speaker, I think the notwithstanding clause is a necessary part of the charter.

However, repeated use of the notwithstanding clause will undermine Canadians' fundamental rights. I think that the debate, as far as the Supreme Court is concerned, is going to centre on how to apply the notwithstanding clause in such a way as to ensure that the fundamental rights set out in the charter are fully protected at all times.

[English]

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada is the party of national division at a time when Canadians are facing an immigration crisis, a cost of living crisis, a debt crisis, a crime crisis and a housing crisis that was intentionally perpetuated by the Liberal government. I am wondering why the Liberal Prime Minister is so keen on distracting Canadians by creating a national unity crisis at this time.

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Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, we have to respect that within this chamber there are rules, and opposition parties are able to raise their opposition day motion. However, the Conservatives are not giving value to the debate on the floor of the House of Commons, so I would ask for relevance on this matter.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): As the member knows as a former government House leader, there is a broad latitude for relevance during questions and comments.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Les Pays-d'en-haut.

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Speaker, I find it incredible that the Conservatives are getting up today and talking about anything but the motion moved by our colleagues on the other side of the House. I think this is an important issue that they should debate with us, because Canadians' fundamental rights must be respected. I believe that today's debate is more important than the other topics raised by my colleagues on the other side of the House.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I understand from my colleague's response earlier that he is making a distinction by saying that today's debate is simply about the notwithstanding clause, and not about Bill 21. I have a very clear question for him.

As a member of Parliament from Quebec, does he support Bill 21, which regulates religion in the civic sphere in Quebec? That is my question for my colleague, nothing more.

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Speaker, I think the Bloc Québécois members are trying to stir up controversy when there is none. Today's debate is about the notwithstanding clause. I do not think Bill 21 is at issue. I believe that they should focus on the subject of the motion before us.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like someone to explain to me how Bill 21 is not at stake, because if the federal government is successful, this legislation could be struck down. I would like my colleague to realize how important the issue we are debating today is.

If the result of the federal government's action is that Bill 21 is struck down, will my colleague be able to explain to his constituents that his government has managed to overturn a Quebec law?

Tim Watchorn: Mr. Speaker, I will not answer hypothetical questions. I think today's debate is about the use of the notwithstanding clause and how it will be interpreted by the Supreme Court. I think that our Attorney General did a good job and that he will do the same before the Supreme Court.

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Jonquière.

I am really glad to speak today on this Bloc Québécois opposition day. People get involved in politics because they have values they want to defend. We want to defend our constituents, and I, as a proud member of the Bloc Québécois, want to defend Quebec. That is really what we are talking about today.

I will repeat the motion. The Bloc Québécois is asking for the following:

That the House: (a) call on the government to fully withdraw from the legal challenge of Quebec's Act respecting the laicity of the State before the Supreme Court; (b) call on the government to withdraw its factum filed on September 17, 2025, with the Supreme Court contesting Quebec's right to invoke the notwithstanding clause; and (c) denounce the government's willingness to use the Supreme Court to take constitutional powers away from Quebec and the provinces.

I wanted to read the motion again because I have been listening to the speeches ever since this morning and I get the sense that people are saying that this is not important, that it is merely a detail, that there are other matters that should be discussed. However, we are talking here about the Quebec nation itself. We are talking about an attack against the Quebec nation. With all due respect to my colleague who said earlier that it is not Bill 21 that is being attacked but rather the notwithstanding clause, it is Quebec itself that is being attacked.

I would remind my colleague that this is not the first time Quebec has used the notwithstanding clause. It has been used many times—41 times, to be exact—since it was introduced. In all those years, the use of the notwithstanding clause was not challenged; however, as soon as we started talking about state secularism, about the very identity of the Quebec nation and its values, a decision was made to question the legitimacy, validity, and intent of using the notwithstanding clause to defend a bill that was duly passed by Quebec's National Assembly. Clearly, this is really a direct attack. It is really an ideological attack. We are seeing the same agenda as there was under former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, under the most recent prime minister, and even the current Prime Minister. Since last March, they have been trying to tell us it is no longer the same government and it is a different government, but the agenda has remained the same. Today, they are pursuing the same agenda as Trudeau Sr., one that transformed into a postnational agenda under our former prime minister Trudeau Jr. and now under the current government. Absolutely nothing has changed.

I talked about identity. Obviously, the Government of Quebec has invoked the notwithstanding clause a number of times, including on matters of language, as well as social issues. Those are topics that distinguish Quebec from Canada and that make us who we are. We want to pass our own laws because they define us as a society and define the projects we have as a nation.

Besides the issue of identity, our democracy is at stake. We once again have a self-righteous government that thinks it can look down at us and judge what is good for Quebec and what is not. However, Quebec is sovereign when it comes to passing its own laws, such as Bill 96 on language and Bill 21 on secularism. I do not think Quebec is the only one worried. Yes, I am defending Quebec, but I was talking about democracy. That is what we want to defend here today as well.

● (1345)

Several Canadian provinces have supported Quebec because they see that the sovereignty of their own assemblies is also threatened by the federal government's paternalistic desire to decide what is good for the provinces and Quebec. This is really a question that goes beyond the issue of secularism, because there is the substance and there is the form. The substance remains a pretext for attacking Quebec, but the form also remains a reason for attacking democracy and the rights that all provinces and Quebec have under the Constitution.

This fear on the part of the federal government, as expressed by the Attorney General of Canada in his factum, is an attack on the form. We are talking about the notwithstanding clause, but also about the approach taken by the federal government, which has been criticized on several occasions for being unable to tackle the issue head-on, instead resorting to roundabout ways to attack Quebec. I find it disgusting—yes, that is the first word that comes to mind—that it has decided to use Quebec taxpayers' money against them. Our laws are legitimate; they were passed by our national assemblies.

Some Quebec members in the House, like my colleague who spoke earlier, are afraid to say whether they are in favour of Bill 21, a law duly passed by Quebec. I would like to add that what he was saying, whether he was for or against it, is that, in his view, his National Assembly is not legitimate and cannot even vote on its own laws. I have a big problem with that. Another government member said that there are currently more Liberal members than Bloc members. I would like the Liberal members—because beyond that, we are members from Quebec—to also be able to defend Quebec. It is all well and good to have Liberal members in the House, but I think we have a problem if they decide that their National Assembly is not legitimate in their eyes. We can see where the government members from Quebec stand.

At this point in the debate, I would like to remind members that just because a member is from Quebec does not mean they are defending Quebec and our National Assembly. In my opinion, based on what I have heard in the debate so far, only the Bloc Québécois members are defending Quebec's National Assembly, and therefore Quebec, tooth and nail. I would like to hear my colleagues on the other side of the House say that is not true if they wish, because that is not what I have been hearing since the debate began.

I would also like to see the government broaden its perspectives. It calls itself multiculturalist, open-minded and postnational, as I said earlier, but it should also look at what is being done elsewhere, both in terms of form, such as override clauses or the democratic tools that parliaments can use, and in terms of content. When we look at what is being done in the European Union, for example, we see that a number of countries are using those tools and trusting each other. The federal government is challenging a tool in its own Constitution in court, which is unbelievable. The government can use this tool, as other countries do. The same goes for the content. When it comes Bill 21 and religious symbols, other states, such as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, have substantial provisions in that area. However, I have not heard the federal government say that they are anti-democratic, that they may be using or bringing back firing squads, or that they are reintroducing slavery.

Business of Supply

● (1350)

I think that the Liberal government should be able to say that to the world. I also believe that Quebec will be as free as those nations that have adopted mechanisms such as the notwithstanding clause and that are, of course, free to address legitimate issues that are within the purview of their own national assemblies.

● (1355)

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is currently claiming that all governments—whether federal, provincial or territorial—can invoke the notwithstanding clause at any time and limit any of the rights protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

If a new federal government decided to invoke the notwithstanding clause to limit one of the rights protected by the Charter, including women's right to equality, would my colleague 100% agree that there should be no limits and no judicial review?

Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, that is a funny question because of the role reversal.

The Constitution's notwithstanding clause is meant to protect Quebec and the provinces, so that is a totally different premise.

The Constitution, which Quebec still has not signed, includes this notwithstanding clause, so the question is hypothetical. It is political fiction, and I do not think it is up to the courts to debate it.

What we want is for legislatures—which are elected every four years at most, even if things can always change and legislation can be voted on again—to be able to invoke the notwithstanding clause for five-year periods.

In short, there are already mechanisms in place that have been discussed. That question makes no sense.

[English]

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I will not be speaking in French. I am working on that. One day soon maybe I will be able to do that.

I noticed that in her speech, my Bloc colleague said nothing has changed in the current government. We hear a lot of talk from the opposite side about this being a so-called new government. I wonder if she would like to expand on that.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I am inclined to ham it up a bit and say that I am not even aware of this new government's current priorities. It seems to be recycling the old ones. We are talking about the notwithstanding clause now, and we talked about it in 2023. There is nothing new here. They are just sticking with the same agenda. Are they organized? I do not get the sense that they are. Time will tell. Obviously, the Bloc Québécois will be very vocal about reminding the government to do its job.

Statements by Members

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

She mentioned taking a look back at a bill previously introduced by the government. The question of the notwithstanding clause was previously brought forward by Mr. Lametti, who was recently rewarded for being a good, useful Liberal. However, I want to draw my colleague's attention to some research done, and I have figures.

In 2016—this research was done by law professor Guillaume Rousseau—41 laws passed by the Quebec National Assembly included at least 11 that remain in force. As far as I know, and as my colleague also mentioned it in her speech, there is no law on the books to reinstate the death penalty, restore to slavery or restrict freedom of the press.

I would like her to talk to us about the fact that these laws exist first and foremost to protect the interests of Quebec, and were democratically voted into force by members of the National Assembly.

Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Shefford for her question. It not only specifically calls attention to the government's paternalistic attitude, a term I used earlier, but also its contempt and arrogance towards Quebec.

Simply to assume that Quebec, as my colleague said, had passed 41 laws using the notwithstanding clause—laws that were progressive and sought to improve the lives of Quebecers—clearly shows, I say it again, contempt, arrogance and ignorance, and disrespect for Quebec.

The Speaker: I wish to mention that we have just enough time for a very brief question and a very brief answer. This would mean 15 or 20 seconds.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

Sophie Chatel: Mr. Speaker, my colleague still has not answered my question.

Would she agree that a federal government could use the notwithstanding clause to limit the rights of women without restraint and without judicial review?

Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I have already answered this question.

I would instead prefer my colleague to share with us whether she is standing up for Quebec and whether she is in favour of Bill 21, which was voted on by our National Assembly and which is legitimate.

This member from Quebec is right now telling us that Quebec does not have the legitimacy to pass its own laws.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN STATE

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday Canada took an important and historic step,

formally recognizing the sovereign state of Palestine. I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the millions of Canadians who told their government how important this is to them. All people have the right to self-determination, and Palestine deserves to take its place among the nations of the world. This is an important advancement of Canada's long-standing support for a two-state solution, where a free and democratic Palestine lives alongside a free and democratic Israel in peace and security.

We must not lose sight of the genocide happening in Gaza and the illegal occupation of the West Bank. There must be a ceasefire. Humanitarian aid must reach those in need. Hostages and prisoners must be freed. There must be a two-way arms embargo. All those responsible for war crimes, including genocide, must face justice.

* * *

CANOLA INDUSTRY

Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the riding of Prince Albert and the people of Saskatchewan have an esteemed agricultural history. Our farmers are proud exporters who help feed the world and improve food security for all. Unfortunately, punitive action taken by the Chinese Communist Party has unfairly targeted Canadian canola. In response to this unjust, unilateral behaviour, the Prime Minister sent a parliamentary secretary to Beijing. When the Conservative Party was in government, we sent the minister of agriculture because we recognized the importance of the canola industry to the Canadian economy.

The Liberal government fails to properly understand the significant negative impacts this Chinese trade action would have on Saskatchewan, our farmers and the Canadian economy. It is about time that our Prime Minister recognizes the challenge at hand and shows Canada that our farmers and our jobs are worth fighting for. Will the Prime Minister show the resolve needed to defend our farmers and work to end the stalemate with Beijing, or will he just continue to roll over to China and sacrifice western Canadian farmers?

* * *

OVARIAN CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, September marks Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month. Ovarian cancer often goes undetected until the late stages.

Our government takes women's health seriously. In the last election, we committed to stronger data collection and advanced research, including the use of artificial intelligence to close the long-standing gap in women's and seniors' health care. Better data means better outcomes.

In Brampton, many are leading by example, from the Canadian Cancer Society's Run for the Cure to the lavender fire truck campaign in Brampton. I also recognize local organizations like Cancer Warrior, the Walnut Foundation and others for their dedication to raising awareness for cancer.

I urge all Canadians to prioritize early screening. Early detection can save lives, and it gives families the best chance for successful treatment.

* * *

OSHAWA FIREWOLVES

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with pride on behalf of Oshawa to celebrate a landmark moment for our community. The relocation of the FireWolves franchise to Oshawa is about more than a National Lacrosse League team; it is about investing in youth, local culture and our city's economic future.

While many assume hockey is Canada's national sport, sorry to the hockey fans but lacrosse fans know the truth: lacrosse is actually our national sport.

Oshawa's lacrosse roots run deep, from the legendary Green Gaels and their seven straight Minto Cups to today's FireWolves calling the Tribute Communities Centre home. Starting in the 2025-26 season, we will see new jobs, more tourism and inspiration for young players.

I invite all colleagues to join me in congratulating the Oshawa FireWolves' players, staff and fans as we begin this exciting new chapter.

* * *

PALESTINE

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, too often governments choose expediency over principle, chasing short-term wins instead of building a just, sustainable future. People and the planet pay the price, as with Canada recognizing Palestine as a state but refusing to use its power to stop the genocide or even allow the entrance of Palestinian Canadians back into the country. They are human beings. They matter.

I remember when my grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, finally let us open the family photo albums. My grandfather had forbidden it. The pain was too great. Page after page, I saw children, cousins, nieces, nephews whose lives were stolen. I grew up without a family because of genocide.

Today I think of Palestinian families facing this devastation, children robbed of futures, parents and grandparents, lonely. Recognition is not enough. We must act now to stop this genocide.

* * *

• (1405)

[Translation]

MICEKENCIA CARLIE FRANÇOIS

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I often say that my riding of Madawaska—Restigouche is full of talent, and today I would like to draw the House's attention to an exceptional young woman. Her name is Micekencia Carlisle François, a teenager of Haitian origin who is now a resident of Edmundston, where she is pursuing her secondary studies at Cité des jeunes A.-M.-Sormany.

Statements by Members

Last July, she published her very first book, *L'été canadien à travers mes yeux*, with Éditions de la Francophonie. In this touching book, she recounts her experience of her very first summer in Canada as a newcomer. With sensitivity and authenticity, she shares the joys, doubts and emotions that shaped her journey.

In addition to being a promising author who masters our beautiful French language with finesse, Carlisle is actively involved in her community. She generously gives her time to a number of community events, acts as an ambassador for francophone youth and actively contributes to the local music, poetry and literature community.

Congratulations, Carlisle, you are a source of pride for your region.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Constitution is the highest law in Canada. Every other law must conform to it. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a cornerstone of our Constitution, and the notwithstanding clause is central to it. It is a deliberate and essential part of the 1982 compromise that made the charter possible. It reflects the will of Canadians to allow elected legislatures, not courts alone, to make final decisions in exceptional cases.

However, the government is asking the court to rewrite our Constitution. That is a reckless overreach with grave consequences, or perhaps it is a calculated distraction. What is it a distraction from? It is a distraction from the real challenges facing Canadians: high inflation, escalating debt, ever-increasing crime, and economic and trade uncertainty. Instead of addressing these mounting issues, the Prime Minister is wedging Canadians and creating an aimless diversion.

Canadians deserve solutions, not more distractions.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Gender Equality Week, so I would like to highlight the fundamental role of women in agriculture. For generations, they have been pillars of support who have too often remained in the shadows. Today, they are finally taking their rightful place with strength and determination.

Statements by Members

I would like to highlight the remarkable work of Agricultrices du Québec, an organization that promotes women in all areas of agriculture. It is with great sadness that I note the tragic passing of its president, Valérie Fortier. Her unwavering passion, leadership and commitment have had a profound impact on the farming community. My deepest sympathies go out to her three children, her loved ones and all women farmers in Quebec. I wish to pay tribute to her memory, to the resilience of women farmers and to all those who courageously continue this fight. Thanks to them, the future of agriculture is stronger, more inclusive and more equitable.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN ARMY

James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is army day on the Hill, when we celebrate and honour the brave women and men in our Canadian Army. Their dedication and sacrifice for Canada is unquestionable.

I want to recognize the over 2,000 members currently serving in the Canadian-led multinational brigade group in Latvia, as well as our troops training Ukrainian soldiers under Operation Unifier and those contributing to the NATO deterrence mission in Europe against Russian aggression under Operation Reassurance. This summer, we saw our soldiers deploy to assist wildfire efforts in Manitoba and across Canada as part of Operation Lentus.

Our troops cannot do all of this without the support of our military families, which are the backbone of our members as they endure long deployments away from home. Conservatives will always support our women and men in uniform, and we will continue to press for them to get all the kit they need to carry out the important missions we ask of them.

I thank all our army heroes for their amazing service and send a shout-out to all those who are joining us on Parliament Hill today.

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

QUEBEC MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, municipal elections are in full swing in Quebec. On November 2, voters will go to the polls in more than 1,000 Quebec municipalities. It will be an evening of high hopes for all candidates and it will also be the end of an era for our elected members who decided not to run again.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to thank all the mayors and the councillors who served the public over the last term. They took on a role that is often difficult, sometimes rewarding, but always essential, with heart and determination.

I also want to wish the best of luck to all those who had the courage to put their face on a billboard and run for office. Voters will make their choice, but there are only winners when thousands of people offer to devote their energy and intellect to the well-being of their fellow citizens.

Quebeckers, go vote on November 2. The future is in your hands.

* * *

COLLÈGE SAINTE-ANNE

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 52 students and three teachers from Collège Sainte-Anne, in Lachine, are visiting Parliament today.

Founded in 1861 by the Sisters of Sainte-Anne, this institution is one of the oldest schools in Quebec. For nearly 165 years, Collège Sainte-Anne has trained students who have contributed to—among many other things—innovation, entrepreneurship and remarkable scientific achievements that have had an impact not only in Quebec and Canada but also around the world. The teachers at Sainte-Anne teach with dedication and energy, arming their students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the career of their choice.

I am delighted to welcome them so they can take a closer look at how democracy works. Maybe some of those students are future members of Parliament. Whatever paths they take, I wish them every success and much happiness in their lives.

* * *

[English]

PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook—Brant North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised the fastest-growing economy in the G7. Instead, we have the fastest-shrinking economy, with higher unemployment, record household debt and the most expensive housing. It is another Liberal broken promise. He told Canadians to judge him by grocery prices, and they are rising even faster today, which is another Liberal broken promise.

The Prime Minister promised to “build, baby, build”. Instead, it is “block, baby, block”. Housing starts are projected to drop 13%, which is another Liberal broken promise. He promised “elbows up” tariffs against the U.S. and then removed them without a deal, which is another Liberal broken promise. He promised to “spend less” and “invest more”. Spending is way up while the deficit is doubling and \$63 billion in investment has fled Canada. It is another Liberal broken promise.

Broken promises are the only thing the Prime Minister has delivered.

CRICKET IN CANADA

Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, cricket has come to Ottawa. Today we are joined by Canadians representing over 300,000 women and men who play cricket across our country and millions who watch and cheer the sport.

Today is the third annual cricket match between Canadian parliamentarians and the Commonwealth diplomats, when they will square off and pitch for peace. Today is more than just about sports. It is about building friendships across the world celebrating cricket's growth here in Canada. For many MPs, senators and diplomats, today will be their first time playing cricket, but it will not be their last. I want to thank all the representatives of cricket who have joined us from coast to coast to coast. I thank Hassan Mirza, president of Canadian College and University Cricket, for his leadership and help in putting this together.

Canada needs to invest in our young cricketers representing us all over the world. We are hopeful that we can continue to pitch for peace to build a stronger nation.

* * *

• (1415)

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington—Tyendinaga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims to be pro resource development, but mere months ago he was praising the authoritarian government in Beijing for understanding “engineering solutions to issues around emissions” and its willingness to “engage in the global commons in and around climate”. He was happily giving the ambitious leadership of the Chinese Communist Party this high praise while it was doing the exact opposite of responsible environmental stewardship by constructing several new coal power plants, but as we are increasingly seeing with the Prime Minister, he prefers platitudes over planning and progress.

Coupled with his personal connections to Brookfield securing a \$250-million loan to the Chinese state-owned bank, Canadians are increasingly realizing that the Prime Minister is not only a walking conflict of interest but also an anti-energy leader in Canada, and his behaviour proves it.

* * *

[Translation]

ALLIANCE DES UKRAINIENS DE QUÉBEC

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer, I had the privilege of meeting, in my riding, representatives from Alliance des Ukrainiens de Québec, an organization that plays a key role for its members and for our entire community. This meeting was an opportunity to listen to their reality, their needs and their aspirations, but especially to see once again the strength and resilience of the Ukrainian community here in Quebec.

As the member for Beauport—Limoilou, I feel very strongly that Canada has the moral and political responsibility to support the Ukrainian people, internationally and here at home. My government has already taken tangible measures to welcome the displaced families, strengthen the cultural partnerships and ensure ongoing humanitarian and military aid.

Statements by Members

Beyond official gestures, it is the human connections and local initiatives, like those brought forward by the Alliance, that give true meaning to our solidarity. I want to reiterate that our government and I will remain an ally to this cause.

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[English]

FIREARMS

Aaron Gunn (North Island—Powell River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Minister of Public Safety accidentally told the truth. Yesterday we learned, through leaked audio, that the minister privately acknowledged what Conservatives have been saying publicly for years, which is that the Liberals' attack on law-abiding firearm owners with their gun confiscation scheme is politically motivated and will do nothing for public safety. It is completely unenforceable and a giant waste of nearly \$1 billion of taxpayer money, at a time when violent crime has surged and gun crime, in particular, under the Liberal government, is up 130%.

We already know that the minister does not know what an RPAL is and that he does not know that his own government decriminalized hard drugs in B.C. How many more failures, scandals and embarrassing moments does one man need to have before Canadians get a new Minister of Public Safety?

* * *

LOCAL BUSINESS IN BAY OF QUINTE

Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer, an extraordinary business in my riding of Bay of Quinte achieved a fantastic milestone. Sprague Foods hit 100 years of operation. Founded in 1925 as a seasonal cannery in Prince Edward County, the company has grown, through five generations, into the only remaining cannery in the region. From preserving local vegetables and producing soups now found on shelves across Canada, Sprague Foods has stayed true to simple, natural ingredients while adapting to changing markets.

At a time when buying Canadian-made products is more important than ever, Sprague Foods is a key partner in supporting our local economy with good jobs and food security. On behalf of myself and the entire House, I congratulate Sprague Foods on the past century and say cheers to 100 more.

