



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

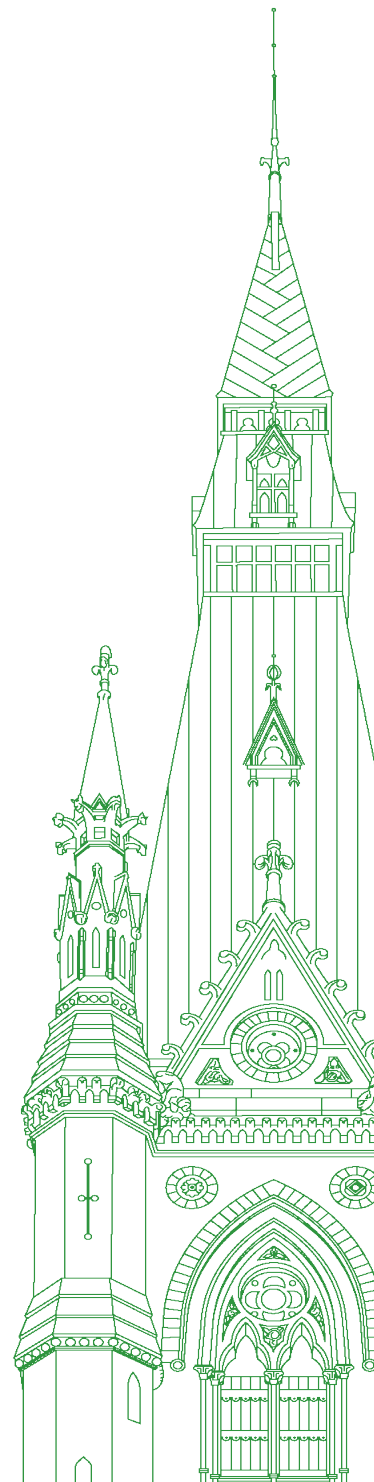
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

House of Commons Debates

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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 12, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[Translation]

CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and in accordance with the policy on the tabling of reports in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, Canada's 10th report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the concluding observations of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for 2024.

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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, Canada's report with respect to international labour organization instruments adopted at the 111th session of the International Labour Conference held in Geneva, Switzerland, in June 2023.

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[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 13 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third and final report of the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, entitled "Review of the Exercise of Powers and the Performance of Duties and Functions Pursuant to the Declaration of Emergency that was in Effect from February 14, 2022, to February 23, 2022".

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

• (1005)

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present the Conservatives' dissenting report from the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency.

For years, the Liberal-NDP Prime Minister has sought to distract Canadians from the failures of his government. The peak of his efforts came in February 2022, when the government invoked the Emergencies Act to silence dissent to his pandemic controls. Conservatives opposed this extreme overreach at the time, and every development that has since come to light has confirmed that the Conservatives made the right call.

Regrettably, the Liberals, aided and abetted by so-called independent senators, thwarted our efforts at committee to get to the bottom of these decisions in order to hold the government accountable. What is worse is that, in the report they have written, several recommendations gloss over the legitimate, serious concerns that arose. Moreover, they would further reduce parliamentary accountability of any government that claims such extraordinary legal powers for itself in the future.

Even Commissioner Paul Rouleau, who once worked in the Liberal PMO, struggled to write a report upholding the Liberal government's decision, admitting, "Reasonable and informed people could reach a different conclusion than the one I have arrived at." However, Canadians can be reassured that the federal court, in the only legally binding analysis of the invocation of the Emergencies Act, has confirmed that the NDP-Liberal government's choices were both illegal and unconstitutional.

Routine Proceedings

Conservatives have put forward a dissenting report, which I encourage everyone to read. It outlines our analysis of the situation and our deep concerns with the lack of government transparency, acknowledges the committee recommendations that we do agree with and sets out a series of additional recommendations we think will ensure greater government accountability and restraint if, God forbid, there is ever a similar situation in the future.

In conclusion, Conservatives wish to express their appreciation for the committee staff, who ably helped us through our deliberations, along with those witnesses who willingly contributed their evidence and views for our report.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise to request unanimous consent to provide the NDP's supplementary report to the Emergencies Act.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, as members of the New Democratic Party, we stand by the recommendations in the main report, but we believe that further reflection is essential. This will help us address the broader implications of this moment and ensure that we chart a future that protects the rights of Canadians.

New Democrats stress the urgent need to rebuild public confidence in our institutions; achieving this will require a much deeper democratic commitment to parliamentary transparency and accountability, not just in the specific context of the Emergencies Act but also in our ongoing governance efforts. The failures of local police services during the “freedom convoy”, with officers appearing compromised or even sympathetic to the occupiers, exposed the systemic issues that must be addressed. Many Canadians felt abandoned during this crisis, and the resulting loss of public trust underscores the urgent need for structural reform.

It is troubling that the last royal commission on policing in Canada occurred in 1962. As the challenges of public safety have evolved significantly since then, we call on the Minister of Public Safety to establish a new national commission on policing. This body should examine police mandates, budgets and their alignment with public safety goals.

In addition, we urge the government to create a dedicated office to investigate radicalization within public security forces and the misuse of resources for undemocratic purposes. The invocation of the Emergencies Act has revealed a deep and systemic challenge in Canada's governance and policing, as well as the protection of democratic rights. The issues exposed during the crisis, those of transparency, accountability and public trust, must be addressed with urgency and purpose.

As New Democrats, we believe that the recommendations in this report are a vital step forward, but they must be accompanied by broader reforms. Canada must seize on this moment to rebuild its institutions in alignment with democratic values, whether by modernizing the Emergencies Act, investigating extremism within our public institutions or rethinking the role and structure of policing. Only through sustained effort and genuine accountability can we

restore public confidence and ensure that our democracy remains resilient against future challenges.

We would also like to thank all the incredible staff, the clerks and everybody who participated, including each of our party staff, for the last close to two years.