Oral Questions

I would also like to acknowledge the Canadian Armed Forces that we have here today for army appreciation day. I thank them for all their service.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FIREARMS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I have never seen anything like this.

On Monday, in a recording, a minister said that his program will not work. On Tuesday, he announced that he is going ahead with the program.

He was right in the recording: It is a waste of \$700 million. This money is being taken from our border and police services to go after hunters and sport shooters, which will endanger the lives of Canadians.

When will the Prime Minister fire this minister?

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me just take this opportunity to talk about the compensation program we launched today. The pilot will take place in Cape Breton. I want to thank my colleagues from Cape Breton for their support. I also want to thank the police chief, as well as those who are going to step forward and apply for the rebate.

This is smart policy. We are moving forward on it. I fully believe that we will be able to implement this throughout the country over the next year.

[Translation]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he said exactly the opposite in the recording.

He admitted that seizing \$750-million worth of weapons will not work. He even offered to bail his tenant out of jail. He broke the Liberal promise to hire 1,000 border agents, even though 80% of the firearms used to commit crimes cross the border illegally. He lost track of 600 dangerous foreign criminals on our streets and does not even know what a firearms licence is. He is incapable of protecting Canadians.

When will the Prime Minister fire him?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, public safety is not about binary choices. We can do both. We can ensure that guns are off our streets by ensuring that people who turn in their firearms can get compensated for prohibited weapons. That is what we are doing with the launch of our gun buyback program today.

We will continue to make smart criminal justice reforms to ensure that criminals are off our streets and that bail is tougher to get for repeat violent offenders.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to admit, in all my years here, I have not seen this before.

On Monday, a minister says that his program will not work. On Tuesday, he says he is going ahead with the program, a program that will take \$750 million away from frontline border and police services to go after Grandpa Joe's hunting rifle. It is a waste of money that police say they will not implement and that the minister was caught on a recording saying the government will never implement. He even promised to bail his tenant out of jail if he breaks the law.

When will the Prime Minister fire this minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. If Grandpa Joe is using AR-15s to go hunting, we have to have a much more serious conversation about hunting.

What we are going forward with are 2,500 prohibited weapons, like the AR-15s that are killing people around the world, including those in mass casualty incidents in Canada. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to have a real conversation about crime, he also has to have a real conversation about guns.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister did have a real conversation about guns. He was caught on tape admitting that his program will not work because it will go after legitimate hunters and sport shooters rather than after the 80% of guns used in crime that come illegally across the border.

He admits that his \$750-million program will not work. He offered to bail his tenant out of jail if he breaks the rules. He lost track of 6,000 foreign criminals in our country. He admits he does not know what a gun licence is. More than half of Canadians do not feel safe under his watch.

Will the Prime Minister do the only thing that will secure our country and fire this incompetent minister?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we cannot be serious about public safety if we are not serious about gun crime.

My hon. colleague on the other side of the House raises concerns about the illegal flow of guns across the border. When he was in government, he made cuts that made it easier for illegal guns to come across the border. We are going to be adding 1,000 officers at the border.

He has also campaigned on a commitment to legalize assault-style weapons and claims they are used for hunting. There are hunters in my community I would love to introduce him to. They do not shoot deer with AR-15s.

• (1425)

BORDER SECURITY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Liberal strategy is to say that the public safety minister is not incompetent enough to be fired because the Liberals have, by comparison, an even more incompetent Minister of Justice. I guess everything is relative.

To prove his incompetence, I am glad the minister brought up the issue of border security. We asked the government in an Order Paper question last week whether it would keep its promise of 1,000 new border guards. The Liberals got back, saying not only have they not hired 1,000 more, but they have no plans to do so.

It is more incompetence from the public safety minister. When will the Prime Minister fire him?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the commitment to hire 1,000 officers at the border, I would point my hon. colleague opposite to the election campaign platform that Canadians across the country, including in the riding of Carleton, supported to make sure that we would defend our border against the flow of illegal guns and drugs coming into Canada.

For years, I have watched Conservatives brush away gun crime as something completely unserious, pretending that it is only law-abiding people who shoot guns in this country. The fact is, there are criminals who shot innocent people. We are going to do something about it.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible. Only this minister, who ruined the immigration system and the housing market, could simultaneously repeat a promise while breaking it. It was last week that the Liberal promise of another—

Some hon. members: Prop.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, that is right; a Liberal promise is a prop.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. member knows that he cannot use a prop.

The hon. member has 15 seconds left. We will start the clock again.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it was just last week that the minister's own department revealed that the Liberals are breaking their promise on having 1,000 new border guards. Not only have they not hired the 1,000, but they have not even developed the plan to do so. That is the responsibility of the public safety minister.

He has broken the promise. Will he be fired?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on April 28, Canadians gave this government a mandate to do many things, including hiring 1,000 CBSA and 1,000 RCMP officers. I am sorry, but it is obvious that the Leader of the Opposition does not understand the hiring process, nor the planning

Oral Questions

and work that go into hiring these 1,000 exceptional men and women who are going to serve this country.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome the leader back to the House. Maybe this is the time for him to get his security clearances so he can actually do his job properly.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' intervention in the challenge to Bill 21 is a constitutional power grab, as their statements today showed.

For them, the problem is more than just secularism. For them, the problem is that Quebec can use the notwithstanding clause to pass laws that Ottawa does not agree with. The Liberals want to weaken this clause, the only tool that allows Quebec to not be subordinate to Ottawa and its courts. They want to transform the government in Ottawa into a superior government and the one in Quebec City into an inferior government.

Will they withdraw from the challenge and put an end to this constitutional power grab?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it should not have been a surprise.

We have held the same position for years. When the case reached the Supreme Court of Canada, we filed an intervention. It is very important for the federal government to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and defend the rights of people across the country.

As the member knows full well, the case ended up at the Supreme Court of Canada. We filed our intervention. That is all.

Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are doing more than just challenging Bill 21. They want a say in all Quebec legislation. Their factum implies that Quebecers lack the judgment to be allowed to pass their own laws without Ottawa's oversight. As proof, they offer utterly apocalyptic examples, such as the possibility that Quebec might use the notwithstanding clause to legalize slavery or arbitrary executions.

Those who cannot come up with an argument resort to exaggeration. Given that their factum contains no arguments, perhaps they should just withdraw it.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned exaggeration. Considering the speech she just gave, that is a bit rich.

Oral Questions

She is well aware that the answer to her question is in her question. Obviously, the courts cannot change the Constitution. The point of our intervention is not to enable the courts to change the Constitution. As she said yesterday, the only entity that can change the Constitution is Parliament. The point of our intervention is not to change the Constitution, but to protect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (1430)

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing.

If the Liberals want to amend the Constitution and section 33, the notwithstanding clause, let them launch constitutional negotiations. Let them reopen the Constitution if they want to change its rules. Let them treat Quebec and the provinces as equal partners in a public debate instead of going through the courts. Let them respect their own federation. Let them behave like democrats.

Will the Liberals withdraw their factum, which is insulting to Quebecers, and withdraw from the challenge to Bill 21?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we do not want to change the Constitution.

We want to give the Supreme Court the opportunity to clarify the Constitution. It is very important for the federal government to defend our Constitution. Now, the case is before the Supreme Court of Canada. That is the appropriate forum for presenting arguments, not the House of Commons.

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[English]

FIREARMS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, gun crime is up 130% under the Liberal government, and what is the Liberals' answer? It is to target law-abiding hunters and sport shooters.

The public safety minister was caught on leaked audio accidentally telling the truth about the Liberal gun buyback scheme. He admitted it is not worth the money, that it will go over budget, that it is politically motivated and all for optics, and, worst of all, that it is not even going to work, yet the Prime Minister is telling the minister to go full steam ahead.

The minister is actively trying to sell a program that he admits will waste \$750 million and not improve public safety. Why will the Prime Minister not just fire the minister?

[Translation]

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to start by setting the record straight.

The program announced at midday today is intended to collect assault-style weapons. It has no impact on hunting. I repeat, this program has no impact on hunting. No reasonable hunter uses assault-style weapons for hunting, and those are the weapons that will be collected. That is what was announced today. This is a program that all Canadians have been waiting for. It started in 1989 after the

femicide, and it is still true to this day. We are going to get hits done.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the public safety minister who set the record straight when he was caught on tape saying that this program will not do a thing for public safety. The Liberals are not taking guns away from criminals; they are letting criminals out on the street, and now they are diverting \$750 million that could go to things that would protect Canadians. That is money being diverted away from the border, where illegal guns and drugs could be stopped. It is \$750 million that is not going to new border agents to deport foreign criminals.

Why will the Prime Minister not just do the right thing and fire the incompetent public safety minister?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try this in English. Maybe the member will understand it a bit more.

This program is to remove from the hands of Canadians firearms designed to kill people, not for hunting. It is not a waste of money, because Canadians want those firearms off the streets. They voted for us. We said we would do that. We will do that.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a leaked audio recording, the Liberal public safety minister said that the Liberals' gun buyback program will not keep Canadians safe and is a waste of money. We agree on both counts, but he is pressing ahead, and he launched an assault on licensed law-abiding gun owners today. Gun crime is up 130% under the Liberals, the Liberal minister and the Prime Minister.

The minister's job is to keep Canadians safe, and he is saying himself that this \$750-million program will not do that. Will the Prime Minister fire his minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify what we are doing.

First and foremost, what the member opposite said is factually incorrect. I support this policy. That is why I brought it forward today at 12:30 this afternoon. I, along with several of my colleagues, as well as the police chief of Cape Breton and the deputy commissioner of the RCMP, announced the compensation program as a pilot first in Nova Scotia, and we will be expanding it across Canada. I invite the party opposite to get on board to ensure that guns are off our streets.

• (1435)

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, please accept my apologies if I do not take the public safety minister at his word today and if, instead, we take him at his word from Monday, when he said that the program was a waste of money and was not going to keep Canadians safe.

If it is such a good idea and it is not going to target people who are not breaking the law, why was he offering to bail his buddy out of jail? How could his friend be targeted unless, of course, the program was going to target licensed, law-abiding firearms owners?

The OPP has said no, it will not participate. A Crown corporation, Canada Post, will not participate. It is \$750 million that could hire cops to keep Canadians safe. That is not what they are focused on.

Will the PM fire the minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we were able to launch the assault-style firearms compensation program. It starts, first off, in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia with a pilot, which will last for five to seven weeks. From there we will expand it across Canada. This is what Canadians voted for on April 28. They gave us a mandate to implement the program, and we will be implementing the program. We will ensure that prohibited weapons, including AR-15s, are off our streets.

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that after the Liberals released violent offenders and targeted law-abiding citizens of this country, such as sports shooters or hunters, gun crime has actually surged by 130% under the Liberal government. The public safety minister admits that it is simply a gun grab rather than accomplishing anything good for Canadians. He has confessed he does not know what an RPAL is, and he has sponsored a bill that undermines civil liberties. He is mired in conflict of interest concerns.

Would the Prime Minister finally do the right thing and fire the incompetent minister?

Hon. Buckley Belanger (Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke in French, and then she spoke in English, and the Tories still did not get it, so I will speak slowly.

This is not about hunting. This is not about infringing upon people who are out there legally hunting. I have met a lot of people from rural Saskatchewan and northern Saskatchewan who enjoy hunting. This is not about hunting; it is about stopping the violence, stopping the AK-47s from crossing our border and keeping—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis has the floor.

[Translation]

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety was recorded admitting that the Liberals' gun buyback program is not worth the \$750 million he is about to spend on it. As he knows and as we know, this program will only frustrate good citizens, like sport hunters. It will

Oral Questions

not reduce gun crime, which, I should note, has increased by 130% under the Liberal government.

Canadians have no confidence in this minister to introduce a policy that he personally acknowledges is ineffective. The only choice left to him is to resign. Will he resign?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question in French.

As we all know, and as the member is aware, the Polytechnique tragedy started a movement among Canadians to get assault-style firearms off our streets. This is so important in Quebec that we are continuing to register long guns, and my colleague voted for that.

What we are doing today will not affect hunters who use reasonable weapons for hunting. It will not affect sport shooters. Only guns intended to kill will be collected.

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is the situation.

Because of the Liberals, gun-related crime has increased by 130%. This is a fact.

The Minister of Public Safety has acknowledged that the gun buyback program is purely political. This is another fact. He acknowledges that it is ineffective. It is no secret.

The minister is failing at keeping Canadians safe. Will the Prime Minister demand the minister's resignation, yes or no?

• (1440)

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, lying in my hospital bed 35 years ago, I did not understand what was happening. I could not understand how such a thing could happen to me in a country like Canada.

In January 1990, I attended the first press conference surrounded by the families of the École Polytechnique students, who were calling for a ban on assault-style weapons.

I will continue to be an advocate. However, the most important thing is what we are doing and what Canadians want, what they voted for.

We will see this through to the end. Hunters will continue to hunt and shooters will continue to shoot.

* * *

JUSTICE

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' challenge to Bill 21 goes far beyond state secularism. They are telling us with their factum that they have seen what Quebecers have done with secularism, and at this point, they would even be capable of shutting down churches or newspapers if Ottawa were not there to stop them.

Oral Questions

The Liberals want to weaken the notwithstanding clause so that the federal government and, of course, federally appointed judges have the final say on all laws passed in Quebec. In Quebec, we would call that being placed under guardianship. What Canada calls it, I do not know.

Can the minister enlighten us?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry, but what my colleague is saying is simply not true. Our intervention before the Supreme Court is aimed at defending the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We are the party of the charter. We have always defended it, and we will always continue to defend it.

Just last week, one province announced that it would be using the notwithstanding clause in three bills at the same time. That is three bills in one province. When provinces and territories decide to invoke the notwithstanding clause, we want the courts to be able to tell the citizens of those provinces that their rights are being violated. That is what we are asking the Supreme Court to do.

Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, amending the scope of section 33 is not about defending the charter.

The Liberals want Bill 21 on state secularism to be repealed. That much is crystal clear. However, it goes beyond that. They want to have the final say and make Quebec's laws subject to their approval and that of judges appointed by Ottawa.

The Liberals want to fulfill their oldest ambition, which is to decide everything for everyone in Canada. If that is what Quebecers have to look forward to, then I wonder what we are still doing here.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that, in the last election, Quebecers voted in twice as many Liberals as Bloc Québécois representatives. I repeat, twice as many. Why did they do that? It is because they know that we will be there to defend their rights, but they also know that we are capable of working with the provinces and territories.

Just last week, I was with two Quebec government representatives to announce a 20,000-unit project, including 10,000 non-market housing units. We are capable of working with the provinces and territories while defending the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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[English]

FIREARMS

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public safety minister's number one job is to keep Canadians safe. Instead he is blowing taxpayer dollars on a gun buyback program he knows will fail. The Toronto Police Association has slammed it as useless, and it is right.

Almost every gun used in Toronto crime last year was smuggled. The overwhelming majority were from the U.S., yet the minister is

attacking law-abiding Canadians, knowing full well that his program will not work.

The minister has failed to do his job. Will the Prime Minister fire the incompetent minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very puzzled as to why the Conservatives are against getting guns off our streets. I am puzzled as to why AR-15s are required for hunting. I am not a hunter, but I have spoken to many hunters, and many of them will say that AR-15s do not belong on our streets, in our communities.

That is what we are doing here today. With the plan that we launched today in Cape Breton, and which will be spread across Canada, we are getting serious guns off our streets, and we will make sure our communities are safer.

• (1445)

Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant South—Six Nations, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth came out a few days ago. The minister knows the gun grab will fail. He was caught on tape admitting that it will blow the budget and that it would be better to lock up criminals committing the crimes.

I am sorry, but the minister's words were not misguided; they were the truth. However, today he is blindly plowing ahead, not to protect Canadians but because the Prime Minister wants a political stunt.

If the minister knows it will fail, admits it will waste millions of dollars and says it is all about politics, why is he still in charge of public safety?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I recognize that the member opposite is a lawyer, and I know he knows what defamation is. I invite him to say the exact same words outside the House.

What I will say is that the program we launched today is one that will make our communities safer. It will ensure that guns such as—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I could not hear. I am trying my best, but it is very hard sometimes, so the hon. minister can start from the top because I really did not catch anything he was saying.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I realize that the member opposite who just asked the question is a lawyer, and I know that he knows defamation law. I invite him to say the exact same words outside the House.

What I will say is that we have launched a program today that will ensure the safety and security of Canadians. We will compensate those who are willing to bring forward their prohibited weapons and collect remuneration for them. We will ensure that we have greater bail reform laws that will keep serious violent criminals off our streets. We can do both.

Jamil Jivani (Bowmanville—Oshawa North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, gun crime is up 130%, and Toronto police report that 88% of the illegal guns they seize have been smuggled north across our southern border. The Liberal public safety minister does nothing to keep our communities in the Toronto area safe. Instead, he focuses on banning legal hunting rifles in rural Canada.

When will the Prime Minister take action, actually hold the minister accountable and fire him? He has done nothing to keep Toronto safe, and that is his job.

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combating Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has put historic investment into our borders to be able to keep illegal guns off our streets and keep Canadians safe. We are going to continue to bring further legislation that will tighten our sentencing and bail systems, but mass shootings are a crime, and we have several examples of mass shootings that have taken place in Canada and the United States. We should learn that lesson and get assault-style rifles off our streets.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with this Minister of Public Safety, it is one failure after another. We have seen a 130% increase in gun crimes. He was recorded admitting that the Liberal gun buyback program is politically motivated. Now he is failing on border security by allowing the African mafia to infiltrate the country and exploit Quebec's most vulnerable citizens.

Will the Prime Minister show his minister the door?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to complete this initiative. Canadians are waiting for this.

It is important to uphold our commitments, and this program will allow us to do that. I think all Quebecers and all Canadians are waiting for this. It is not the only thing that needs to be done to fight crime, but it is a part of the whole package. It is one measure we will implement to ensure success.

LA SÉCURITÉ PUBLIQUE

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, my question is for the Minister of Public Safety, not the Secretary of State for Nature.

We are talking about border security. We are talking about crime and the African mafia. It is important to note that, because of this minister, public safety has become a major issue in Canada. We have problems. Nothing has been done to control African mafia groups.

Will the Prime Minister fire his public safety minister?

[English]

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do want to caution the member that he should really tread lightly in the language he is using, describing the particular group that he is concerned about. It is borderline racism, and I do caution him to take note of his language.

Oral Questions

Let me be very clear. We are investing in our border. We have already invested \$1.3 billion in securing our border. We are hiring 1,000 new RCMP officers, and we are also hiring 1,000 new CBSA officers. We will ensure that our borders are safe and secure.

● (1450)

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, even with Canada's success in negotiating new trade deals around the world, efforts to secure a new agreement with the U.S., and the launch of major projects, the unjustified U.S. tariffs on steel, aluminum and autos are hurting businesses of all sizes, including manufacturing and agri-food in my riding of Guelph.

Will the minister responsible for FedDev please outline which new programs are available to support them in these difficult times and how to access them?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Guelph for her important question and tireless work on behalf of her constituents and local businesses.

Southern Ontario, as we all know, has been among the hardest hit by tariffs, home to the steel and auto industries and industries that employ more than eight million workers. This summer, I spoke with businesses such as Laval Tool in Windsor and organizations such as Niagara Economic Development, which told us how much they value FedDev's work and its investment in innovation and creating new jobs. That is why our regional tariff response initiative is now open for applications and why our caucus—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the public safety minister's number one job is to keep Canadians safe, but he has failed at that job.

In a secret recording, he said, "Don't ask me" about "the logic", and I agree. I do not see the logic either. Gun crimes are up 130%, bail across the country is perceived as a joke and the Liberals, in Bill C-5, voted to lower sentences for gun crimes. Everything in this file is a mess.

Oral Questions

Why does the Prime Minister not fire his public safety minister?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to public safety in this country, we agree that there is work to do when it comes to bail reform and to tightened sentencing, which is why we will be introducing legislation that makes the criminal justice system treat serious crime with more serious consequences going forward.

A point of disagreement between the government and the opposition is the role of assault-style weapons in this country. My constituents at home in Nova Scotia and Canadians that I meet in every province believe that it is common sense to take guns that are designed to kill people off our streets. It is remarkable that the Conservatives have a contrary view.

Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if he wants a point of disagreement, how about this: house arrest for people who do drive-by shootings. The minister voted for it. That is a point of disagreement.

The minister has one job, and that is to keep us safe. There is \$742 million going toward a program that he does not even believe in. How many RCMP officers could that get us? How many border security officers could that get us? This whole thing is an absolute mess.

The question is this: When will the Prime Minister fire him?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take crime, all types of crime, very seriously. That is why this government's second piece of legislation in this House was Bill C-2, to make sure we give our policing organizations the tools they need to crack down on organized crime and on criminals who are running our streets.

We do not need AR-15s in our country. That rifle was designed to kill human beings.

If I could ask the Conservatives, why are you on the side of crime?

The Speaker: I would remind members to speak through the Chair.

The hon. member for York—Durham.

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BORDER SECURITY

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election, the Prime Minister promised to hire 1,000 new border officers. Now, the Minister of Public Safety, in his response today, suggested they just do not understand the hiring process. Let me suggest to him that he does not understand how promises work; one actually has to keep them.

Internal documents from the CBSA last week disclosed to the House that the Minister of Public Safety, responsible for hiring border officers, has hired precisely zero. His number one job is to keep Canadians safe, and he has failed

When will the Prime Minister hold the minister responsible and fire him?

• (1455)

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we made a promise in the last election. On April 28, Canadians gave us a mandate, and we are fulfilling that promise this afternoon.

We have launched a compensation program where, in Cape Breton as a starting point, we were piloting the ability for individual owners who have prohibited firearms to turn them in to law enforcement. They will collect them; they will inspect them and then advise on the compensation. This will spread across Canada in the coming weeks. I look forward to the support from the member opposite, who is really—

The Speaker: The hon. member for York—Durham.

Jacob Mantle (York—Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister says he is taking this seriously, but his own response to the House tells a very different story. Not only has he failed to hire a single new border officer, but he does not even have a plan to hire any. He has failed to keep the government's promise, failed to hire new border officers, failed to stem the flow of illegal guns across the border and failed to keep Canadians safe, his one and only job.

When will the Prime Minister hold the minister accountable and fire him?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we look forward to welcoming 1,000 new RCMP and 1,000 new CBSA officers to the ranks of our frontline public service.

I was in Regina, speaking at the RCMP training facilities. They are getting prepared to train the 1,000 new RCMP officers we will be onboarding over the next several years. It is important that we continue to invest in law enforcement. That is exactly what the Prime Minister committed to. That is exactly what we will be doing.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the summer it was revealed that the public safety minister lost track of 600 non-citizens with serious criminal records who were set to be deported. Over 70% of these people have been convicted of serious crimes, such as sexual assault. Right now, these people are still roaming our streets. The minister had one job: to keep Canadians safe. He has failed to do that.

Will the Prime Minister fire his public safety minister?

Oral Questions

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year we are on target to remove over 20,000 individuals who do not meet the requirements to be in Canada. That will be a record level of removals for Canadian history. We are working toward ensuring that this is accelerated even further. The addition of another 1,000 CBSA officers will help this process.

We will continue to make sure that Canada and our border are safe. That is exactly what we have been working on. We will continue to invest in Canadians.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what “on track” means when there are 600 serious criminals who are non-citizens, who should be deported, but are on the streets.

We asked these questions in May and in June. The minister had the entire summer to come up with a plan. These are people who have been convicted of crimes like sexual assault. He lost them and he cannot find them.

Why will the Prime Minister not fire his public safety minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Border Services Agency has been working very hard, not just through the summer, but over the last several years, to ensure that our borders are stronger than ever. This year we are on target to have more than 20,000 removals of those who are not eligible to be in this country. That number is accelerating by the month.

This is the type of work that our exceptional front service officers are doing. This is the type of investment that we will be adding to this year, including adding 1,000 new CBSA officers.

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FIREARMS

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety got caught on tape telling his tenant that he need not worry about the Liberals' \$750-million gun buyback program, because he could simply ignore it. The minister then proceeded to joke that he would bail him out if he got arrested. In other words, the Minister of Public Safety effectively counselled his tenant to break the law.

In the face of this serious ethical lapse, will the Prime Minister fire the minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate another opportunity to talk about the compensation program that I launched at 12:30 today, along with many of my colleagues, including the Secretary of State for Nature. We have heard in this House about the enormous work that she has done for decades in advocating for this moment. Survivors across Canada have asked for this.

It is important that we get weapons such as AR-15s off our streets. That is exactly what we have done. We will be expanding this from Cape Breton to across Canada over the next five to seven weeks.

• (1500)

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it does not end there. On tape, the minister admitted that the buyback rips off law-abiding firearms owners when he promised his frustrated tenant to personally pay the difference in value for his confiscated firearm. He went from counselling his tenant to break the law to promising to bail him out and then trying to appease him by cutting a cheque.

How many ethical lapses is it going to take before the Prime Minister fires this incompetent minister?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I invite this House and the members opposite to have a serious conversation about guns. When we want to talk about crime and when we want to work together to ensure that our streets are safer, it needs to be a serious conversation. It cannot be hyperbole.

What we have announced today would take, from our streets, weapons that should not be in possession of Canadians, which include AR-15s. They are lethal; they can destroy people. This is why we brought forward this plan.

We are starting in Cape Breton. We are going to be expanding it across Canada. I invite members opposite to support this.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the first job of the public safety minister is to keep Canadians safe. The public safety minister admitted to not knowing what a firearms licence is. He said he does not know what the classifications of firearms are, and he could not even defend his own Liberal government's gun confiscation scheme to his tenant on the most basic questions. This is the minister responsible for Canada's gun laws.

The public safety minister oversees national security and terrorism. What else does he not know about his own file? His incompetence puts Canadian lives at risk.

When will the Prime Minister fire him?

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, I am told, understands weapons and understands firearms. I want to ask him a very simple question. Why do we need AR-15s in our communities? Why do we need them in our neighbourhoods? Why do we need them on our streets? Can the member tell this House why we need that type of weapon on our streets, making it harder and more unsafe for Canadians?

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DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Paul Connors (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2025 wildfire season has been the second-worst wildfire season on record, with communities across the country, including in my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador, facing devastation and thousands of Canadians forced from their homes.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of Emergency Management give us an update and tell the House how our government supported Canadians and the wildfire response?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski (Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the first responders, local officials and members of the Canadian Armed Forces whose work on the front lines saved lives and protected communities. We were there for Newfoundland and Labradorians as they faced these historic wildfires. We also supported Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia.

In true Canadian form, the provinces and territories stepped up to help one another when more resources were needed. While many face a long road to recovery, we will continue to support Canadians with focus, determination and unity.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, keeping Canadians safe is the public safety minister's number one job, but the rising number of extortion cases in this country is out of control. Surrey police say the number of cases they have investigated since June has tripled. Canadians continue to live in fear of their house being shot at, business being burnt down or much worse.

Meanwhile, the minister continues to make empty promises of additional RCMP officers, but they have not been hired yet. The minister has clearly failed to keep Canadians safe from international gangs and extortion.

When will the Prime Minister fire him?

• (1505)

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, extortion is illegal in Canada. It carries a very stiff penalty. The Conservatives would like people to believe that it is legal to extort people; it is not. Extortion carries minimum sentences.

We have created a national task force that is working on and monitoring all extortions and connecting police agencies across this country. Many arrests have been made. We will not stop there. We will continue to go after extortionists. It is illegal, and they will be put behind bars.

Sukhman Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the number one job of the public safety minister is to keep Canadians safe, but he has failed. Extortion is up 330%, especially in my riding of Abbotsford—South Langley. The minister has not yet labelled the Bishnoi gang as a terrorist organization, but it is responsible for widespread violence in Canada. Designating the Bishnoi group as a terrorist entity would arm law enforcement with the critical tools needed to prosecute the gang's activities. Politicians nationwide have been calling for this.

Will the minister resign today, or will the Prime Minister finally fire him for his poor behaviour?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, public safety is a top priority for this new government. National security experts independently evaluate and

make recommendations on terrorist entity listings. This work is ongoing, and we hope to have a decision very soon.

Amanpreet Gill (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, extortion cases have skyrocketed by 330%. This past Saturday night, my community was targeted by Bishnoi terrorists who carried out a shooting followed by an attempt to extort the victim. This gang is actively threatening innocent Canadians, causing fear in neighbourhoods like mine, yet the minister has failed to label it as a terrorist organization.

My question to the Minister of Public Safety is simple. Will the minister resign or will the Prime Minister fire him today?

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Secretary of State (Combatting Crime), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the RCMP that first exposed the Bishnoi gang in this country as an organization that is actively working in our neighbourhoods. It is a crime to extort Canadians. We will go after them. We have created a national task force to address this issue.

Our national security experts are independently evaluating the listing of Bishnoi as a terrorist organization. I hope they will arrive at a decision soon so that we can continue to keep our communities safe.

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GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Aslam Rana (Hamilton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's new government was elected on the promise to spend less, invest more and make government more efficient.

Can the President of the Treasury Board update the House on the red tape review he has recently launched and how it will help ensure more effective service delivery for Canadians?

Hon. Shafqat Ali (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's new government is taking bold actions and delivering results. We are eliminating red tape to improve efficiency and to deliver better and faster services to Canadians. We have received almost 500 proposals since launching our red tape review.

These initiatives will make the government more efficient, to build the strongest economy in the G7 and to build Canada strong.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***FIREARMS**

Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a mess this Liberal government has once again made of the firearms file. Crime is up 130% under the Liberals, and the minister is going after the wrong people. He is going after law-abiding citizens, hunters and sport shooters.

The new Minister of Public Safety privately says that the infamous gun buyback program is a waste of money and that the budget is going to skyrocket. However, under pressure from the Prime Minister, he must be a hypocrite and go ahead with the program. The minister no longer has any credibility.

When will the Prime Minister fire him?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians want to live in a world that is safe. For 35 years, they have known that assault-style weapons can lead to mass shootings in Canada. It happened to me and it happened to other Canadians in Portapique. It has happened in places across Canada.

What we are going to do today, starting in Cape Breton, is take assault-style weapons off our streets to make our country safer. I thank the team in Cape Breton that is launching this pilot program.

* * *

• (1510)

*[English]***LABOUR**

Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government abused its power one too many times by invoking section 107 of the Canada Labour Code as a back door to order striking workers back to work.

It did it with rail, port and postal workers and tried to do it with Air Canada flight attendants. CUPE national fought back and defied the back-to-work order. Trade unions across the country stood firmly on the side of flight attendants to say that unpaid work does not fly.

Will the minister respect the constitutional right of workers to free collective bargaining and repeal section 107 of the labour code, yes or no?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Jobs and Families and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the privilege and honour, along with Secretary of State for Labour, to meet with the Canadian building trades unions that are standing strongly with our government as we plan to build the strongest economy in the G7. We talked about the major projects that are going to provide great jobs for unionized tradespeople across this country and the importance of having unionization in this country to protect a strong middle class.

I will tell members that this government will always act quickly to support labour rights and industrial peace.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is facing record wildfires that are destroying communities, critical infrastructure and lives while also creating dangerous air pollution that harms human health, yet Canada still does not have a sovereign aerial firefighting fleet. In Port Alberni, Coulson Aviation is a world leader in retrofitting aircraft such as the retired CC-130 Hercules that could continue to protect Canadians and create high-skilled jobs here at home.

Will the government commit in this budget to establishing a permanent national aerial firefighting fleet so Canada can defend our communities from climate disasters while also meeting its NATO obligations?

Hon. Eleanor Olszewski (Minister of Emergency Management and Community Resilience and Minister responsible for Prairies Economic Development Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are living in a new reality where natural disasters are more frequent and more severe. I am actively working with provinces and territories, indigenous partners and other stakeholders on how we can strengthen coordination and capacity.

Throughout the summer, I met with first responders, local officials and members of the Canadian Armed Forces to hear their first-hand experiences of wildfires this season. We will ensure that communities have the tools they need to respond, recover and rebuild.

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Last week, we raised a point of order because the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship said that she would speak in another language because she had not been understood.

The point we raised last week was not an attack. We did not ask for an apology. We asked that members not make such comments. We asked that that comment be withdrawn. That did not happen last week. Maybe that is why it is happening again today.

I have the utmost respect for the Secretary of State for Nature, but when someone says they are going to repeat something so that a member can understand, it is an official languages matter. Both official languages are accepted and used in the House. It also shows a lack of respect for the interpreters, who do top-notch work.

If anyone in the House cannot hear what others are saying, I strongly suggest that they put in their earpieces. Not everyone has their earpiece in at all times. Perhaps that would help calm things down in the House.

Business of Supply

Mr. Speaker, I will not ask you to call on the secretary of state to withdraw her remarks, because that did not work last week. Perhaps you could at least give a general reminder to members about the importance of respecting the members' right to speak in the language of their choice and respecting our interpreters' outstanding work.

The Speaker: I would be happy to do so. Members have to be careful about making such comments. As I said last week, it is one way to put it, but it may not be the best way to put it in the House. The point that the member for Berthier—Maskinongé raised is duly noted.

* * *

● (1515)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. René Legacy, Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance and Treasury Board and Minister of Energy for the Province of New Brunswick.

I also wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Jean-Claude D'Amours, Minister of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Minister responsible for Immigration for the Province of New Brunswick.

[English]

Also, we have the Hon. John Herron, Minister of Natural Resources for the province of New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—OIL AND GAS EMISSIONS CAP

The House resumed from September 22 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:16 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle related to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1525)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 37)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Anderson
Arnold

Aitchison
Allison
Anstey
Au

Baber
Baldinelli
Barrett

Berthold
Bezan
Bonk
Bragdon
Brock
Caputo
Chong
Cody
Dalton
Davidson
Dawson
d'Entremont
Diotte
Dowdall
Epp
Falk (Provencher)
Généreux
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Godin
Gourde
Guglielmin
Hallan
Ho
Holman
Jansen
Kelly
Kibble
Kmiec
Kram
Kronis
Kusie
Lawrence
Lefebvre
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Ma
Majumdar

Mantle
Mazier
McKenzie
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Muys
Patzner
Poilievre
Reid
Reynolds
Roberts
Ross
Ruff
Schmale
Shipley
Steinley
Strauss
Thomas
Tolmie
Van Popta
Viersen
Wagantall
Wagh

Acan
Ali

Bailey
Barlow
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bexte
Block
Borrelli
Brassard
Calkins
Chambers
Cobena
Cooper
Dancho
Davies (Niagara South)
Deltell
DeRidder
Doherty
Duncan
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Gallant
Genuis
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gladu
Goodridge
Groleau
Gunn
Hardy
Hoback
Jackson
Jivani
Khanna
Kirkland
Konanz
Kramp-Neuman
Kuruc
Lantsman
Lawton
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lobb
Mahal
Malette (Kapuskaing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Martel
McCauley
McLean (Calgary Centre)
Menegakis
Morin
Motz
Nater
Paul-Hus
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Richards
Rood
Rowe
Scheer
Seeback
Small
Stevenson
Stubbs
Tochor
Uppal
Vien
Vis
Warkentin
Williamson— 140

NAYS

Members

Al Soud
Alty

Anandasangaree
Bains
Bardeesy
Battiste
Beech

Bendayan
Blair
Blanchette-Joncas
Bonin
Brière
Carr
Chagger
Champoux
Chartrand
Chen
Chi
Clark
Cormier
Dabrusin
Danko
DeBellefeuille
Deschênes-Thériault
Dhaliwal
Diab
Duguid
Earle
El-Khoury
Eyolfson
Fanjoy
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gaheer
Garon
Gaudreau
Gerretsen

Gould
Greaves
Guilbeault
Hajdu
Hepfner
Hodgson
Housefather
Iacono
Jaczek
Joly
Kayabaga
Khalid
Koutrakis
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lavack
LeBlanc
Lemire
Long
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
McGuinty
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
Ménard
Michel
Miller
Morrissey
Nathan
Noormohamed
Oliphant

Auguste
Baker
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill Riv-
er)
Bittle
Blanchet
Blois
Boulerice
Brunelle-Duceppe
Casey
Champagne
Chang
Chatel
Chenette
Church
Connors
Coteau
Dandurand
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Deschênes
Desrochers
Dhillon
Duclos
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Erskine-Smith
Fancy
Fergus
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser
Fuhr
Gainey
Gasparro
Gazan
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassi-
nan)
Grant
Guay
Gull-Masty
Harrison
Hirtle
Hogan
Hussen
Idlout
Johns
Joseph
Kelloway
Klassen
Kwan
Lambropoulos
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Larouche
Lauzon
Lavoie
Leitão
Lightbound
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Cardigan)
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
May
McKelvie
McKnight
McPherson
Mendès
Miedema
Mingarelli
Myles
Nguyen
Ntumba
Olszewski

Business of Supply

O'Rourke
Perron
Plamondon
Provost
Rana
Rocheffort
Royer
Saini
Sari
Sawatzky
Sgro
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard
Solomon
Ste-Marie
Tesser Derksen
Thompson
Valdez
Vandenbeld
Watchorn
Wilkinson
Zahid
Zuberi— 191

Osborne
Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski
Ramsay
Robertson
Romanado
Sahota
Sarai
Savard-Tremblay
Schieffe
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sodhi
Sousa
Sudds
Thériault
Turnbull
van Koeverden
Villeneuve
Weiler
Yip
Zerucelli

PAIRED

Members

Anand
Jeneroux
Naqvi

Hanley
Lake
Zimmer— 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

[*English*]

Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, we noticed that the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier was out of his chair for a significant duration of the time that the vote was being counted. He was speaking with the leader of the Green Party. I just want to confirm if he intended to vote in the House or if he did it by app, because as I think the House wants to remember, a member cannot leave their seat in the middle of voting if they voted here in the House.

The Speaker: Could the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier clarify where he voted?

Eric St-Pierre: Mr. Speaker, I did not leave the chamber, but my apologies for standing up. My intent was to vote here.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, members must remain in their seat when voting in the chamber. We cannot register the member's vote, which he said was in favour.

I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement and the deferred recorded division, the time provided for Government Orders will be extended by 11 minutes.

● (1530)

[*Translation*]

OPPOSITION MOTION—CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS OF QUEBEC AND THE PROVINCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will start by sharing my thoughts on what I have been hearing all day.

Business of Supply

The government members, in all their speeches, tried to make us believe that they were not seeking to oppose Bill 21, but rather the notwithstanding clause. Even though we heard the former prime minister, Mr. Trudeau, strongly disavow Bill 21 repeatedly in the past, even though we heard many people on the government side strongly disavow Bill 21, as if by magic today, it would seem that the Liberals oppose the notwithstanding clause.

On the other side, the speeches we heard from the Conservatives focused mainly on the increased cost of living. We raised a few points of order to find out whether the Conservatives were going to speak on the motion and whether the Conservatives, particularly those from Quebec, are prepared to support Bill 21. However, it seems that that is not what they were interested in today. This leads me to say that, even though our Liberal friends have pointed out repeatedly that they hold a majority of seats in Quebec, Quebec is being served very poorly today. I would have liked to see a little more respect from the members from Quebec since this motion is so essential to us.

What we have before us today is clearly a challenge against Bill 21, which is part of the Canadian government's long history of attempting to make Quebec a province like any other. The common thread running through Canadian political action for many years has been a refusal to recognize Quebec's uniqueness. It has also often involved demonizing, by any means possible, the Quebec nation's desire to express its political autonomy.

What we are seeing with Bill 21 is a bit like Groundhog Day. Every time Quebec legitimately uses the tools at its disposal to take responsibility for its destiny, express its difference and defend its identity, the federal government is there to throw up roadblocks. What we witnessed today looked a lot like that.

We need only look back over events from the political history of Quebec and Canada, such as the multitude of challenges to Bill 101. Back when Quebec's Bill 101 was debated in this parliamentary chamber, it was portrayed as Nazi legislation. All the federalist parties have consistently rejected the idea of Quebec as a distinct society. The same thing happens when we asked for more power over immigration, or tried to hold rounds of constitutional negotiations. Like me, the Speaker knows about them. There were the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords. Both failed and both times, Quebec was plainly told "no".

The same goes for limiting federal spending powers or the fiscal imbalance. We are used to that. In Quebec, we are used to being told "no". That is what led to the sovereignist movement. However, I get a sense that we are adding a new wrinkle this time. The federal government is no longer content to lock down Quebec's political autonomy, it wants to send us a negative image of who we are.

Before I turn my attention to the substance of the factum, I would like to discuss a situation that strikes me as a corollary of what we are seeing today. As members may recall, it has long and often been said that Quebec is an insular community that does not welcome immigration or difference. Even in the good old days under Mr. Trudeau, Quebec's political agenda was described as beligerent nationalism. The Speaker must have seen that.

I do not know if anyone here has ever taken history classes, but there was a rather interesting dispute between Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Hubert Aquin. The crux of that dispute is clear to anyone who has ever read *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. Mr. Trudeau sees Quebecers as an inward-looking and homogenous nation, while Mr. Aquin makes a rather convincing argument that Quebec has always been a multi-ethnic nation. What made Quebec so different was its culture.

● (1535)

Quebec may have a homogenous culture, but that homogenous culture is made up of people from different ethnicities. These criticisms that denigrated Quebec in the past have reappeared in the factum at hand. Today, some members are going even further than the Attorney General of Canada's factum by suggesting that Quebec wants to limit freedom of the press, limit freedom of religion, limit the rights of unions and open the door to forced labour and maybe even arbitrary executions.

This pile of nonsense that we read is part of a consistent pattern that has caused considerable harm to Quebec's reputation. It must be said for once and for all. There were debates on reasonable accommodations, on Quebec's place within the federation and even on the place of religion in the public sphere. Quebec is not closed to difference. Quebec is not closed to ethnocultural minorities. Quebec is not closed to immigration, but we are constantly seeing this harm to our reputation.

Quebec is an open society where there are fewer hate crimes. Quebec is a society that treats its linguistic minorities in an enviable way. I would like members to find another linguistic minority that represents 8% of the population but is still squeezing out 30% of education budgets. It does not exist anywhere else but in Quebec, and it would make any francophone community outside Quebec jealous. However, we have to constantly play with this reputational damage that is done to us.

This brings me back to the observation I made in my introduction: For Canada, Quebec must become a province like any other. What we are talking about today is undoubtedly the federal government's challenge of Bill 21. Let us say it once and for all, even though the Liberals are trying to pull the wool over our eyes by suggesting that the notwithstanding clause is what they are really challenging. To make this perfectly clear, I want to go back to the birth of multiculturalism in Canada.

In 1963, the Laurendeau-Dunton commission was set up. What exactly was going on in 1963? We were coming out of the Quiet Revolution. Quebecers are no longer called French Canadians, but they are Quebecers. At the same time, in Canada, some people are wondering what kind of collective identity can be developed to integrate Quebecers. That questioning led to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Canada's response to Quebec.

What was the original intention? Canada was supposed to become a bicultural and bilingual country. Well, biculturalism was completely ignored. Canada became a bilingual country in name only, and biculturalism was completely abandoned in favour of multiculturalism, so that was the first time Quebec was really told no. Canada chose to become a multicultural country where all cultures were recognized. By recognizing all cultures, we might as well say that we recognize none. That is what most commentators have to say about that period.

The first time Quebec was told no was during the Laurendeau-Dunton commission. In the process, Quebec decided to develop its own integration model, known as interculturalism, and the debate surrounding Bill 21 on secularism and the place of religion is directly linked to this interculturalism. There are three main principles of interculturalism on which there is a broad consensus in Quebec. It is clearly a rejection of multiculturalism, a rejection of assimilation, but also the importance of integration based on Quebec's fundamental values. What are those fundamental values? Quebec is a French-speaking state. Quebec is a state where gender equality is non-negotiable, and Quebec is a secular state.

Some silly things were said today, justified by quotes from Simone de Beauvoir, about how the notwithstanding clause could somehow infringe on women's freedom to make their own choices. I have never heard so much nonsense in my life. The women of Quebec who had to break free from the Catholic church in the 1950s and 1960s know very well the price women can pay when religion controls everything in a society.

I will be pleased to answer questions. In sum, the Liberals just need to stop telling us that they are against the notwithstanding clause. What they are trying to do—

• (1540)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Joliette—Manawan.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating my hon. colleague on his excellent speech.

I would like to quote a few lines from constitutional lawyer, André Binette.

Defending the Canadian Constitution means defending the notwithstanding clause, and everyone must accept that. It is impossible to remove it because it is the central component of the 1982 political compromise from which Quebec was excluded.

The notwithstanding clause is not unique to Quebec. It is part of the very essence of Canada.

I would like my colleague's reaction.

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly right.

What happened is that Quebec was sidelined after 1982. If Quebec, as a national minority, wants to follow its own path and create its own laws, it needs some kind of political autonomy. We have constantly been denied that political autonomy by the different federal governments.

The notwithstanding clause is an insurance policy that at least allows Quebec to bring in its own legislative measures. Even that is too much to ask for the Liberals.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will have the opportunity to address, in more detail, the concerns that I have, but the question I have for the member is fairly specific. First of all, I would say that this is not about the province of Quebec. The issue of the notwithstanding clause applies to all provinces and to Parliament.

Does the member have any concerns whatsoever about using the notwithstanding clause as a pre-emptive measure?

[Translation]

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, that ploy is not working, not even with the media. If, as they claim, this challenge is not specifically against Quebec, why does their factum specifically challenge Bill 21? Why did they do it in this specific case? I sense a touch of, shall I say, hypocrisy on the part of the government.

They want to have it both ways, but the principle is clear. If we go by what the government has said in the past, the Liberals are very much against Bill 21. Now they are trying to sneak this through using the notwithstanding clause so they do not have to take responsibility for who they are.

It is sad for them, but not for us.

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on his eloquent speech. It covers all the essential elements of our cause.

Since the Constitution was repatriated in 1982, a phenomenon known as the judicialization of political space has taken hold. In other words, we are constantly sending issues to the courts when we lack the courage to resolve them politically. If the Liberals object to the notwithstanding clause and want to return to the spirit of the 1982 Constitution, could they not reopen the Constitution?

What does my colleague think of that political position? It seems like cowardice to me.

• (1545)

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, cowardice is the right word. We watched the red herring all day long as the Liberals stood up to say they have nothing against Bill 21, but they want clarifications about the possible impact of the notwithstanding clause. Only the most fearful would go to such lengths to avoid standing by their position.

There was a Liberal government in place before. Most of the members I see are familiar faces from the previous Parliament. Every time their Prime Minister rose to bash Bill 21, they stood behind him clapping. Today, they expect us to believe that what they are objecting to is the notwithstanding clause, not Bill 21.

Personally, I will let my colleagues judge for themselves.

[English]

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians elected us as parliamentarians to work together to solve the crises that the Liberal government has caused: the immigration crisis, the cost of living crisis, the debt crisis, the inflation crisis and the housing crisis.

Business of Supply

I wanted to ask our colleague whether he agrees that this is just another distraction that the Liberal Prime Minister is trying to stir up for Canadians.

[Translation]

Mario Simard: Mr. Speaker, Quebec's identity is not a distraction. Quebec's plan to govern itself is not a distraction. Quebec's autonomy to make its own choices is not a distraction. The Conservatives should be ashamed of this petty rhetoric they have been engaging in all day.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been here throughout the day, listening to the debate, and a couple of things come to my mind right at the beginning. I want to give a bit of a background with respect to why I want to be able to speak to the motion before us, because I have witnessed a lot of things that make me question why people are motivated to speak to the legislation.

I look at the Conservatives, as the official opposition, and they are just as comfortable trying to shift the debate and not talk about the issue. They literally accuse the government of trying to use it as some sort of a diversion strategy to prevent us from being able to deal with the many different things that have been happening since we elected a new Prime Minister not that long ago. I would invite the Conservative Party to bring forward such a motion on its opposition day. Let us talk about and review the last six months since we have had the new Prime Minister.

Then there is the motivation of the Bloc Party. Let us be very clear on this: the Bloc party is a separatist party. It wants to break up Canada. Its motivation is to try to get the government to say, "This is all anti-Quebec; this is all about Bill C-21", even though the Bloc members know it is just not true. However, it does not stop them from saying that, because they are trying to hype up whoever it is they are trying to garner support for.

The province of Quebec is not the only province that has used the notwithstanding clause. Provinces in every region of our country have used the notwithstanding clause. It has not been every province, but there has been a province in every different region: Atlantic Canada, Ontario, Quebec, the Prairies and B.C.. We could probably even think more in terms of the provinces that have thought about the possibility of bringing it in.

Let us take a look at the history, which is where my motivation comes from. I was a relatively young man of 20 years old when Pierre Elliott Trudeau sat at the table and signed off on the Constitution and the Charter of Rights in 1982. At a very early age, I had a keen interest in getting involved in politics, and I was very proud of my prime minister and the nation of Canada.

At the time, my favourite NHL team was the Montreal Habs. I was also passionate about football, and if the Bombers could not win the Grey Cup, I wanted the Montreal Alouettes to win it. In fact, if we take a look at my biological ancestry, we will find that a few generations ago, my family comes from Saint-Ours, Quebec, three hours from Ottawa in terms of a drive.

When I approach the discussion we are having today, it is not to talk about how one province is being alienated from the federal government. I will not buy into that, because it is a separatist party that is trying to shove that aspect down our throats. I do not buy it.

There is a responsibility for the Government of Canada to deal with the issue because it is coming before the Supreme Court of Canada. That is the reason the Government of Canada has to address the issue, and there is an obligation. If we did not do that, I would suggest we were neglecting our responsibility.

I would be wanting to talk to the Attorney General of Canada, saying that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is something we believe in as a political entity. The Liberal Party is the party that brought it into being under Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

• (1550)

I am very much aware of the constitutional discussions that took place then, much like I was aware of the constitutional discussions of the Charlottetown Accord and the Meech Lake Accord, because I was an elected member of the Manitoba legislature and understand the dynamics of the power play between the provinces and the federal government. There is nothing new there.

All provinces tend to want to look at ways in which they can represent their constituents on important issues, and we have an important issue. That is why parliamentarians need to express their thoughts on the issue, whether they are from the Manitoba legislature, B.C., Nova Scotia or the province of Quebec. It has an impact on Canadians' rights and freedoms. As a member of Parliament, I have a duty to do so, and I resent the fact that there are members from the Bloc trying to tell me that I do not have a duty to do so.

Bloc members approach the issue through a motivation that ultimately works to the detriment of us as a nation, and that is why it is without reservation whatsoever that I talk about the issue today. I understand and appreciate a multi-faceted or holistic approach in dealing with this critically important issue. Is the timing the best? That is debatable, but at the end of the day, we have a government and a Prime Minister who are solely focused on our economy, Canadians, the environment and trying to bring it all together so we can advance and continue to move straight forward.

However, there are still other responsibilities. That is why we have the different ministries we have. The primary responsibility of the Attorney General of Canada is to protect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms for all Canadians. If not that minister, then who does that? That is his job, and he has to do that. Was I surprised when we heard that there was a factum put before the Supreme Court of Canada? Absolutely not.

It will be interesting to see where the members of the Conservative Party of Canada stand on the issue. Where do they stand? Are they going to be voting with the Bloc, understanding the motivation as to why it brought forward the motion, or are they going to vote in the national interest? The national interest means everyone: young, old, French-speaking, English-speaking or whatever their ethnic background might be. It is all Canadians. We all have that role and responsibility, even members of the Bloc, I must say.

Business of Supply

How will the Conservative Party of Canada vote on the motion? Is the coalition between the Bloc and the Conservatives so strong that the Conservatives are going to abandon their responsibilities and vote for the motion? We are going to find out tomorrow. It is going to be very interesting to see where they stand on the issue. I have listened to all the debate on the issue and have witnessed the Conservatives' stepping back and not providing an opinion on how they will vote. My colleagues and I know where we stand: We are going to be voting against the motion, and I hope the Conservative Party will do likewise.

For individuals wanting to get a good appreciation or understanding of the importance of the issue, I did a quick Google search and want to quote something I found from the Government of Canada website. I think it encapsulates why this is such an important debate and why the federal government has a role to play. The Government of Canada website states:

● (1555)

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms...protects basic rights and freedoms that are essential to keeping Canada a free and democratic society. It is a powerful force for progress, protection, and fairness with the power to influence our society by interpreting laws and policies. The Charter ensures that the government, or anyone acting on its behalf, doesn't take away or interfere with these rights or freedoms in an unreasonable way.

Since 1982, the Charter has been an essential part of Canada's democracy and it will continue to shape our identity as a nation. The Charter affirms that we are a multicultural society and that it must be read and understood with this in mind.

The debate today is all about section 33, and the website provides a very specific comment about section 33:

Section 33 of the Charter, also called the notwithstanding clause, allows Canada's Parliament, provincial and territorial legislatures to pass laws that may violate certain Charter rights. A legislature may do this if they clearly state to the public that they are passing a law that violates the Charter and which rights in particular the law infringes. All levels of government must review and re-enact this declaration to Canadians every five years, or the limits are automatically lifted. The federal Parliament has never used the notwithstanding clause.

I am very proud of the fact that the federal government has never used the notwithstanding clause. Even in my time in Parliament, we have had legislation come to the House because the Supreme Court or superior court made a decision. As much as it might offend a lot of parliamentarians, we respect what the Supreme Court or the superior court has said, and it has obligated us to change the law. We have before us today a bill that would do that.

We are not bringing in the notwithstanding clause because, my God, we are taking a hard position on this. No, we are changing and modifying the law so that it still reflects the interests of Canadians and hopefully deals with the concerns of the independent judicial system, our Supreme Court or superior court's decision, which we respect where we can.

A number of provinces have made the decision not to amend a law that was ruled as going against the charter. Instead of bringing in modifications, they have brought in the notwithstanding clause. My friends in the Bloc would say, "That is provincial; let the provinces do whatever they want", but Liberals recognize the debate is not about Ottawa saying it has control in any fashion whatsoever over the provinces. The Bloc will say that, but it is not the case.

We have a judiciary responsibility to the very same people the provincial governments represent: to ensure that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is being respected. This means that part of the charter includes the notwithstanding clause, within which there is a caveat that if a right is being taken away, the law needs to be reviewed and re-enacted every five years. If that is not done within five years, the law needs to be allowed to expire, and the court decision will prevail.

What is being proposed? We are seeing more and more governments consider, with consideration coming even from the Conservative leader, using the notwithstanding clause. In the last election, he talked about using the notwithstanding clause on a crime bill.

● (1600)

This is not something that is focused on any level of government or any provincial government in particular. It is to get clarification from the Supreme Court of Canada and to allow the Supreme Court of Canada to provide an opinion, which, because of its independence, should be respected. That is an admirable thing for us to be doing. I would have much preferred that members opposite, if they were to have an opposition day motion on that, to provide their thoughts on that issue.

My thoughts, to be very clear, are that I am concerned about two aspects of implementing, revoking or using the notwithstanding clause. Number one is that I want a sense of comfort for the people I represent that their rights and freedoms are not going to be unduly infringed upon. I can ensure that by realizing that the sunset clause should not automatically allow for any level of government to say, "We brought in the notwithstanding clause four and a half years ago, and the time clock is coming up, so let us redo it for another five years," making it an automatic thing. That is disrespectful of what Canadians feel about our freedoms and our rights, which were well-established back in 1982. That is a concern I have, and I know many of my colleagues share that concern. The Federal Court will hopefully take that into some consideration.

Number two is with respect to the other aspect, which I have actually posed questions about. What about using the notwithstanding clause as a pre-emptive measure? That is something that we are starting to see more of. All of us should be concerned about that.

When, for example, we have the leader of the official opposition saying that he does not care what the court system, the Supreme Court of Canada, says because he will use the notwithstanding clause to ensure *x*, *y* and *z*, I believe that is a highly irresponsible approach to governance. I do not think any of us should be supporting that sort of a proclamation, if I may put it that way. Whether it is from a federal leader, a provincial leader or anyone else, I would suggest that is an inappropriate use of the notwithstanding clause.

That is my opinion, based on the many hours of discussions I have had and the studies I have put in over the years, from 1982 to being an MLA back in 1988 for the Meech Lake accord and the debates on the Charlottetown accord during the nineties. I understand the importance of joint responsibility and jurisdictional responsibility. I understand why it is so critically important, with respect to the issues for which we have shared responsibilities, that all of us have a role to play.

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However, if we are not here to defend Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, then why are we here? I would like to think that the charter and the Constitution make up who we are as a nation. I believe that there is an obligation for members, and that is why I started off by talking about the motivation factor. People know what my motivation is: It is love of country. I want Canada to continue to be the best country in the world to call home. That is my goal, and that is what motivates me to come in every day.

When it comes to the motivation that I have witnessed today, I do not like what I am seeing, because I am seeing more division trying to be sowed. I see issues that a vast majority of Canadians would not support. That is the reason I felt it was important that I share my thoughts today. I look forward to any questions that might be asked.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, before the parliamentary secretary lectured us on morality, he did something that he does not often do: He opened up to us and told us the truth. He said that when there were constitutional negotiations, he was in the Manitoba legislature. He said that the Constitution was a compromise that included the notwithstanding clause, and that he did not like that compromise because it reflected the balance of power at the time. He is not happy with the Constitution because he lost.

What he is telling us is that, since the balance of power is not the same today, he wants to use the courts and the judiciary, rather than democracy and Parliament, to ensure that the courts make a different interpretation of section 33, even if it is absolutely clear, written in black and white.

Is my colleague not showing a lack of courage? Instead of having the courage to reopen the Constitution and discuss it, he prefers to say that he is a sore loser and that his government will make sure that judges do the dirty work.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not see that at all. When I reflect on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was signed in 1982, I believe the essence of what is there is to show, through the notwithstanding clause, that Parliament is supreme, that the legislatures are supreme, in the laws they are making and passing. That was assured by the notwithstanding clause, but there was a sense that this was a clause that people would not be turning to constantly.

I take a look at the years between 1990 and 2010. How many times was the notwithstanding clause used? I suspect members would be surprised by the degree to which it was used, as I do not think it was. I cannot recall it offhand. Maybe members opposite can tell me if, in fact, it was used. I contrast that to the last number of years and how it is being used. That should raise some red flags.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was certainly a sanctimonious speech by our colleague from Winnipeg North. It was definitely not his first time lecturing us, nor is it likely to be his last.

His argument does not hold water. He says we need to ask the Supreme Court for an opinion because the role of the Attorney General, through the government, is to defend the Charter. The notwithstanding clause has been around for more than 40 years. If there was no prior intervention, if the Supreme Court was never asked for a legal opinion, does that mean the government was not defending the charter?

I have a simple question. Is my colleague saying that the government has not been defending the charter for the past 40 years because it never asked for a legal opinion even though the notwithstanding clause was used more than 100 times during that period?

• (1610)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the notwithstanding clause has been in place for 43 years. It is going before the Supreme Court of Canada. The Attorney General of Canada, and I would like to think everyone in this chamber should support this, has a role to play in defending Canada's interests. By Canada's interests, I mean those of every woman, man and child, no matter their age, their sex or what language they speak.

There is a judiciary responsibility for Canada to be at the table. If we were not at the table, I would, quite frankly, question whether the government of Canada was doing its job. I believe that no one should be surprised that the federal government is doing its job in protecting the interests of Canadians. It is before the Supreme Court.

[Translation]

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise for the first time today to take part in this important debate.

[English]

I agree that the notwithstanding clause should be used only sparingly. I think it should go to the Supreme Court, but I also have deep respect for my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois. I have deep respect, and I felt that, at one point in the member's speech, he dismissed the concerns of Bloc Québécois members, because of their wanting to break up the country.

I want to say very clearly to my own constituents and to other members in this place that what I see in the Bloc Québécois members of Parliament is a deep commitment to serve Quebec, as each of us should serve our own communities. I do not see them as destructive. I see them as constructive allies in seeking progressive values.

[Translation]

I think Bloc Québécois members are really good MPs.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think there are phenomenal members who advocate for their regions, their provinces and their municipalities. Different people come to the House of Commons for many different reasons.

When we talk about the national interest, having something of this nature elevated to the Supreme Court of Canada dictates that the Attorney General of Canada has to express the interests of all Canadians.

I am a very proud Manitoban, but I am a Canadian first and foremost.

[Translation]

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague claims that it is not the substance of the issue that is at stake, but rather the issue of the notwithstanding clause, which is not strictly a Quebec issue. I have a very simple question for him. What does he think of Bill 21?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, in my speech, I could have talked about the many different uses of the notwithstanding clause, but to go through and start itemizing them, I would then be criticized for provincial autonomy.

I respect that the provinces do and should have the ability to access and invoke the notwithstanding clause. My primary concern is the potential of automatically hitting the renewal button every four or five years. I am interested in what the Supreme Court of Canada has to say on it. I think it diminishes the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

[Translation]

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased because I love asking the member for Winnipeg North questions.

First, I am going to ask him about his reaction. I was in the hall near the lobby earlier, and I heard him say that a separatist party was proposing this. He is right. I would encourage him to continue.

Later on in his speech, he asked what the Bloc was doing here. We defend Quebec's interests because Canada does not do a great job of that. In fact, it often works against Quebec's interests. As our Green Party colleague pointed out, perhaps he should listen to what we are saying, because we are much more constructive than destructive. What we want is not to break up Canada, but to build Quebec. That is very different. It means taking charge of and developing our destiny as an autonomous nation. I would like him to think about that tonight as he goes to bed.

• (1615)

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I want to build up the prairies because I believe it would make Canada stronger and healthier. I want to advocate for the province of Quebec to be built up. Where I take exception to the member's comments is that he is trying to give a false impression, but the federal government does not do what he is trying to imply.

We have the five major projects. The port of Montreal will benefit immensely because of the passage of Bill C-5, which, by the way, the Bloc opposed. That particular project is going to create literally hundreds, if not thousands, of jobs for people in the Montreal area, and all of Canada will benefit.

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We all have a responsibility to advocate for the strengths of our provinces and regions to build a stronger, healthier Canada.

[Translation]

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

Why does he think that no government in Quebec has ever signed the Constitution Act, 1982 and its draft charter?

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have some personal thoughts on that issue. Maybe one of these days, when I attempt to visit where my ancestors grew up in Saint-Ours, Quebec, the member will join me for coffee and we can talk about it.

That is not what today's debate is about, nor is it about singling out any specific province. It is a constitutional issue, an obligation Canada's Attorney General has a fiduciary responsibility to fulfill.

[Translation]

Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île, who is sure to speak truth to power, as he does so well.

I thank everyone here and I thank everyone seated in the House who is listening to the arguments we are making here today. Not everyone listens. Some people have their lines prepared and have the nerve to tell us they work for the interests of Quebec since they are voting in favour of Bill C-5. I just heard that. It is crazy how surreal things can be around here.

A lot of things have been said about today's motion. Several people have read it, so I will not reread it, but I will sum it up because some people are not great listeners. What we are asking is for the government to withdraw from the case. The Liberals have told us all day long that the court is independent. They are using our money to fight our laws that were legitimately passed by our parliament, our National Assembly. Then they tell us that the court is independent. We want the government to withdraw and withdraw its ridiculous factum.

We also wanted to speak out today against the weaponization of the courts, because that is what this is all about. This weaponization is done on our dime, as I just said. We are fed up. Let us manage our own affairs.

That is Canadian history for you. The Quebec nation manages itself and does pretty well with the imperfect institutions that have been given to it and sometimes imposed on it. I would remind the House that today we are talking about the 1982 Constitution that was signed at night, behind our backs, while the premier was sleeping. I am not making this up. If it were a TV show, half the audience would tune out, thinking this could never happen in a democracy. However, it happened here. Then they tell us that this is the best country in the world. That takes some nerve.

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This is not the first time the Bloc Québécois has worked on this. It is not the first time that it has brought this issue before Parliament. In 2023, we moved a motion explaining to parliamentarians that the Quebec government has every right to invoke the notwithstanding clause. Quebec is using a clause in the Constitution that the government created and whose parameters have already been properly defined. These parameters do not need to be defined again. If they do not like it, if they do not like this clause, then they need to reopen the Constitution. However, I do not think they will, because they do not have the courage to do so. They know it is impossible to get all the provinces to agree to the slightest change if it would benefit Quebec.

Let us go back to the 1990s. The Meech Lake accord was fairly straightforward. It was so bare bones as to be humiliating, and still it was rejected because it was too much. Charlottetown was a second attempt. It was even more ridiculous. Quebecers voted against it because it was too little, and Canadians voted against it because it was too much. That is the Canadian Constitution. That is the Canadian federation.

Today, we are speaking out against an attack on secularism. The government can be hypocritical and say that the problem is the use of the notwithstanding clause and that it is used too often. What triggered this move? The Act respecting the laicity of the State. The fact that Quebec is different. We have a different way of seeing society and the world. We have a different way of integrating newcomers so that they can fully participate in society. We do not want people to ghettoize and live in separate groups. We want to build community and enable newcomers to enrich Quebec's culture with their own. That is why we practice interculturalism, not multiculturalism.

People on the government side do not understand that. They do not like it because it is not based on the British model. They want to stamp it out. Regardless of what they say, they are doing everything they can think of to obliterate it. The tragedy here is a lack of understanding.

As I said in my previous question, we are here to be constructive. I feel that we are being pretty constructive and pretty nice. We are basically the only group here that respects the Constitution, which we have not signed. That is really something.

Various political parties here are constantly advocating for even greater encroachment on provincial powers. Members should consider that for a moment and think before claiming that we are the troublemakers here. I do not think we are troublemakers; we are here to defend the interests of our people. That is what we are doing.

• (1620)

We will continue to do so, because it is our duty. Days like today are not a waste of time. We are educating the public and MPs in the House of Commons about the disgraceful act that is being committed: The federal government wants to crush the Quebec nation once again. That is what we are doing. I need to calm down, because I am getting upset. It is upsetting to hear that. There is something dismissive about it. It is as though they are condescendingly thinking to themselves, "Not surprising, they are separatists."

We are being constructive and asking them to get out of the way. The notwithstanding clause was already framed by the Ford decision in 1988. It was clear. It says that as long as they follow the conditions set out in the Constitution, they are following a piece of legislation. When people go to court for a case, the judge does not up and decide that he is going to interpret things this way or that way because he is having a bit of a bad day. He does not rule a thing unfair or excessive because something was said four or five times, or because something rubs him the wrong way and he is going to fix things. He reads and applies the law. That is what we do, and that is what the legislatures of the provinces and Quebec do. Just let us get on with it, that is all. The message is simple: Stop interfering. Even after all that, people are still shocked that we want independence for Quebec.

The situation is utterly ridiculous. Speaking of utterly ridiculous situations, have members seen the federal government's brief? It says that we might bring back slavery, take away civil rights and abolish unions. Come on. I can hardly believe I am speaking words like these in Parliament. I thought it could not be true when I read the summary at the beginning. I thought it must have been a mistake, that it could not possibly say that, or it was a joke and the Liberals were making themselves a laughingstock. But no, they meant what they wrote. Then they turn around and tell us that this is the best country in the world and we should stay put.

We just want to protect our model. I will explain secularism once again for those who do not understand what it is. It is not discriminatory. On the contrary, it is the model that most respects individual religions because every individual, when using government services, is not discriminated against, since the person providing the service is neutral. Canada does the exact opposite. It prioritizes the individual right of the worker who says, "I have the right to wear my symbol and I will impose it on the 50 people I serve today." The 50 people served today will be subjected to his or her symbol. It might not bother some people, but it likely does bother others. That is the idea behind secularism. It protects personal beliefs and allows people to practise their religion at home, as they wish. We will never make places of worship illegal. What is being presented to the Supreme Court is madness. It completely boggles the mind.

Canadian history has always been about erasing Quebec's distinctiveness. With the Royal Proclamation of 1763, they wanted to assimilate us. In 1774, there was the American Revolution, and they used us by giving us gifts and making us believe that everything would be wonderful afterward. That did not last long because in 1791, the Loyalists arrived. They divided up the territory and created democratic institutions, thinking that the French knew nothing about that and would not be able to manage. Surprise, surprise, we were really good in parliament, just as we are today. I think we are still good.

This caused so much unrest that they decided to try to crush us again in 1840 with the Act of Union. Not only did they take away our democratic power, but they also made us pay the debts of others. However, we still found a way to work things out by forming an alliance, the Baldwin-LaFontaine alliance, to save what we could and preserve the French language and our culture. Since they did not like that, they came up with the idea of making us believe that they were forming a confederation, when in fact it would be a federation, and then, little by little, through mass immigration and gradual measures, they would stifle these people and make their government disappear. Today, this is yet another brick in that edifice. Fortunately, the Bloc Québécois will always stand in the way of this very negative project of Canadian nation building, because we want to continue to exist. They want us to disappear. Multiculturalism is part of that. That is the overall picture.

• (1625)

Our message today is that we must be allowed to make our own choices. We have a deadline next year in Quebec, and we are going to work toward it.

[English]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to make reference to the factum that the member referred to. He talked about the issue of labour, and he kind of ridicules the government, asking why one would include that as an example. If we look at the usage of the notwithstanding clause and who has actually used it, we will see that labour was a part of it.

Does the member not recognize that having the Attorney General of Canada express an interest in how the notwithstanding clause could be used, repetitively, might actually affect the Charter of Rights and Freedoms? Is that not a serious issue?

[Translation]

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the member directly.

I am against the Attorney General of Canada assuming that Quebec could abolish individual rights, allow summary executions and do away with all class action rights. I object to that.

I object to the fact that this government is trying to go through the courts instead of having the courage to stand up, reopen the Constitution and change what it does not like; it knows that we would have other demands as well. I would remind the member that we respect the Constitution. We would have had other demands, which is why the government did what it did. It is not going to work.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé on his speech.

Today, we hear the Liberals repeating over and over that they want to defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but the one who inherited the charter, the Canadian Constitution and its 1982 repatriation was Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

Obviously, I would be happy to remind the House of Quebec's motto: *Je me souviens*, I remember. I will repeat for my colleagues on the other side of the House what the heir to the Charter and the

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Constitution said, which is that he was not afraid of the use of the notwithstanding clause. Instead, he kept repeating that it was always the elected representatives, voted in by the people at the ballot box, who had the last word, not the courts.

I would like my colleague to comment on this historical reference.

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, indeed, he talked a lot about the charter. It is true that he reiterated his desire to protect it.

The only problem is that they did it without us. They forgot to ask our opinion when they implemented it, when they passed it. They avoided asking us because they knew we would make too many demands. However, if we had been there, we might have been able to point out that there was a chapter missing from their charter, namely the one on collective responsibilities and solidarity. That is the difference. That is why charters have notwithstanding clauses.

Some of the members may be hearing for the first time that Quebec is ahead of Canada yet again. That is because we adopted the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1975, seven years earlier, and our charter also has a notwithstanding clause because no one can foresee everything. That is what it is for.

• (1630)

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my Bloc Québécois colleague and I heard the term "secularism".

One of the things that really motivated me to settle in Canada and choose to live in the province of Quebec as a Quebecker was its secular nature. Here, however, we have to be tread very carefully. There is a big difference between secularism and secularization. Secularization is really about imposing a certain culture on a newcomer, and that is very important.

My question is this: What harm does it cause to the service you receive if someone wearing a kippah or a veil shows up when you come to see a nurse or an educator? Why would it bother you if someone wears a conspicuous religious symbol? Other people who hold religious beliefs may be wearing a cross but keep it out of sight.

What is the difference, then? I ask because, in both cases, the people are genuine believers.

The Deputy Speaker: Before recognizing the chief whip of the Bloc Québécois, I would remind the member that he must address the Chair.

The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

What does this have to do with the federal government, and why does it want to get involved? If my colleague chose Quebec because he liked the secularism model, he could have come to Quebec City and told me the same thing.

Why is this so upsetting? The government must be neutral.

I will make a quick comparison.

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I was a high school teacher before becoming an MP. I then became president of the Bloc Québécois, president of the Parti Québécois and many other things. I did not show up in class with my PQ or Bloc lapel pin, because I was representing my government. I had a duty to remain neutral. That is what government is all about.

For a nurse or anyone else, that is the secularism model. It is about respecting people who use government services.

It is true that this does not bother everyone, but it does bother some people.

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Peace River—Westlock, Oil and Gas Industry; the hon. member for Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, Agriculture and Agri-Food; the hon. member for Calgary Crowfoot, Natural Resources.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers care deeply about state secularism. The first demands came from the Patriotes of 1837 and 1838. In their declaration of independence, they called for freedom of conscience and a strict separation of church and state.

Secularism is one of the driving forces behind the birth and development of modern Quebec. The Quebec nation has a special history where the Catholic faith had a very strong presence. At one point, the church controlled a lot of institutions. Modern Quebec was born out of questioning that model, which made it practically a religious state.

After the Parent commission report was tabled, Catholic teachers were asked not to wear their religious symbols. There was no legislation, but people co-operated and they complied. Then, the system of Catholic and Protestant school boards was abolished. Today, secularism is not discriminatory; it applies the same way to all religions.

Laws similar to the Quebec legislation have been deemed perfectly compatible with human rights by several courts around the world, including Europe's highest court, which has historically developed human rights. It recently ruled that prohibiting the wearing of religious symbols in schools does not constitute a violation of religious freedom. Belgium, France, Bulgaria, Austria and Denmark have even banned the full veil from public spaces.

The Quebec people have a unique identity with distinct norms and values, namely Quebec values. However, Quebec is a minority within Canada. Quebec is a national minority that, in reality, is not recognized as such by the English Canadian majority.

That much is obvious when we look at the Official Languages Act. Starting in 1969, with Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Official Languages Act defended the principle that English Canadians are a minority in Quebec, even though the people of Quebec have endured 200 years of British colonialist domination and English Canadian economic domination. Until the 1960s, its institutions were largely underfunded.

The Canadian majority imposed the Official Languages Act on us. Rather than trying to repair the damage caused to Quebec by

200 years of underfunding French schools in Quebec, the government decided to support English schools and the anglophone education system exclusively. It decided to promote English in public services in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction.

That is the problem. This was done despite the fact that Quebecers make up 90% of Canada's francophone minority. That is more or less what is happening right now. We are told that the Constitution, with its Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, seeks to protect minorities from the dictatorship of the majority, but it does exactly the opposite for Quebec's national minority.

Whether we like it or not, Canada is a multinational country. There are the first nations, Inuit, the Acadian nation, francophone communities descended from the French Canadian nation, such as the Quebec nation, and the English Canadian nation.

The best demonstration of how anglophones are not just a minority in a province, but part of the Canadian majority, is the fact that the Constitution and the charter were imposed on us in 1982 to weaken our language planning. This Constitution remains the Constitution of English Canada to this day, since no Quebec government has signed it. Under that Constitution, federally appointed judges dismantled Quebec's Charter of the French Language. As some have said, the Supreme Court is a bit like the tower of Pisa; it always leans the same way.

● (1635)

That is essentially what we are going through. If we do not learn from our history, it repeats itself. We keep hearing that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms defends minorities, but that is clearly not the case. Professor Henri Brun said that the highest court is federal because of judicial appointments. Consider the recent appointment of McGill's Robert Leckey, an enemy of the Charter of the French Language. He was appointed by Justin Trudeau and confirmed by the current Prime Minister. According to Mr. Brun, judges appointed by Ottawa are naturally guided by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As such, religious freedom in Quebec's charter cannot be interpreted differently from the courts' interpretation of religious freedom in the Canadian charter. This is a blatant example of how Canada tends toward charter uniformity. It is one of the greatest perils facing Quebec and all other minority nations around the world. The courts and the government of judges have a homogenizing effect.

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We also must not forget that, as we said earlier, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 was adopted one evening next door, at the Château Laurier, by the federal government and the nine provinces of English Canada during negotiations that were described as the “night of the long knives” because Quebec was excluded from those negotiations on the night of November 4 to 5, 1981. The notwithstanding clause was not Quebec's idea. It came from the other provinces, which agreed to Ottawa's introduction of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the condition that a notwithstanding clause be added, thus allowing Quebec to make its own choices. The notwithstanding clause is an essential element of democratic life and the democratic process. The precursor to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Bill of Rights, included a notwithstanding clause, as did the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Saskatchewan bill of rights and the Alberta Bill of Rights, all of which predate the Canadian charter.

Even Trudeau senior said that the notwithstanding clause is “a way that the [provincial] legislatures...have of ensuring that the last word is held by the elected representatives of the people rather than by the courts”. After the 1982 constitutional power grab, René Lévesque used the notwithstanding clause for all laws in Quebec. Today, it is used for 41 laws, not just for the Act respecting the laicity of the State or Bill 101. It is also used for very progressive legislation, such as the small claims division legislation.

The federal government never challenged the notwithstanding clause in connection with any of these laws. Now, all of a sudden, it is challenging the notwithstanding clause. It is not against secularism, but it is challenging the notwithstanding clause. The current Prime Minister, like Justin Trudeau, sees this clause as unnecessary. He wants to curtail Quebec's right to self-determination. The Prime Minister says that the notwithstanding clause should never be used pre-emptively. Apparently he thinks we should pass laws, wait for them to be struck down by courts all the way up to the Supreme Court, then rewrite them with the notwithstanding clause. The notwithstanding clause was used to keep lawyers out of small claims court. Imagine all the cases that would have to be retried.

We condemn the use of the courts for political purposes. Why intervene in this matter? The federal government is intervening with our money to challenge our laws. This proves that, as long as Quebec remains in Canada, it must battle for its very existence in an unfair fight with the Canadian majority. The only way forward for Quebec is quite simple: independence.

• (1640)

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I admire the Bloc Québécois member's eloquence, and I also admire the image he chose, the image of the tower of Pisa, which always leans the same way.

Along the same lines, can he not see that the Bloc Québécois is also like the tower of Pisa in a way, because it always leans toward the majority? The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects minority rights above all. However, in his speech, I never heard him or his colleagues talk about minorities or what they might experience on their difficult migratory journey. It is very important to remember that today.

Can he at least explain how he could also protect minority rights with these elements?

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, but he just revealed that he did not really listen to my speech, because I did talk about minorities.

Quebec is a plurinational state. The charter is supposed to defend minorities against the dictatorship of the majority, except for the Quebec national minority. I do not think Quebecers are the majority in Canada. He cannot dispute that. We are not recognized as a minority. We are being presented as a big, nasty majority, simply because we want to continue living in French. My God, it is appalling. The only way to be “correct” is to become anglophone.

Quebec is a minority that has the right to exist. The people of Quebec have the right to exist with their own language, with their own values, just like first nations, just like other minorities.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will use my turn to denounce the outrageous remarks made earlier by the member for Winnipeg North. He said that if the Bloc did not agree with the Liberal Party line, they had no place here. To the member for Winnipeg North, some elected members have value and others do not. He stands up and gives us lessons in democracy.

Beyond that, if he thinks that Bloc Québécois members have no place here because they defend the consensus of the National Assembly of Quebec, what does that say about the Quebec members of Parliament who are elected on the other side, who follow this party line, and who, time and time again, day after day, week after week, stand up to vote against unanimous motions adopted by the 125 duly elected members who make up their national parliament in Quebec City?

• (1645)

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague.

I will continue to address my colleague from Bourassa. Minorities are important. Quebec is probably one of the places that respects its minorities the most. We must continue to do so. Unfortunately, the problem is that we are a minority that is subject to the majority, and legislation such as the Official Languages Act is imposed on us. English is imposed on us as an official language.

Secularism is recognized as a perfectly legitimate principle. Whether one agrees with it or not, the ban on religious symbols for government officials in positions of authority is part of this principle. That was one of the findings of the Bouchard-Taylor commission, which was established by Jean Charest. This whole debate was also caused by a Supreme Court decision. I do not think that we should muddy the waters in this way.

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to muddy the waters. I want to be specific this time, and I would like an answer from my colleague.

When I speak about minorities, I do so as a Quebecer, representing Quebec here. I was referring to minorities in the province of Quebec compared to the francophone majority in Quebec.

Business of Supply

What values are we talking about? Are they values defined solely by that majority, or values based on inclusion, diversity and the richness represented by immigrants who choose to settle in Quebec?

Within the Liberal Party, there are a number of members representing the province of Quebec. The Quebec Liberals are diverse: Some are women, of course, but there are also people from different ethnic backgrounds. My question is this: How many Bloc Québécois members are from other ethnic backgrounds?

Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I would remind my colleague that one of the very first Black members to sit in the House was elected under the Bloc Québécois banner. That said, one of the challenges we face today is the increasing anglicization of Montreal, a phenomenon caused in large part by Montreal's municipal government. It makes things difficult for us.

I am the only Bloc Québécois MP on the island of Montreal. However, I can assure my colleague that I know many immigrants who are running for office and who agree with us that we really must fight to defend French in Quebec. They are on our side—

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the member.

Resuming debate. The member for Québec Centre.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share my time with the member for Bourassa.

I rise today to discuss the Bloc Québécois opposition day motion. First, I would like to congratulate and thank my colleagues in the House for offering many complementary perspectives on this issue. The use of section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, commonly known as the notwithstanding clause, is indeed an important issue that affects all Canadians, including Quebecers.

As Ban Ki-moon, former secretary-general of the United Nations, used to say, protecting minority rights protects the dignity of all people. Quebecers and other Canadians expect their governments to protect their rights and freedoms. With that in mind, I consider it perfectly legitimate, reasonable and responsible for the Attorney General of Canada to provide an opinion in the context of a judicial exercise of tremendous importance to the evolution of Canadian constitutional jurisprudence.

First, I think we should take a brief look back in time and revisit comments made by certain political leaders who were intimately involved in negotiations surrounding the Canadian charter. As we will see, many of them saw the notwithstanding clause as a tool of last resort, to be used only in exceptional circumstances.

I would also like to use my brief time to point out that the charter is structured so as to allow the government and Parliament to introduce important public policies, provided that achieving these objectives does not disproportionately restrict Canadians' rights and freedoms. This appropriate balance between individual rights and collective interests also strengthens our democracy, helps society thrive and supports the well-being of all Canadians.

When a legislature invokes section 33, the courts cannot strike down the law, even if the law places unjustifiable limitations on charter sections 2 and 7 to 15. This is an extraordinary power. Nev-

ertheless, it is clear that the relatively recent uses of the notwithstanding clause appear to depart from some of the original views on section 33.

For example, Roy McMurtry, Ontario's attorney general at the time, saw the notwithstanding clause as an exceptional tool that might be necessary in the "event of a decision of the courts that is clearly contrary to the public interest".

Furthermore, Allan Blakeney, the then premier of Saskatchewan, explained in an article published in 2010 that he believed that the notwithstanding clause might be necessary in the event that a court rendered a decision that would have a negative impact on rights not protected in the charter, particularly social and economic rights.

Many political leaders at the time saw the notwithstanding clause as an exceptional tool of last resort that should be invoked with caution. It was not designed to systematically thwart the very purpose of the charter, which is to respect fundamental rights and freedoms, much less to circumvent the courts before they have had a chance to rule on the constitutionality of the legislation in question.

Of course, section 33 of the charter preserves a form of parliamentary supremacy. At the same time, the notwithstanding clause should not be viewed in isolation. It should be assessed in light of the entire Constitution, of which it is an integral part.

In any event, it has now been 43 years since the charter was adopted. The concerns that some of those involved in repatriating the Constitution and introducing the charter may have had, rightly or wrongly, have largely dissipated with time. The courts have certainly interpreted the rights and freedoms guaranteed under sections 2 and 7 to 15 of the charter generously, as they do for the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

● (1650)

However, they have also, under section 1 of the charter, maintained reasonable limits on those rights where a government has been able to demonstrate that the public interest justified them. This brings me to a brief discussion of the architecture of the charter.

The purpose of the charter is not to unduly obstruct government action. The government and Parliament have successfully advanced several major public policies that benefit Canadians in areas as diverse as health, the environment, immigration and public safety, while respecting the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the charter. In addition to section 1 of the charter, other provisions of the charter allow for restrictions on rights and freedoms as long as the state acts reasonably. Rights and freedoms are not absolute and must sometimes be weighed against social and economic imperatives.

Consider, for example, section 7 of the charter. It states that everyone has the “right to life, liberty and security of the person” and that the state can only infringe upon those rights in a manner consistent with the “principles of fundamental justice”. This means that the rights to life, liberty and security of the person are not absolute. Limits are permitted as long as they respect certain fundamental principles of a free and democratic society.

In particular, the government cannot act in an arbitrary, excessive or procedurally unfair manner. It would be excessive, for example, to imprison Canadians for minor offences. On the other hand, imprisonment for more serious crimes is entirely justified.

It is this proportionate balance between individual rights and public interest objectives that courts seek to achieve when applying section 7 of the charter. This section constrains government action, but not excessively so.

This demonstrates that the charter is not an absolute obstacle to government action, but rather a safeguard against government action that could be considered arbitrary and discriminatory. It exists to prevent abuse and excess by forcing the government and Parliament to ensure that the laws to which Canadians are subject will not infringe on their rights beyond what is truly necessary to achieve important public policy objectives. This approach to governing can only enrich our democracy, which is why successive federal governments have succeeded in governing without exempting their laws from the application of the charter. This is a record of which Canadians can be proud.

• (1655)

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question has two parts.

First, our colleague from Bourassa mentioned earlier that, in his opinion, Quebec's National Assembly is like the leaning tower of Pisa in that it is always leaning in the same direction, against minorities. That is an extremely serious allegation. I would like to know whether the member for Québec Centre shares this opinion about the Quebec National Assembly. I would like to know whether, in his opinion, this also applies to Bill 21.

Second, the member for Québec Centre said that the notwithstanding clause should be used in exceptional cases and that it is being used more frequently than before. However, after 1982, René Lévesque's government used it systematically in each of its bills. I would therefore like to know how my colleague defines the word “exceptional”.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, that one question contains many questions. I will leave it to my esteemed colleague from Bourassa to give the answer that my colleague obviously deserves.

To answer the second question, I would say that it is a matter of striking the right balance between individual rights and freedoms and the collective, social, economic and other objectives that we are able to set ourselves as a government. The charter is there to help an independent judiciary help us, as parliamentarians, achieve the right balance between those individual rights and freedoms and the social and economic objectives that governments are able to set for themselves.

Business of Supply

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague, who presented a beautiful framework, a very interesting vision of the angle that the charter should take. I congratulate him on that work.

My question is very simple. Can my colleague at least give us an idea of how this notwithstanding clause can also harm minority interests in Quebec, freedom of expression and freedom of religion?

I want to take this opportunity to say that when I alluded to the tower of Pisa, I was mainly talking about the Bloc Québécois, not the Quebec government or Quebec's legislative assembly.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, my colleague just raised an important point.

Both inside and outside the House, people sometimes tend to lump together the views of Quebecers as if one political party speaks for them all. Quebecers are entitled to a wide range of opinions, identities and interests. It is a bit much to claim that one party, perhaps because of its name, speaks for all Quebecers. No party here represents the Government of Quebec. Certain members represent Quebecers, and the Quebec members have the right and the duty—certainly Liberal members have the duty—to promote the diverse opinions that they hear in their ridings.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague from Québec Centre, who understandably refuses to take a position on the deplorable statement made by the member for Bourassa. However, let us return to the subject at hand.

My colleague spoke about balance, so let us talk about balance. The notwithstanding clause has been used more than 100 times in the last 43 years. Never in those 43 years has the federal government thought it was justifiable or necessary to seek an opinion from the Supreme Court on the notwithstanding clause. That is the legacy of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who said he was not afraid of this clause. It is thanks to the notwithstanding clause that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was able to be implemented when the Constitution was repatriated in 1982.

In all this confusion, I would therefore like my colleague to explain to me what balance he is talking about. This clause has been in place for 43 years and has already been used more than 100 times, but for some reason it is suddenly necessary and useful to seek an opinion from the Supreme Court of Canada.

• (1700)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos: Mr. Speaker, I have two quick things to say.

First, maybe it has taken too long. Maybe 43 years was too long to wait for the Supreme Court to rule on this important issue.

Business of Supply

Second, it was not the Government of Canada that brought this case to the Supreme Court; it was Quebecers and Quebec organizations. It was not the Government of Canada that created this case. It was Quebecers who, rightly or wrongly, believe this issue must be addressed. The Supreme Court will be able to decide if the laws we are talking about, be they in Quebec or elsewhere, are laws that can invoke the notwithstanding clause on a regular basis.

In closing, I would have liked to add one relatively minor comment to the Attorney General's factum, but I see the Speaker is signalling to me, so maybe I will get to it some other time.

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about a matter of crucial importance: protecting the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since 1982, this document has been not only a legal instrument, but also a symbol of our identity and our democracy.

[English]

Canadians see the charter not only as a law, but as a living guarantee that protects everyone, regardless of their origin, faith or background.

[Translation]

The charter is a pillar of our democracy. Above all, it has become an essential bulwark against arbitrary decisions. It protects all citizens. In fact, polls show that over 80% of Canadians believe it has been good for our country. In Quebec, there is also a large majority that recognizes its importance.

[English]

It is not a coincidence that other nations, such as South Africa and New Zealand, have looked to Canada's charter when drafting their own bills of rights.

[Translation]

As a Quebecer, I want to say today that the notwithstanding clause is a dangerous tool. Let me explain.

Section 33 says that the notwithstanding clause allows certain fundamental rights to be suspended: freedom of religion, freedom of expression, the right to equality and the right to a fair trial. These rights are at the heart of our democracy. Suspending these protections undermines the bedrock of our society.

[English]

The notwithstanding clause may appear technical, but its impact is very real. It allows governments to bypass the courts and silence minority voices. That is why its use must remain exceptional.

[Translation]

Religious freedom is a test of our democracy. Religious freedom, guaranteed in section 2(a), protects the right to believe or not to believe, as well as the right to express one's faith openly and without fear. It allows everyone, whether they attend a mosque, church, synagogue or temple, to express their faith with dignity.

Restricting this freedom through the notwithstanding clause sends a message that religious minorities can be pushed aside based on the political choices of the majority. We need to be careful and make a clear distinction between secularism and the Bloc

Québécois' idea of secularism. The Bloc wants to impose values on us. They claim to know what Quebec's values are, and they want to decide what those values are. Quebec's values include the French language, as well as Quebec's rich diversity. That is Quebec's value. That is Quebec's culture. I want to come back to religion.

[English]

Freedom of religion includes the right to wear symbols of faith in public life. In Canada, multiculturalism is not an abstract principle. It is a lived reality, and religious diversity is at its core.

• (1705)

[Translation]

This clause raises other questions. It may affect freedom of expression and freedom of the press, which are essential for informing citizens and holding governments to account. The right to life, liberty and security, under section 7, protects against arbitrary interference by the state. The right to protection from unreasonable searches, in section 8, guarantees privacy. The right to equality, in section 15, prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, sex, sexual orientation, origin or disability.

[English]

When one group's rights are suspended, all Canadians are weakened. Democracy is not only about majority rule; it is about protecting minorities as well.

[Translation]

It is a matter of principle. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us of this in his letter from the Birmingham jail: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Our duty as legislators is to protect the charter as a whole, without picking and choosing which rights are the most convenient to defend depending on the circumstances.

[English]

Steadfast respect for charter rights, without resorting to section 33, benefits all Canadians, strengthens our democracy and upholds the rule of law.

[Translation]

Respecting charter rights and freedoms is not just an abstract principle. It is a very real responsibility toward all citizens. Failure to protect these rights and freedoms undermines our democracy. Protecting these rights and freedoms strengthens our country's confidence, diversity and unity.

Quebec chose 44 Liberal MPs, many of them women and men from diverse backgrounds. Quebec voters chose a significant number of women. A huge percentage of people from diverse backgrounds represent the people of Quebec. I think the Liberal Party has the right to represent Quebec culture, Quebec values and, most importantly, Quebecers' rights and freedoms.

Business of Supply

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Québec Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I applaud my colleague's enthusiasm and passion. I have a quote for him, and I would like to hear his thoughts on it. The great Alexis de Tocqueville said that nothing is more dangerous than citizens' apathy toward the oppression of minorities. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, that is a great quote.

I think that protecting minorities is very important, especially when it comes to fundamental rights such as access to employment. I will give just one example. The people most affected by unemployment in Quebec are people of different racial backgrounds. These are people who, unfortunately, do not have access to employment because they wear a religious symbol. This includes women who wear headscarves, unfortunately. That is what we are talking about. When these people are oppressed, it undermines everyone's freedom.

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the courage of the member for Bourassa, who, unlike many of his colleagues, has spoken out on the substance of Bill 21. I find that very courageous. He opposes Bill 21, a bill that was democratically passed by the Quebec National Assembly.

I do not know where he was in 1982, but I think he has forgotten something about the history of Canada and Quebec, specifically that the people of Quebec are a minority. In 1982, our status as a linguistic minority was usurped and our status as a nation was usurped. The minority he is talking about, the Quebec linguistic minority, is surrounded by 370 million anglophones.

Where is his minority?

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, that is what I was saying earlier. Unfortunately, listening to the Bloc Québécois members, it is as though there are two sorts of Quebecker.

He asks me where I was in 1982. I know the history of Quebec. I had the choice to go to other provinces when I immigrated, but I decided to settle in Quebec because I believe in Quebec's values, in the values of diversity and the French language.

That is why I tell him here that one Quebecker is no better than another, none is more Québécois than another. Simply put, that is my answer.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we never said that. We are all Quebeckers. I agree that diversity of opinion exists among Quebeckers. However, because a lot of Liberals were elected, they sometimes say that they represent Quebeckers.

When the 1982 Constitution was introduced, only one Liberal member from Quebec voted against it. It was Mr. Duclos, who subsequently resigned. Furthermore, no Quebec government has ever signed this Constitution.

How does my colleague explain that?

• (1710)

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, once again, I really do not need any lessons from the other side of the House.

Mario Beaulieu: Answer the question.

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question by simply saying that, for us, Quebec values include the value of diversity. When we say in the House that we represent Quebec, it is a matter of arithmetic. There are 44 Quebeckers here who will represent and defend Quebec's culture and values. There are more of us. We have more women, more diversity and more seats. We will defend Quebec values and culture tooth and nail.

[English]

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned the unemployment that people are facing in his community. I am curious why the Liberal government is not addressing the unemployment crisis that Canadians are facing all across the country. We are faced with a youth unemployment crisis that economists are saying is at a recessionary level.

Why not address the crisis the Liberal government has created instead of creating a national unity crisis to distract Canadians from the real problems?

[Translation]

Abdelhaq Sari: Mr. Speaker, first, our government is tackling unemployment, developing employability and creating plenty of job opportunities. It is building a very strong economy.

However, I would simply like to point out that there may have been a misunderstanding with my message. The fact is that in Quebec, a woman who wears a veil cannot teach. A woman who wears a veil cannot really work in a day care. Many job opportunities are being eliminated for those people. That is what we want to defend. It is freedom of religion.

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Rimouski—La Matapédia.

It is sad to have to speak after the previous member, after hearing a supposedly honourable member. During a debate on a constitutional issue, he initially said in veiled terms that the Bloc Québécois was racist. He said that the Parliament of Quebec was like the Leaning Tower of Pisa and systematically leaned away from minorities. He said that the 44 Liberal members in Ottawa are worth more than the 125 members of the National Assembly. Do people realize how serious his comments are? He just told us that he represents Quebec. He says he represents Quebec's diversity. That is what he just said. He is telling us that the 125 members who voted unanimously on motions in the National Assembly are worthless. According to the member for Bourassa, the members serving in the Quebec National Assembly are garbage. It is mind-boggling that this is tolerated in the federal Parliament. I am also disgusted by his comments about us not being representative of diversity in any way.

My wife immigrated here. She was born in Algeria. At home, we speak Kabyle and French. We have mixed origins that are part of our lives. That is what interculturalism is all about. It means being able to live together. When a member rises with a rude, contemptuous, pseudo-intellectual attitude and tries to teach us a life lesson, as if all the Bloc members were from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and we were all descended from one Tremblay ancestor, it is a disgrace to the House and to our democracy.

Business of Supply

The notwithstanding clause is valid in 41 statutes. In 31 of those, it is there to protect people's rights and ensure that, if they have a small debt, they do not have to go to court and pay \$100,000 in legal fees. Does the member realize that? No, he does not, because he is not sticking to the party line. We understood what the member for Québec Centre, a true intellectual, was saying. He talked about balance. That makes sense. However, the member for Bourassa rose and said that the notwithstanding clause should be scrapped and that they hope the Supreme Court will do just that.

This is about rewriting the Canadian Constitution. A redo of 1982 would be a betrayal. It would be a betrayal of history, a betrayal of consensus, a betrayal of philosophical liberalism as conceived by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Chrétien. The member thinks that is okay. That is how he wins votes in his riding. That is how he sows division and spits on interculturalism. He says it is fine for his government to protect people's rights by going to the Supreme Court and saying that Quebecers might use the notwithstanding clause to bring back some form of slavery. We have certainly seen some Quebec bashing—more than ever, in fact. Whenever we think they can go no lower, they do.

I urge my colleague to pull himself together and stop making gratuitous accusations. The types of accusations being made by the member would never be tolerated from a sovereignist. Sovereignists have made unfortunate statements. They apologized. They went through a difficult experience. They know what it feels like. Everyone makes mistakes. Why is it tolerated when it comes from a Liberal? I take it as a personal insult to me, my family and my vision of interculturalism. In my family, back home, people left their country of origin to escape religious persecution and to avoid seeing religious symbols in public. These people, like many other Quebecers, believe that this issue should be debated in Quebec City, in a civilized manner.

This is an appeal from the heart. It is not written down. I have some papers here, but nothing I am saying is written down. I found the member's words very harsh and undignified. At least he had the honesty to say that his government is against the notwithstanding clause and that he is against it. He is not spouting nonsense like the member for Winnipeg North with his pseudo-intellectual remarks, reading us all kinds of legal articles to tell us that, in the end, it is just a quasi-constitutional issue. The member for Bourassa is honest. At least he said what he thinks. I can tell my colleagues that we hear what is said in the halls of Parliament, and we know that many of them think that way, at least those who think at all.

• (1715)

Since they cannot rewrite the Constitution themselves, they decided to ask the court to ban the pre-emptive use of a provision that was in fact purely designed to be used pre-emptively. They are like kings telling us to install an alarm system in our homes, but to not connect it to the monitoring centre until someone is breaking down the door. This is the constitutional equivalent of that.

When there is a consensus, when there are debates, the National Assembly passes a law. The people of Quebec are not complete idiots. We have lively debates involving people of all origins. Despite that, the federal government is saying that the Superior Court has to strike down the law first. Then people would have to go to the

Court of Appeal and get it to strike down the law as well, and that challenge would be funded with federal money. It would take five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 12 or 13 years before the case reaches the Supreme Court. Then, when the law is struck down by that court, that is when the notwithstanding clause would be useful and should be used. The federal government wants us to believe that, but the reality here today is that it does not like Bill 21.

The declaration that invokes the notwithstanding clause must be re-enacted by a vote every five years. It is not permanent; there are guidelines. The way the notwithstanding clause can be used has already been defined in the Ford decision. The safeguards already exist.

What is more, what is completely absurd is that these Liberals act as if we in Quebec need a federal grandpa. When I say “we,” I mean all of us: the member for Bourassa, the member for Québec Centre, the Bloc, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, everyone, my family, his family, their family.

We have lively debates. Kim Thuy, an extraordinary artist who was on TV the other day, was uncomfortable with the debates on immigration in Quebec. Some nice things and not-so-nice things were said. We debated. We have a civil society, journalists, a parliament and courts. There are lively debates happening in Quebec, outside the federal bubble where 44 Liberal members say they are worth more than 125 members of the National Assembly of Quebec.

They are not ashamed that a gentleman from Winnipeg is telling them to stand up and vote against Quebec, not against the Bloc, but against unanimous motions. They tell us they will vote against it if a gentleman from Winnipeg tells them to. They say that we, the Bloc Québécois, are a bunch of hicks, that our ridings are just farmland and that we represent nothing. I congratulate them on their lesson in democracy.

The notwithstanding clause is the result of a historic consensus. It is the outcome of a profoundly liberal reflection on democracy, which means that, ultimately, we cannot always rely on judges. That is what this clause says.

I know that the member for Bourassa, like others, does not believe in his heart of hearts that we are going to bring back slavery. I apologize for using him as an example. I know he does not believe that we are going to bring back slavery, but perhaps he is winning votes by saying so. That is the issue. He wins votes by calling us racists, by saying that we are exclusionary, that we do not like minority groups, that we only speak French, that we are against religion and that we are going to prevent women from working. He may win votes by doing that, but I would invite him to think hard about that type of rhetoric. When he talks about division, I would invite him to reflect on that type of rhetoric.

Does everyone have to agree 100% with what is in Quebec's Bill 21? No. People do not have to agree 100% with Bill 96 or any of the other laws, either. That is why we have a democracy; that is why we have elections. These are not easy questions, and that is why we eventually have to make decisions about them. That is why the use of the notwithstanding clause is temporary, and that is why it always needs to be voted on again. That is healthy.

I invite the 44 Liberals from Quebec to start respecting Quebec's parliamentary system and the members of the National Assembly. They, too, are elected, and they represent Quebec. Even though we are the only party that brings unanimous National Assembly motions to the House of Commons, I urge the Liberal members to stop thinking that we represent the Bloc's opinion and never represent 125 unanimous MNAs.

● (1720)

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the next member, I would remind the member for Mirabel to choose his words very carefully. The member referred to papers that he had in his hands. They are considered a prop. Members cannot refer to a report, papers or a printed speech that they are holding in their hands or that are on their desks.

The hon. member for Joliette—Manawan.

Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I think there was a misunderstanding. What he meant was that his comments were not based on a written speech, but rather on what he had just heard. Therefore, he did not use papers as—

The Deputy Speaker: I understand what the member is saying, but he made reference to it. It is important that we remember the Standing Orders. I know the member has a lot of experience in the House and knows that.

Jean-Denis Garon: May it please the Chair, I would like to withdraw my papers.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for Mirabel for his understanding.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Bourassa.

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I see that my remarks shocked the members on the other side of the House. That was not my intention.

I simply want to say that, while they do not really have the exclusive right to speak on behalf of Quebecers, neither do we, but we were still elected by Quebecers who sent us here.

I do, however, want to point out one thing on which we agree. There is at least one. It is that we need to debate. The problem with these laws that my colleague mentioned is that they were imposed and there was no debate. That is what is important in a free society.

My question for my colleague is this. One of my constituents is a single mother with three children who wears a veil and is not allowed to teach. What should I say to her?

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to stress one thing. We lost seats in the last election. We lose some, we win some. Sometimes it goes up, sometimes it goes down. This teaches us a lesson in humility. I make this appeal to my colleague.

We in the Bloc Québécois have come here to table a motion from the Quebec National Assembly. When a Liberal member rises on an opposition day and tables in the House a unanimous motion of the National Assembly to debate it, then we will talk. We will talk about the representativeness of the Quebec legislature. As the Speaker said, I have a lot of experience in the House; that is his assessment. However, I have never seen this happen. This appeal to humility applies to everyone.

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Furthermore, a law passed is not a law imposed. There is no law that has unanimous support in civil society. There is no law that everyone agrees on. That is why we debate it again, vote on it again and have elections. There will be elections in Quebec in the fall of next year. I encourage my colleague to stand up for his convictions, and that is what I would say to his constituent.

● (1725)

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sensitive to when the member says the Quebec legislature or parliament passed a motion unanimously. The unanimous passage of motions in provincial legislatures occurs. In Manitoba, unanimous resolutions are passed.

Is the member conceding that if any legislature in the province unanimously passes a motion, it should become national policy?

Do I not represent Manitobans to the same degree as when I was an MLA for just under 20 years? I would argue that I do. We have a national interest and we have provincial interests, and sometimes they might be a little different.

Would the member not agree that we are not in a position, as members of Parliament, to agree with every unanimous motion that passes in every different provincial or territorial legislature?

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, our time might be put to better use if we debated these motions. I would like my colleague to table documents in the House. I would like him to table the Hansard for the day that the House recognized the Manitoba nation. I do not know when it took place. This Parliament recognized Quebec as a nation while the member's own government, which has not changed in 10 years, was right here.

Second, when we bring motions here that were unanimously adopted by the National Assembly, our purpose is not for the will of Quebec to become federal policy, rather than "national" policy. Some vocabulary problems exist on both sides of the House. The idea is for Ottawa to step back and let Quebec manage its own affairs, while the federal government does the same.

The question itself shows that the parliamentary secretary has no grasp of Quebec's reality.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely want to congratulate my friend and colleague on his passionate speech. I would like him to tell us, what exactly are notwithstanding clauses, also known as parliamentary sovereignty clauses?

We know that the Quebec Court of Appeal upheld the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding or parliamentary sovereignty clause in Bill 21. At the Supreme Court, there was the Ford decision. The difference this time is that the Supreme Court is being asked to overturn its clear jurisprudence.

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What does my colleague think about that?

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government may not be MAGA, but I think it is populist. It has a lack of respect for the institutions that have been established, a lack of respect for provincial legislatures, a lack of respect for the law, a lack of respect for the Constitution and a lack of respect for precedents.

I think that needs to change.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Ottawa talks about national unity when it is convenient, but becomes divisive and paternalistic as soon as Quebec asserts its uniqueness and its choices. When faced with Washington's tariffs or the threat of American annexation, we are called upon to join forces. However, as soon as the external threat is averted, Ottawa turns against Quebec to challenge its democratic choices and undermine its institutions.

Today, it is not just a law that is being targeted, but the very heart of Quebec's democracy. Ottawa is attacking Quebec's secularism law by seeking to restrict and weaken the notwithstanding clause, even render it meaningless. This is not the first time we have debated this issue. In February 2023, the Bloc Québécois tabled a very simple motion: "That the House remind the government that it is solely up to Quebec and the provinces to decide on the use of the notwithstanding clause." This motion did not ask for approval of Bill 21 or for a decision on secularism. It simply asked for recognition of a fact. However, the Liberals, NDP and Greens voted against it. They refused to acknowledge this reality. That is the whole story, the true story.

The Supreme Court has already ruled on this issue. In the 1988 Ford decision, the Court recognized that the National Assembly of Quebec has complete freedom to invoke the notwithstanding clause. It can do so pre-emptively without waiting for legislation to be struck down. Furthermore, the courts cannot rule on the merits, only on the form. The invocation must be clear and explicit. It is written in black and white. The notwithstanding clause belongs to the elected representatives. It is up to Quebec to decide for itself and on its own behalf.

Secularism is not a partisan whim. It is a deep-seated consensus, confirmed since the Bouchard-Taylor commission. All polls indicate that a clear majority of Quebecers support Bill 21. This legislation was not born out of a sudden impulse, but rather out of a long social debate. It expresses the democratic will of an entire people. It is this choice that Ottawa is seeking to undermine by attacking the very tool that allows us to protect it.

In his September 17 factum to the Supreme Court, the Attorney General of Canada had the nerve to claim that the use of the notwithstanding clause could lead to slavery, arbitrary execution or the banning of newspapers. These are not arguments; they are caricatures. This is what Ottawa thinks of Quebec democracy and its elected officials: that they would degenerate without the oversight of federal judges.

The notwithstanding clause is not an abuse. It is an integral part of the Canadian Constitution. It was even the compromise that allowed the provinces to accept the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1981. In fact, it was Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a Liberal,

who had to include it in order to get their agreement. Members will recall that he said that he was not afraid of the notwithstanding clause and that it is the elected representatives of the people who have the last word, not the courts.

This notwithstanding clause works. It allows a parliament duly elected by the people to temporarily exempt a law from the courts. In other words, it puts the decision back in the hands of citizens. If a government abuses it, it will pay the price at the polls. That is the real limit: democracy. Forty years later, these same Liberals are the ones who decided to destroy what they had put in place earlier. The current Prime Minister is following in the destructive footsteps of Justin Trudeau and the centralist Liberal Party.

Let us not forget that, thanks to the notwithstanding clause, Quebec has been able to make progress not only in terms of language and identity, but also in social matters. Here are a few examples. Small claims court, access to justice for all, was made possible by the notwithstanding clause. The Act Respecting Equal Access to Employment in Public Bodies was a step towards greater social justice. The Youth Protection Act, which ensures the protection of children's anonymity, is guaranteed by the notwithstanding clause. The notwithstanding clause is not the exception; it is democracy in action.

Make no mistake, this is not just about Quebec. Five provinces, namely Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and British Columbia, will take the same position before the Supreme Court. The Liberal government is attacking not only Bill 21, but also the parliamentary sovereignty of all the provinces.

• (1730)

Above all, secularism is not a Quebec fantasy. France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Denmark regulate the display of religious symbols in state institutions. The European Court of Human Rights has confirmed this on numerous occasions. In short, when it comes to secularism, Quebec is a normal nation. Canada is the outlier, and it has been so for a long time.

Since 1982, it has always been the same story: repatriation without us, the failures of Meech and Charlottetown, challenges to Bill 101. Today, it is Bill 21, and soon it will be Bill 96. Every time Quebec wants to move forward, Ottawa changes the rules or imposes its judges. Every time, we hit the same wall. We are at a dead end.

The question is simple: Who decides for Quebec? Is it the National Assembly, made up of elected members who derive their legitimacy from the people of Quebec, or the Supreme Court appointed by Ottawa, interpreting a Constitution that we have never ratified? Ottawa chooses its judges while Quebec chooses its elected officials: that is the difference.

As long as we remain strapped in this straitjacket, our collective choices will remain fragile, disputed and precarious. The only normal outcome for a normal nation is national independence, not against Canada, but for Quebec.

Independence is the peaceful expression of a people that wants to decide for itself. Like all nations, as Lucien Bouchard used to say, Quebec is tired of always being told no. If Quebecers keep being told no, they will eventually say yes, yes to our national destiny.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the day, I have found that if we want to promote and encourage healthy debate on the issue, we should be looking at it, in a very serious fashion, from the perspective that it is not all about Quebec. The notwithstanding clause is about the Parliament of Canada and any provincial or territorial jurisdiction.

The Bloc insists on wanting to make it about Quebec, but I believe it is not about Quebec. There are rights within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that concern all Canadians, no matter what region of the nation they might be in. I think that is where we should focus the debate.

Should a province or the federal government be able to use the notwithstanding clause consistently and extend it if it is about to expire, thereby marginalizing the potential effect of Canada's rights and freedoms?

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is on the wrong track.

In my speech, I mentioned that this also has to do with other provinces. Other provinces have used the notwithstanding clause throughout history. I invite him to read the Ford decision, which states that there is no danger in using the notwithstanding clause. I would also remind him that, historically, the notwithstanding clause has been used for more than 100 pieces of legislation. It has been in place for 43 years.

Now, the government is filing a factum, through the Attorney General, as part of a challenge to a Quebec law, Bill 21. That is why we are pushing this issue so hard. The truth that my colleague does not want to say aloud is that the Liberal government is afraid of losing political points by attacking Bill 21 directly. It is going through the back door and using the courts so it can say that it is not the one challenging Bill 21 directly, but rather, it is the Supreme Court judges. We are not stupid enough to fall for that.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on what André Binette, a constitutional lawyer, has written. He points out that the notwithstanding clause first appeared in Canadian law in the Canadian Bill of Rights, a federal statute passed by John Diefenbaker's government in 1960. Yes, he was a defender of individual freedoms but, coming from western Canada, he was also a fervent admirer of British institutions. Parliamentary sovereignty, which emerged from the British Glorious Revolution of 1688, a century before the French Revolution, was for him a legacy of civilization.

What does my hon. colleague and friend think?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for that softball question.

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Here is another example. In Diefenbaker's charter, Canada had a notwithstanding clause. That was in the 1960s. He was the one who implemented the charter that included the notwithstanding clause. That was the deal.

Today, the Liberals do not agree with the Quebec model's vision of its language, interculturalism and secularism. They decided to change the rules of the game, to go through the back door, to appoint judges to the Superior Court, to take over the courts and tell them that their legislation is invalid.

We are simply asking them to grow a backbone and to show a little courage. If they want to debate the Constitution, we are prepared to do so, even though we never signed it.

• (1740)

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of talk about minority issues. There is a lot of talk about the court and the 125 MNAs in Quebec.

It is also important to note that what is happening now is that this law was imposed on a minority in Quebec, and it is this minority that is turning to the courts.

My question is simple. Do these people have the right to challenge the law in this way and to turn to Canada to challenge this law?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Speaker, I gather that my colleague from Bourassa is openly against the laicity law. I will read him my prepared answer.

Laicity is not a threat to religious minorities; it protects them all equally. The notwithstanding clause is not an aberration; it is a tool provided in the Constitution to enable elected officials, not judges appointed by Ottawa, to rule on matters of societal debate.

The real danger is not laicity. The real danger is a federal government that would prevent Quebec and the provinces from exercising their democratic rights. I would remind my colleague that laicity is a defining feature of the great western democracies. Only in Canada is it not.

I would invite my colleague to listen to my speech again. I named all the countries that embrace the principles of laicity.

[*English*]

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this debate. I will be sharing my time with the member for Ajax.

[*Translation*]

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this Bloc Québécois motion.

I will talk a bit about my history as a child of the charter. In our caucus, several newly elected members are children of the charter. I believe that is also the case across the way.

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I was born to immigrant parents from Egypt and England. They arrived in Newfoundland in 1974 and then settled in New Brunswick. I am the only member of my family who was born in Canada.

[English]

I was six years old when the charter was proclaimed. A lot of us on this side of the House were not party to the debates described in this House, but we experienced the effects of it. In particular, in my case and in my family's case, we enjoyed the language protections that were afforded in the Constitution based on previous fights, in particular that of the government of Louis Robichaud, which in the 1960s established the equality of French and English in New Brunswick.

I know that some of my colleagues on this side of the House had this benefit, but being a child of the charter, I had the chance to go to an English-language school, with French-language schools fully protected later through the charter. However, there was an effect that came from the charter being in our lives. One thing that was important, combined with the official languages of New Brunswick, was that in English-language schools, there was a priority on French-language education and French immersion.

[Translation]

Francophone students, Acadian students in particular, had their own schools that were well protected by the charter. Where I lived, it was half anglophone, half francophone. For anglophones, there was an anglophone school, where the French language and the French fact in New Brunswick and in Canada were recognized.

[English]

Some of my other colleagues on this side of the House and I took it upon ourselves to enjoy the fruits of the charter and to see ourselves reflected in this new reality, this new set of values that was being experienced in Canada, a Canada of equal rights where the march for rights continued year after year. We experienced this despite the fights that were happening and despite the very real wounds that were experienced in the fight of 1982 and in the fights previously. A number of us on this side of the House, like my colleague who is going to be speaking, came of age around the same time and perhaps politically came of age around the same time, experiencing this in the eighties.

• (1745)

[Translation]

When we were in our twenties, we saw on television, in demonstrations or in politicians or our own leaders, that the fight was on-going.

[English]

Whether it was the Meech Lake accord or the Charlottetown accord, we experienced decades of constitutional challenges.

[Translation]

I arrived in Quebec in 1993 to study art at McGill University, where a person could take courses in French and answer in English. That was where I took a course with Alain-Gustave Gagnon. We read up on the discoveries of Guy Rocher and his memoirs.

I noticed that the leader of the Bloc Québécois, the member for Beloeil—Chambly, gave a great speech on Mr. Rocher's recent death.

[English]

Those of us on this side of the House try to reach across the aisle, and at that time, I was able to get a better understanding of what this constitutional battle was about. There was Bill 101, which resulted in real gains on behalf of Quebecers, and we had the use of the notwithstanding clause, which became a serialized use of it. I remember that in my engagements with this issue, this was a surprising thing to me. As someone who understood the charter in a certain context and that the notwithstanding clause had a certain role, I was surprised that it was being used in this way.

[Translation]

At the same time that the notwithstanding clause was being used by the Government of Quebec—a provincial Liberal government at that—the charter continued to evolve.

[English]

The use of section 1 became one of the ways in which we could achieve a balance between parliamentary supremacy and the protection of rights. Despite the use of section 1, there was an evolution toward more and more rights protection, and there was an evolution toward the understanding of minority rights protections in particular. The equality rights under section 7, as we discovered through the charter's interpretation in a variety of courts, were about a slow expansion of rights to recognized groups that had not been previously explicitly enumerated in section 7.

[Translation]

I noticed that the expansion of rights at the time of this legal interpretation often followed protests and social movements that started in Quebec.

[English]

The social movements in Quebec were a key part of the way in which our understanding of the rights grew under section 7 of the Constitution. I am thinking of collective bargaining rights, gender and sexual rights, and all rights under some of the other freedoms that we understand, particularly under section 7 and under section 2. Those fights were led by Quebec social movements. Again, when we had this understanding of the charter, notwithstanding the very important historical basis on which the Bloc has raised its concerns about the original implementation of the charter, we had this dialogue among different groups in Canada that allowed us to discover and see the emergence of rights. This is something that is in a very strict space of constitutional interpretation, which the member for Québec Centre explained very well.

Where are we now? We are in a situation in which we have a constitutional issue that is before the Supreme Court, with lots of interest. There are 13 appellants, I understand, and more than 60 interveners. We have the use of the notwithstanding clause in a more aggressive fashion in a number of provinces, including pre-emptively. It does not necessarily take a lot for some members of this House, on this side of the aisle anyway, to rise to attend a protest, but the use of the notwithstanding clause on Bill 124 in Ontario, which put a severe limit on collective bargaining rights, led me to the lawn of Queen's Park to say that this was wrong. The progress we are making with respect to the rights that are guaranteed under the charter faces a risk under the serial use of the notwithstanding clause.

I will be opposing this motion because I believe that, on this side of the House, we are the party of the charter. We are the party that is for standing for Canada. If the shoe were on the other foot and the Government of Canada passed a law that tried to limit some of the rights that were felt to be in existence in Quebec, if this Parliament threatened to or used the notwithstanding clause in that process, I would hope the Government of Quebec would indeed present its litigation and not withdraw its memo as is being asked of us by the Bloc. I believe that this party on this side stands in the interest of continuing to advance rights. That is why I will be opposing this motion.

• (1750)

[Translation]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely congratulate the hon. parliamentary secretary on his speech, much of which was delivered in French. I think that is a first for him in the House, so I applaud and congratulate him. I have the pleasure of serving with him on the Standing Committee on Industry and Technology, where we are doing very constructive work, at least from my perspective, so far.

I really enjoyed hearing his life story, the journey that led him to take a stand on the topic of today's debate. I find that very interesting. However, I would like to hear his reaction to the comments made by the late Benoît Pelletier, who was a constitutional law professor in Ottawa and a Liberal member of the Quebec National Assembly. He justified the importance of the notwithstanding clause by saying that it "allows...legislatures to have the final say on various social and political issues on some occasions, rather than leaving it to the judiciary."

I would like to hear the hon. parliamentary secretary's thoughts on that.

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Joliette's comments.

I think my opinion is consistent with the notice and factum that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada submitted. We need to know what constitutes reasonable limits for the notwithstanding clause.

[English]

The notwithstanding clause is in the charter. It is in the Constitution. I think the appropriate question is, what are the appropriate

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limits of this? Let us take the understanding of the charter and the Constitution as a living tree.

[Translation]

I do not know how translatable this is, but, if we imagine the Constitution as a living tree, I think daily use of the notwithstanding clause in a way that could jeopardize the collective rights people fought for—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I have to interrupt the hon. member to go to the next question.

The hon. member for Elgin—St. Thomas—London South.

[English]

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the thoughtful engagement of my hon. colleague opposite with respect to this issue. However, I have to point out a glaring question. I have spoken to thousands and thousands of constituents, and not one single person has raised this issue as being their top priority.

The number of people who have said they are fed up with the way that crime has run rampant after the last 10 years of Liberal government is astronomical, as are the numbers of people who say they cannot afford the cost of groceries and they want the government to get serious about that and people who talk about the need to get serious about immigration and to rein in what has become a reckless and dangerous approach to public policy.

Therefore, I wonder why the Liberal government members have decided to engage in this distraction, engaging in division and generating a national unity crisis bordering on a constitutional crisis instead of tackling the issues Canadians are truly seeking them to act on.

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, when one stands for rights, one has to stand for them when it is unpopular. One has to stand for rights when no one else is looking. It may be the case that the residents of the hon. member's riding are not plugged into this issue, and that may be the case for the residents of most of the ridings on this side of the aisle as well.

The question is, are we going to be defending those rights? The question is, would this use of the notwithstanding clause be normalised in a way that is concerning? On this side of the House, we have some concerns with that.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague was interrupted as he was explaining the difference between using the notwithstanding clause and using it pre-emptively. I would like to give him time to finish that thought.

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly how it is used on a daily basis. We have seen this in all democracies.

[English]

When we try to limit rights in a way that stops being exceptional, that is when real concerns about what is happening to democracy are likely.

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Jennifer McKelvie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in response to a motion calling on the government to fully withdraw from litigation involving Bill 21.

In effect, the motion would have the House agree that the Government of Canada, the government of all Canadians from coast to coast to coast, should not participate in one of the single most important constitutional appeals in recent memory before our Supreme Court. This appeal certainly concerns Quebec legislation directly, but the legal issues it raises, and which the Attorney General of Canada has addressed, are of overarching interest and concern the role of the importance of the charter in our modern system of governance.

At issue at the Supreme Court is what it means when section 33 of the charter is used by Parliament or a provincial legislature. Section 33 of the charter, which is known as the notwithstanding clause, has never been used at the federal level.

Today, I want to speak further about some of the less well-understood ways that governing under the charter supports good governance and better policies and laws. I do this to highlight the thoughtful and considered practices that may be at risk if the use of section 33 is allowed to become more routine and less taboo. The main point I want to make today is that the charter imposes an essential discipline on government policy development and law-making, a discipline that would be lost if resorting to section 33 were to become normalized. Let me explain.

The charter is part of the Constitution, and the Constitution is the supreme law of the land. This means that every law and action of the government must be consistent with the charter. Within a country founded upon principles that include the rule of law, governments must take to heart the need to ensure that the actions they take and the laws they propose respect the charter.

Undoubtedly, governments prior to 1982 were mindful of the values fundamental to a free and democratic Canada, which were ultimately entrenched in the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the charter, but after 1982, respecting those values became a matter of constitutional imperative. To be clear, respecting rights and freedoms does not mean never limiting them. The rights and freedoms guaranteed in the charter are not absolute. The charter expressly provides for limits in its all-important section 1, which guarantees the rights and freedoms, subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.

What are these reasonable limits that can be imposed on Canadian rights and freedoms? In essence, the standard boils down to a deceptively simple set of questions. Is the government's objective sufficiently important to justify limiting a right? Is the limit a rational way to achieve that objective? In trying to achieve that objective, does the law use the option that causes the least harm to the right being limited? Finally, if the answer to each of these questions is yes, is the overall harm to the exercise or enjoyment of the right worth it when weighted against the benefits of the rights-limiting measure? If so, then in Canada, we can consider such a limit to be reasonable, and, assuming that a government is well-armed with

supporting evidence, logic and reason, demonstrably justifiable as well.

When potential impacts on charter rights and freedoms are identified in the policy development process, governments need to carefully evaluate whether any limits on rights and freedoms are reasonable and can be demonstrably justified in Canada's free and democratic society. As I outlined, this requires asking a series of questions that ultimately go to the reasonableness of what is being considered.

Let us take the first question of whether the government's objective in proposing a new law is sufficiently important to justify limiting a right or freedom. This can prevent governments from proposing trivial or merely symbolic laws that would limit rights and freedoms.

The second question asks whether the proposed way of achieving the government's objective is rational, or in other words, if it is the right tool for the job. This prevents reliance on, for example, common sense that may not be well-founded or well-informed. Saying, for example, that public safety will be enhanced by doing a particular thing does not make it so, especially if the weight of evidence demonstrates that it is not the case. If we are being honest, the evidence-based solutions to some problems are counterintuitive, and governing with an attitude of respect for charter rights and freedoms helps us to realize this and come up with better, more effective approaches.

The third question asks whether there is another effective way to achieve important objectives while doing less harm to a right or freedom. Satisfying this standard means doing the homework on the different options available to advance a goal and choosing the reasonable one that does the least harm to Canada's fundamental values and Canadians' whose rights and freedoms may be limited.

● (1800)

Finally, the last question asks whether the benefits of a proposed law in furthering an important objective outweigh the harms to the exercise and enjoyment of the right or freedom. This is the ultimate cost-benefit assessment, and it is a fundamental one. This element of the section 1 standard prevents laws with marginal benefits that have real impact on Canadians' rights and freedoms. It does not tolerate laws that are dismissive of the rights and freedoms of people who may be unpopular, such as those charged with or being punished for a crime, or laws that fail to properly value the negative effects on members of a minority group who have limited political power and weak or fleeting public sympathy.

I think everyone can agree that the questions the charter requires us to ask when considering a new law are good and proper ones. These questions and the answers to them are posed and assessed through the policy development process, from the initial discussion within a department of options to highlight a problem, through to cabinet's consideration of the options, to the drafting of a bill and finally, in the most important step of Parliament, to debating and enacting a bill.

Weak answers to any of these questions should raise alarm bells and lead to heightened scrutiny and a consideration of alternatives. Having good answers to the questions that the charter requires us all to ask leads to more thoughtful and considered policy and to better laws for all people in Canada. The absence of good answers and the weakness of arguments and evidence leads to poorly developed law, and when that happens, the government should be held accountable for its choices.

However, if section 33 is in play and the Charter of Rights and Freedom does not need to be respected, a government will, for example, be able to say without consequence that a law pursues a purpose that it really does not. A government will be able to assert that a law will have benefits, without any evidence to support that assertion. A government can ignore more rights-respecting approaches to law-making, and a government can discount the interests of a minority group or non-popular group that poses no threat to it at the ballot box. This is what we have to worry about if the use of section 33 becomes normalized in Canada.

Instead of thoughtfully considered, well-reasoned, logical and evidence-based laws that limit rights and freedoms and that are subject to strong checks and balances in the form of judicial review, as is happening before the courts, the use of section 33 does away with this disciplined approach to law-making. The use of section 33 can amount to a raw assertion of power over the rights and freedoms of people in Canada that is directly opposed to the way in which federal governance has worked for over 40 years.

Despite Canada's being one of the best countries in the world in which to live, we are far from perfect. We have made grievous mistakes in the past. Biases, blind spots and prejudices are inherent in human beings and in the institutions we create and operate. This is as true of governments and Parliaments as it is of any other institution in Canada.

These all-too-human tendencies allowed us to think at one time that it was right, good and in the public interest to do several horrible things, including impose a head tax on Chinese immigrants; force generations of indigenous children into residential schools; in 1939, turn away Jewish refugees from Germany on the *MS St. Louis*; and intern Japanese Canadians during and after the Second World War. As a nation, we have come to regret these decisions, and we have apologized for them. The discipline that the charter imposes on government decision-making and law-making helps to avoid tragedies like these ever happening again in Canada.

What new decisions will we come to regret in the future? If the use of section 33 becomes normalized, we may have more regrets. For the sake of all Canadians, we should not find out. We should all commit to governing while respecting all rights and freedoms guaranteed in the charter. We should commit to resisting the temptation to resort to the unnecessary and extraordinary powers of section 33.

● (1805)

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski—La Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, of course, my colleague's speech and the Liberals' central argument today is around the charter. They want to defend the charter. They want the charter to be front and centre.

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The charter is not a smorgasbord where people can just pick what they want. The charter includes section 33, the notwithstanding clause. That is what enabled the repatriation of the Constitution and the implementation of the charter.

Let us try to illustrate that again to help my colleagues understand. The charter is like a book. The Liberals are not happy about one page and they want to remove it. They want guidelines. In reality, all they want to do is attack Quebec's secularism and language model. That is the truth.

Taking a page out of the charter, which the government says it wants to defend and enforce, is not about defending the charter; it is about censorship.

I would like my colleague to explain how the charter can be defended by removing or limiting its section 33, the notwithstanding clause.

[English]

Jennifer McKelvie: Mr. Speaker, we know the notwithstanding clause can be challenged, and we have seen that in Ontario. It has been tried in courts, and in some cases it has been overruled and in other cases it has been ruled as justified.

What we have before the Supreme Court is an assessment of the use of the notwithstanding clause and whether or not it does infringe upon the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is important that this judgment is done before the Supreme Court to answer those four questions that I laid out. Have we done our due diligence? Is it being applied in a way that is respectful of the rights and freedoms of Canadians? By that, I mean the rights and freedoms of all Canadians.

[Translation]

Marianne Dandurand (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very interesting presentation on the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is a fundamental pillar of our democracy, as well as on the use of the notwithstanding clause.

Can my colleague elaborate on the use of the notwithstanding clause, in particular its pre-emptive use, which is at the heart of today's debate?

[English]

Jennifer McKelvie: Mr. Speaker, using it pre-emptively is not giving due justice to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I think it is important that the laws are passed and that citizens can challenge them when they need to, and certainly that is the case. There are many citizens challenging Bill 21, saying that it is not respecting their rights and freedoms. They have the right to be heard in court.

There is a great T-shirt I saw, and I always think of it; it says, "Equal rights for others does not mean fewer rights for you. It's not pie." We have to keep that in mind.

It is possible to protect the rights of Quebec—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I have to interrupt the member.

Business of Supply

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Joliette—Manawan.

[Translation]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following the reasoning presented by the hon. parliamentary secretary, which the government also argued in court, today in *Le Devoir*, journalist Marie Vastel said:

However convoluted it may be, this reasoning would lead to a federal rewriting of the constitutional compromise that would usurp parliamentary sovereignty and give judges the final say. According to this logic, it would be up to the courts to create this new criterion for assessing the use of the notwithstanding clause and then, on a case-by-case basis, to judge its irrevocability.

Once again, there seems to be a desire to remove political debates from the chambers of elected representatives and hand them over to the courts. This is precisely what the federal government is seeking to do by challenging the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause, even though it is provided for in section 33 of the Constitution. Let us not forget that Quebec did not sign the Constitution.

Jennifer McKelvie: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is the party of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, so it will come as no surprise to anyone that our government is doing its job, which is to defend the charter.

The Supreme Court's decision will determine how federal and provincial governments can invoke the notwithstanding clause in the years to come. As this case is before the courts, it is important to keep an eye out for this decision.

• (1810)

Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a very friendly suggestion to my colleagues that they read a book that taught me a lot on the topic of this debate, since there seems to be some misunderstanding about it.

The book is entitled *The Charter of Rights and the Legalization of Politics in Canada*. My colleagues can take notes. It was not written by a Bloc member, a sovereignist or a separatist, as the member for Winnipeg North would say. It was written by Michael Mandel, a professor of constitutional law at York University in Toronto. If my colleagues want to be proactive, reading this book will help them understand the debate we may have to have about Bill 96. That legislation may be reviewed by the Supreme Court.

I want to begin by saying that I am a sovereignist and separatist. I am a democrat because I am a sovereignist and separatist. The democratic ideal is rooted in the sovereignty of the people.

The Canadian government used our money to fund groups to challenge Bill 21 all the way to the Supreme Court. It had to be said. All day long, the Liberals have refused to take a position on the substance, except for the member for Bourassa, who had the courage to say he was against Bill 21. Everyone is hiding behind the technical detail of the notwithstanding clause as though it were being abused. I will come back to that.

However, I would point out that, in law, legitimacy is the basis of legality, not the other way around. There have been many laws throughout the history of humanity that were passed but were not legitimate. For instance, I am thinking about segregation laws. To

understand today's debate, we need to look at the sociology of law. When I hear Liberals talking about the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution, I get the impression that it is locked up tight with five padlocks, that it must not change and that it is the most accurate representation of the reality in Canada and Quebec.

We are talking about the sociology of law in the sense that laws are not immutable. They change with the times in so-called free and democratic societies, obviously. Otherwise, it becomes a democracy of judges or a dictatorship in other cases. Before I address the federal government's claim that the notwithstanding clause has been misused, I will provide a historical overview to understand the context in which Bill 21 came to be.

When a human community established within a given territory has its own language, history, culture and heritage, when it is aware of its specificity, when it is driven by a desire to endure in history, and when it is organized around a common goal, then a nation exists. The people of Quebec form a nation. The fact that the House symbolically recognized Quebec as a nation has no legal impact. The Liberals paid lip service to it the second time. The government does not want this recognition enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. If it were, we would not be talking about what we are talking about today. Indeed, the Constitution would guarantee specific provisions to allow Quebec to have historical continuity. That is fundamental.

Quebec is not just a distinct society. We asked the question twice, there was a debate twice, and the rest of Canada said that we were not even a distinct society.

• (1815)

I want to remind my colleagues of something that has often been said: No Quebec premier, whether federalist or sovereignist, has ever ratified the Canadian Constitution. I just wanted to remind the 44 Liberal members who are lecturing us about the fact that they have a majority in the House. No—

Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

This is not a pub. If people want to talk, they can go somewhere else.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I thank the hon. member. It seems to be quieting down.

The hon. member for Montcalm.

Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, no Quebec premier, whether federalist or sovereignist, signed the Canadian Constitution. Why is that? Because, lectures about respect for minorities aside, the Constitution took away our status as a minority and as a nation. Pierre Elliott Trudeau's fantasy about establishing bilingualism and biculturalism foundered in the murky depths of a ghettoizing multiculturalism that failed to foster interculturalism.

Even Will Kymlicka, a scholar of multiculturalism, says that multiculturalism is unsuitable for a minority nation such as Quebec. He wrote: "Had Quebec not been guaranteed these substantial powers—and hence protection from being forced to submit to English Canadian majority decisions—either it would not have joined the Canadian federation or it would have seceded soon thereafter." Yet Quebecers are the ones viewed as nasty separatists who, seated astride the high horse of our linguistic majority, trample upon rights and freedoms. There has to be a solution, but that is a bit much.

One thing is certain: All independence activists throughout history have demonstrated their commitment to the foundations of democracy. We did not pull out bazookas. When the referendum was stolen from us and we lost in 1995, we continued to pay taxes to Ottawa. We continued to respect Canadian parliamentary democracy. The proof is that we are bringing our point of view to the House and, as long as we pay taxes, we have the right to be represented.

I am a child of the Quiet Revolution, which was unquestionably a time of political and sociological effervescence. We transitioned from a society where institutions were entirely denominational to a secular, neutral society. A look at conflicts around the planet shows that any time religion found its way into a political agenda, things went off the rails. Polarization would happen, leading to wars and intolerance. That was why Quebec decided to separate church, religion and state.

Quebec is a francophone nation in a sea of 370 million anglophones. We adopted a way of living together in harmony built on a cultural convergence centred on three essential principles. Intercultural relations are the common denominator of our shared existence. Our different roots join us together. In Quebec, everything happens in French. As I said, there is a separation of church and state, and gender equality is enshrined. That goes hand in hand with the separation of church, religion and state. Every religion I know of subordinates women to men. If anyone knows one that does not do that, please rise and tell me.

The problem we are seeing in this debate is a misunderstanding of a phenomenon known as the legalization of politics. What is that? The Canadian Parliament is well versed on this subject. It always waits for the courts to rule before changing laws. However, we, the representatives of the people, are the ones making the laws. The Supreme Court justices must interpret the laws we enact in accordance with section 1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

• (1820)

A charter right can be infringed within reasonable limits if it can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society. On the substance of the issue, which the Liberals refuse to speak to, the courts can rule on Bill 21. How, exactly, is freedom of religion or conscience infringed beyond reasonable limits?

When Quebecers had the Canadian Constitution shoved down their throats, Jean Chrétien boasted about the notwithstanding clause in a little book I have at home and should have brought with me to quote from. He said, for the benefit of those who may not know, that parliaments must be above the courts.

Business of Supply

This means that if the Supreme Court says that the legislation unreasonably infringes a right guaranteed in the charter, we have options. The notwithstanding clause can remain in place for five years, allowing time for a review, especially if the goal is to change the law and bring it into compliance after five years of debate in the legislature that is violating the charter. What is happening here subordinates and devalues the parliamentary democracies in Quebec and the provinces. That is where the debates should take place.

The other option is to change the Constitution. I do not know of any law that was put in place with the notwithstanding clause and that has been re-enacted ad infinitum, because a debate eventually takes place in a parliament. At some point, the public tells the government to come up with a law that complies with the Constitution or else it will be ousted.

What we are doing here is devaluing political power. It has been that way for years, and the charter gave rise to the relationship that Canadian politicians have had with the court. Take medical assistance in dying, for example. The Parliament of Canada has always lagged behind the Supreme Court. The justices forced the Canadian Parliament to pass laws, because it was too far behind to represent the people and do what the people were asking it to do. That meant people's freedom, right to life and freedom to choose were infringed. I did not see a lot of people on the other side rebelling over that. However, we are being lectured a great deal about rights and freedoms.

Quebec has passed a law on advance requests for degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. The Liberals have rejected the idea outright. However, 87% of Quebecers want us to move in that direction, and the Criminal Code is not aligned with the Quebec law. I have not seen the 44 current Liberal members come forward and say that it is appalling that the Criminal Code is not aligned with Quebec law. These are just examples. We are faced with a legal stance that devalues the role of the legislative assemblies.

I think that in today's debate, we saw Liberals who lacked courage. In fact, only one of them showed any courage. What we are asking the government to do is not that complicated. We are asking it to withdraw its ridiculous factum that claims that the danger of the notwithstanding clause is that it could lead a legislative assembly to abolish unions. I would love to see a party in a legislative assembly manage that. I would just want to see if it gets re-elected and how things turn out in its province or in Quebec.

Shutting down newspapers and churches? Give me a break. It is one thing to say that public institutions must be neutral and secular in order to prevent polarization. If someone wants a church or a Jewish school, they can pay for it. We have no problem with that. No one is being forced to stop practising their religion, except in public institutions, because everyone pays taxes.

• (1825)

Secularism is a humanist principle. That is why we are asking the government to withdraw its factum.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): It being 6:26 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

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

Luc Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 24, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

The hon. member for Winnipeg North has a point of order.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:41 p.m. so we can get to the late show.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, back in June, I asked the government how many new pipeline projects we could expect completed within the next two years.

I would point out that over the last dozen years, the government has cancelled a dozen pipelines and 14 LNG projects because of the changes it brought to the legislation right here in Canada.

In response to the question I asked in June, the government replied that this was a golden opportunity to vote in favour of Bill C-5, which basically makes a workaround to all the terrible legislation the Liberals put in place over the last 10 years and allows the cabinet to pick and choose its favourite projects going forward. Bill C-5 was promised to build the economy of tomorrow.

As one could expect, we waited with bated breath over the summer to see what was going to happen. We had worked to expedite Bill C-5. We were fundamentally opposed to the idea that Bill C-5 would, basically, work around the rule of law in Canada and allow cabinet to pick and choose. However, we said that if this is what it would take to make Canada an “energy superpower”, which were the words of the Prime Minister, we would support Bill C-5 with the expectation that we would see major energy projects proposed clear across this country, from east-west pipelines to west coast pipelines.

Given the fact that Bill C-69 and Bill C-48 were the major impediments to these major pipelines, and given that Bill C-5 was basically skirting around these two pieces of legislation, which we have been calling for the repeal of for nearly a decade, we were saying that if the government got rid of these bills, these projects would go. The Liberals said they were not going to do that but would have a workaround.

We expected that over the summer we would see the government pick a number of projects, particularly oil pipelines for energy to the west and east coasts, getting our energy to market and making Canada the “energy superpower”. However, we did not see that. What we saw was 66,000 jobs lost in Alberta over this year. Excluding COVID-19, it is the worst job loss in Alberta since 2017. Last month, total unemployment hit its highest mark since May 2016, again, excluding COVID-19.

This slump cannot be totally blamed on what is happening south of the border. This is entirely because the major projects of our country are being completed: The Site C dam is basically done, and the west coast LNG project is basically over. We see that the government has failed entirely.

We have watched billions of dollars exit this country. We had the energy east pipeline, the northern gateway pipeline and the Pacific northwest pipeline that were going to be built, but they are not going on. We had 15 LNG projects on the books ready to go back in 2015; today, one of them has been built.

I guess the question still remains. Back to reality, we have passed Bill C-5, and we have yet to see any new major energy projects coming online. There has been delay after delay. Will the government be proposing major energy pipelines across this country under Bill C-5?

• (1830)

[Translation]

Claude Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my opposition colleague for his question.

As Canadians, we believe in our ability to build. We believe that hard work and vision can provide future opportunities for our children and grandchildren. Throughout our history, when faced with uncertainty, we have risen to the challenge. Today, we must demonstrate the same spirit, because the issue before us is not just about fuel. It is about Canada's economic independence, our jobs and the leadership role we can play in the global energy future.

[English]

We need to take charge of our destiny. We need to build more projects of national importance. We are not ruling out new and expanded pipelines. Our efforts to advance major projects are how we strengthen our economy, how we create certainty for investors and how we build the resilience we need against unjustified trade actions. Canada has always risen to the occasion when faced with challenges, drawing strength from our unity, resilience and ambition.

The new Major Projects Office is our commitment to lead and to build the energy sector, acting as a single point of contact to prioritize and streamline nation-building projects that will secure Canada's place as an energy superpower. This unwavering focus is rapidly turning into action. Among the first set of projects that have been referred to the Major Projects Office for consideration, the LNG Canada phase 2 project stands out as a transformative opportunity. Located in Kitimat, British Columbia, this proposed expansion will double the facility's capacity, allowing us to export 28 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas each year.

Canadian LNG is produced to the highest environmental and labour standards and will diversify our markets, strengthen global energy security and reduce emissions by offering cleaner energy alternatives to the world. With its operation projected to emit 60% less greenhouse gases than the global average, LNG Canada exemplifies how we can deliver energy responsibly while generating more jobs for Canadians.

[Translation]

Through the Major Projects Office, we ensure that energy projects, such as phase two of LNG Canada, receive the attention, support and regulatory certainty they need to move forward quickly and successfully. Working with governments, indigenous communities and the private sector, we are building the infrastructure and partnerships needed for a strong, sustainable and sovereign economy.

We do not just ask ourselves whether we should build; we lead the way in how to build, with determination and speed. Our environmental obligations and our legal obligations to indigenous peoples are also non-negotiable.

• (1835)

[English]

Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about LNG Canada, for example. I am interested to know what roadblocks Bill C-5 pulled out of the way of LNG Canada. LNG Canada was well on its way to being built already. Bill C-5 has not created a new project in LNG Canada.

The member talked about certainty for business. Bill C-5 gives no certainty for business. All Bill C-5 does is say that someone better go and lobby the federal government and the cabinet to get a particular project on the books, and maybe they will say yes. What certainty for business looks like is a clear set of guidelines, and if a project fulfills those types of things, it will be able to be built in Canada; someone does not have to go to the cabinet and request special permission to build a particular project.

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The government is a sham. It pays lip service to energy superpowers and does nothing to get out of the way to make these projects happen in Canada.

Claude Guay: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to remind the hon. member and the House that our government, alongside the B.C. government, approved the Ksi Lisims LNG project just last week.

As the Prime Minister said, we are diversifying our trade partners, we are developing new industries, and we are strengthening economic activity across Canada to build the strongest economy in the G7. That is what visionary leadership looks like, and I am here to say we are moving forward to make Canada an energy superpower.

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I get the chance to follow up on the ag minister's non-answer to my previous question, I would like to say that this month, my home province of Saskatchewan celebrates its 120th anniversary of joining the Confederation.

From humble beginnings out on the wild frontier, we have seen a lot of growth since then. Farmers have played an essential part in that every step of the way. We continue to be the breadbasket of the world, and we will always be proud of the people who get up early, stay out in the field for late nights and work all year-round to feed Canada and feed the world. I give my thanks to the farmers and the producers for everything they do.

It has been a long time since we have had an ag minister from Saskatchewan or western Canada who has first-hand experience of what prairie farmers face in their industry. I just want to take a few moments to go over some key statistics from Saskatchewan producers and Canadian producers and what they mean for the world. Canada contributes 22% of global exports of canola meal, 21% of global exports of canola oil, 17% of canola seed exports, 37% of lentils exports across the world and 27% of global dry pea exports. When we look at Canada at large, 87% of Canada's lentils come from Saskatchewan, 85% of our chickpeas come from Saskatchewan and 55% of Canada's canola is grown in Saskatchewan.

That is why I brought up the issue of tariffs on canola oil, canola meal, canola crush and on our peas, yellow peas in particular. They are all being tariffed by China. It is extremely important that the government understand how important agriculture is, not just to the Saskatchewan economy, but to the general economy as a whole. One in eight jobs in Canada come from the agriculture sector. Numbers like these underscore just how important agriculture is to Saskatchewan.

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I represent southwest and west central Saskatchewan, right near the heart of what is called the Palliser Triangle in Canada. It is an area that was supposed to be uninhabitable for man. However, within that very region, the farmers of Saskatchewan and Alberta have been able to essentially feed the world. Looking at the numbers of the various kinds of crops being produced, it is important for the government to understand just how important the export market is.

With China being a major export market, we have seen 100% tariffs and 76% tariffs on various products from China. We have also had a trade relationship with India that goes up and down. There are other markets around the world that have been on-again, off-again for us, so it is important that those export markets remain available to our producers.

We hear the Prime Minister talk about how amazing he is going to be for our relationships with China and other countries because he has all this fantastic experience. At the end of the day, he has been in power now for over six months, and these tariffs still exist. Some of these tariffs were recently introduced. It is not even like they have been on for a long time. They were recently introduced, and the Prime Minister has not done anything about them.

We know that with China, the only way this is going to be resolved is through our country's Prime Minister and the leader of China meeting. That is the only way we are going to be able to get this resolved. The Prime Minister has not gone to China. Instead, he has been going off to Europe and other countries for, more or less, fake trade announcements or fake announcements of things that we already have in place with these countries.

I am just wondering if this time the parliamentary secretary can tell the producers of Saskatchewan very clearly when these tariffs will be removed.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Sophie Chatel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for reminding us once again about the importance of agriculture.

I completely agree with him. The agricultural sector is a pillar of our economy that feeds not only our country, but much of the planet as well. It is an economic driver, as my colleague said, and not just with respect to jobs, although it accounts for one in nine jobs in Canada. It also accounts for a significant portion of our gross domestic product. I want to join him in thanking all our producers, including canola producers.

[English]

Canola producers are facing the unfair tariff that China has imposed on canola products. Canola in Canada is one of the best in the world, and we should be very proud of that. We are responding to support the sector.

I want to mention a few things. I would like to remind the member that canola producers were front and centre in the Prime Minister's recent announcement of measures to help them with the impact of tariffs. Those measures include an increase to the interest-free

limit for canola advance payments, under the advance payment program, to half a million dollars for the year 2025-26. This change is expected to provide an additional interest savings of up to \$35 million to more than 6,000 producers of canola.

In response to the canola sector's call for a domestic market, the Prime Minister also announced more than \$370 million to support the stability and resilience of Canadian producers of biofuel and renewable diesel. As part of this announcement, the Prime Minister also made a commitment to make targeted amendments to the clean fuel regulations. Taken together, these efforts will support Canadian farmers through increased demand for feedstock used to produce these renewable fuels, such as canola. We heard at committee some of the sectors saying that it is indeed growing the domestic market economy for canola producers, and that is really welcome.

The Prime Minister also announced new funding of \$75 million over five years to the AgriMarketing program to support the diversification of agricultural exports into new high-growth markets such as Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. With this change, we are standing up to support our canola farmers. Of course, we will continue to negotiate with China so that it withdraws its unfair tariffs on our sector.

Jeremy Patzer: Mr. Speaker, Kevin Hursh, who is a producer from southwest Saskatchewan, writes for *The Western Producer* on a regular basis. The latest article he wrote was regarding net farm profitability. The whole point of the article is to show, with current prices, input costs and the way things are, what the most profitable and what the biggest-loss crops are.

Right at the very bottom of that list is yellow peas, and yellow peas are the subject of tariffs from China. Going back just a year, yellow peas did quite well, and now they are down at the bottom of the list. Adding this trade irritant with China is going to further exasperate the yellow pea growers. That is one of the crops that actually grows quite well in southwest Saskatchewan.

We are seeing very minimal returns on canola now with the price point the way it is, and then we add this other trade irritant. We need the Prime Minister to take this seriously, and the relief steps they are taking just do not cut it.

• (1845)

Sophie Chatel: Mr. Speaker, we also met at committee this week with the pea producers, and the situation is really dire there as well. The tariffs China has imposed on the sector are really difficult.

These farmers will also be able to benefit from the support of the strategic response funds of \$5 billion to affected sectors. It is not only canola. It is the pea sector as well. I would add that China also has unjustified tariffs on the pork industry.

Of course, we want the resolution of China withdrawing those tariffs. There is a diplomatic effort at all levels. When the conditions are right, the Prime Minister will meet his counterpart. We need to have a diplomatic solution and free those tariffs from the sector.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government was first elected in 2015, it killed 16 major resource projects and chased \$176 billion out of the Canadian economy. This resulted in thousands of lost jobs in my city alone, and Bill C-69 continues to make it impossible to build the pipelines needed to unleash our resources and restore our economic independence.

I asked in June whether the Prime Minister would commit on that day to cancelling Justin Trudeau's "no more pipelines" bill, Bill C-69. The response from the new minister was to say:

We will support new pipelines if there is a national consensus in favour of them. With our country's facing American tariffs, we must strengthen our energy and natural resources sectors. There is no question that energy is Canada's power. We will help build the strongest economy in the G7, create jobs for Canadians and give the best cards to our negotiators at the negotiating table.

Canada's new government will win this trade war.

There is a lot to unpack in that response. To start with, the minister said, "if there is a national consensus". They do not have a consensus even in their own caucus about pipelines. How are they going to have a consensus? The word "consensus" means that every single person agrees, and that is not a reasonable bar for the government, or any government, to set for whether there will be something as critical to our economy as pipelines to be built.

He talked about "the strongest economy in the G7". Canada arguably has, and actually this is probably not even arguable but instead a fact, the weakest economy in the G7 right now. We have declining per capita GDP as we speak, and over the last number of years, while the government has been in power, Canadians have been getting poorer. Per capita GDP has been declining. This is a decline in the living standard of Canadians that the government has presided over.

Liberals are talking about jobs and about the importance of energy, but the government has spent literally 10 years chasing capital out of Canada, chasing jobs out of Canada and doing everything it can to strangle the energy industry in Canada. Therefore it is hard to take at face value the mixed words about claiming to support energy, when its response is, for example, to bring in a bill, Bill C-5, which gives the government the power to interfere politically, to decide and to pick and choose when it wants to dispense with the rule of its own laws and not apply the laws it created that are preventing private investors from building infrastructure in this country.

The government could just do as I asked in my question, or what we have been calling for for the last 10 years: Get rid of Bill C-69, get rid of Bill C-48, get rid of the emissions cap, get rid of the industrial carbon tax, get rid of the EV mandates, repeal the so-called clean fuel standard it brought in, rein in its spending, bring in a balanced budget, restore the public finances of the country, establish conditions upon which private investment can once again flourish

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in this country and get Canadians back to work in the energy industry so we can supply clean, reliable energy to the world.

● (1850)

Claude Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. colleague that, thanks to the One Canadian Economy Act, voted for, I believe, with his support, we are getting projects off the ground faster. We are making Canada strong by strengthening our economy while protecting our land, our water and our people as we grow. The government's actions show exactly what kind of country we want to be: one that builds, works shoulder to shoulder across governments, protects our environment and respects indigenous rights every step of the way.

Let me say what I believe every member of the House knows: Canada is a nation built on ingenuity, resilience and the courage to seize new opportunities in the face of global challenges. At this transformative juncture, as the world adjusts to a dramatic realignment in trade, energy security and technology, Canadians expect their government to move boldly and responsibly, not only to protect our interests but also to build prosperity for all. Recent months have demonstrated just how vital Canada's energy sector is, not only here at home but also on the global stage.

Faced with punitive tariffs abroad, shifting geopolitics and new competition, the stakes for Canada's energy future have never been higher. Our allies are calling for energy they can trust, reliable, secure and low-carbon sources of energy that underpin economic sovereignty and security. Today I am proud to say that Canada has what it takes to rise to this challenge across conventional sources and in renewable and clean energies that promise growth and innovation for generations to come.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to strengthening Canada's position as an energy superpower. This is about our collective ability to take charge of our destiny, to build long-term prosperity and to support allies who depend on our resources.

Sovereignty, security and prosperity are more than mere words. They are the values that guide every one of our decisions. We are focused. Instead of getting bogged down in bureaucracy, we need to protect our economy and our environment in a way that actually benefits Canadians and the energy sector and that attracts investors from around the world and countries that want to buy our responsibly produced energy.

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Collaboration is key to these changes. Greater flexibility in agreements with the provinces and territories under a “one project, one review” approach will require barriers to be removed. For businesses and communities, this means faster and fairer decision-making, which, as the Prime Minister has clearly stated, is one of the new government's key objectives. That is the intention of the Major Projects Office.

[English]

Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, it is as if the parliamentary secretary has no background information at all on the track record of the government he speaks for. He said in his response just now that our allies are calling for Canadian energy. Indeed, they are. They have been for 10 years, and this government, the government the parliamentary secretary speaks for, loudly told our allies that there was no business case for Canadian LNG. That is what the then prime minister of Canada had to say.

This government has been in power for 10 years, and it is as if there is some kind of out-of-body experience where the Liberals are not aware of who has been running the government for the past 10 years and who has been chasing away investment, including invest-

ment in LNG, which would supply the world with reliable Canadian energy.

• (1855)

Claude Guay: Mr. Speaker, we in this new government are working side by side with indigenous people, provinces, territories and proponents to build rapidly and build the right way. That is why with the Building Canada Act, we are creating a process that truly reflects what Canadians want and what Canadians value: efficiency, common sense and a commitment to building Canada strong. It is also what investors around the world want: a commitment to doing what is right as we rapidly develop, produce and sell our natural resources. We are quickly advancing major projects while keeping our commitment to protecting the environment and respecting the rights of indigenous people.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to standing order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:55 p.m.)

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Canadian Multiculturalism Act

Barsalou-Duval 1957

Bill C-245. Introduction and first reading 1957

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 1958

Criminal Code

Thomas 1958

Bill C-246. Introduction and first reading 1958

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 1958

Petitions

Persons with Disabilities

Boulerice 1958

Wildfire Response

Johns 1959

Health Care

Lamoureux 1959

Questions on the Order Paper

Lamoureux 1959

Points of Order

Scheduling of Committee Meeting

Brock 1959

Perron 1959

Lamoureux 1960

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Constitutional Powers of Quebec and the Provinces

Fortin 1960

Motion 1960

Brière	1961
Gourde	1961
Perron	1961
Boulerice	1962
Normandin	1962
Lamoureux	1963
Dalton	1963
Housefather	1964
Gourde	1964
Chatel	1964
Ho	1966
Watchorn	1967
Larouche	1967
Lawton	1967
Simard	1967
Lamoureux	1968
Berthold	1968
Barsalou-Duval	1969
Scheer	1970
Watchorn	1970
Simard	1970
Scheer	1970
Lamoureux	1972
Larouche	1972
Berthold	1972
Blanchet	1972
Fergus	1975
Lamoureux	1975
Garon	1975
Housefather	1975
Gourde	1975
Kayabaga	1976
Fortin	1976
Fergus	1976
Barsalou-Duval	1977
Chatel	1977
Genuis	1977
Housefather	1977
Champoux	1979
Genuis	1979
Chatel	1979
Champoux	1980
Zahid	1981
Hardy	1981
Barsalou-Duval	1982
Deschênes	1982
Chatel	1983
Kronis	1983
Larouche	1984
Lavoie	1984
Barsalou-Duval	1985
Simard	1985
Holman	1986

Watchorn	1986
Brunelle-Duceppe	1987
Chatel	1987
Ho	1987
Simard	1988
Brunelle-Duceppe	1988
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)	1988
Chatel	1989
Kirkland	1989
Larouche	1990

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Recognition of Palestinian State

Zahid	1990
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Canola Industry

Hoback	1990
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Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month

Sidhu (Brampton South)	1990
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Oshawa FireWolves

Kirkland	1991
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Palestine

Gazan	1991
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Mickencia Carlie François

Deschênes-Thériault	1991
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Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

McLean (Calgary Centre)	1991
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Women in Agriculture

Dandurand	1991
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Canadian Army

Bezan	1992
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Quebec Municipal Elections

Barsalou-Duval	1992
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Collège Sainte-Anne

Dhillon	1992
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Prime Minister of Canada

Muys	1992
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Cricket in Canada

Khalid	1993
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Resource Development Strategy

Kramp-Neuman	1993
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Alliance des Ukrainiens de Québec

Lavoie	1993
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Firearms

Gunn	1993
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Local Business in Bay of Quinte

Malette (Bay of Quinte)	1993
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ORAL QUESTIONS

Firearms

Poilievre	1994
Anandasangaree	1994
Poilievre	1994
Anandasangaree	1994
Poilievre	1994
Anandasangaree	1994
Poilievre	1994
Fraser	1994

Border Security

Poilievre	1995
Fraser	1995
Poilievre	1995
Anandasangaree	1995

Justice

Normandin	1995
Fraser	1995
Normandin	1995
Guilbeault	1995
Simard	1996
Fraser	1996

Firearms

Scheer	1996
Provost	1996
Scheer	1996
Provost	1996
Barrett	1996
Anandasangaree	1996
Barrett	1997
Anandasangaree	1997
Thomas	1997
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)	1997
Vien	1997
Provost	1997
Vien	1997
Provost	1997

Justice

Fortin	1997
Guilbeault	1998
Fortin	1998
Guilbeault	1998

Firearms

Brock	1998
Anandasangaree	1998
Brock	1998
Anandasangaree	1998
Jivani	1999
Sahota	1999
Paul-Hus	1999
Provost	1999

La sécurité publique

Paul-Hus	1999
Anandasangaree	1999

Regional Economic Development

O'Rourke	1999
Solomon	1999

Public Safety

Caputo	1999
Fraser	2000
Caputo	2000
Sahota	2000

Border Security

Mantle	2000
Anandasangaree	2000
Mantle	2000
Anandasangaree	2000

Public Safety

Rempel Garner	2000
Anandasangaree	2001
Rempel Garner	2001
Anandasangaree	2001

Firearms

Cooper	2001
Anandasangaree	2001
Cooper	2001
Anandasangaree	2001
Lawton	2001
Anandasangaree	2001

Disaster Assistance

Connors	2001
Olszewski	2002

Public Safety

Uppal	2002
Sahota	2002
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	2002
Sahota	2002
Gill (Calgary Skyview)	2002
Sahota	2002

Government Priorities

Rana	2002
Ali	2002

Firearms

Godin	2003
Provost	2003

Labour

Kwan	2003
Hajdu	2003

Emergency Preparedness

Johns	2003
Olszewski	2003

Presence in Gallery

The Speaker	2004
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GOVERNMENT ORDERS**Business of Supply****Opposition Motion—Oil and Gas Emissions Cap**

Motion	2004
Motion negatived	2005

Opposition Motion—Constitutional Powers of Quebec and the Provinces

Motion	2005
Simard	2005
Ste-Marie	2007
Lamoureux	2007
Thériault	2007
Ho	2007
Lamoureux	2008
Garon	2010
Blanchette-Joncas	2010
May	2010
Thériault	2011
Perron	2011
Beaulieu	2011
Perron	2011
Lamoureux	2013
Blanchette-Joncas	2013
Sari	2013
Beaulieu	2014
Sari	2015
Garon	2015
Duclos	2016
Garon	2017
Sari	2017
Blanchette-Joncas	2017
Sari	2018
Duclos	2019
Thériault	2019
Beaulieu	2019
Ho	2019
Garon	2019
Sari	2021
Lamoureux	2021
Ste-Marie	2021
Blanchette-Joncas	2022
Lamoureux	2023
Ste-Marie	2023
Sari	2023
Bardeesy	2023
Ste-Marie	2025
Lawton	2025
Dandurand	2025
McKelvie	2026
Blanchette-Joncas	2027
Dandurand	2027
Ste-Marie	2028
Thériault	2028
Division on motion deferred	2030

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Oil and Gas Industry

Viersen	2030
Guay	2030

Agriculture and Agri-Food

Patzer	2031
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Chatel	2032
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Natural Resources

Kelly	2033
Guay	2033

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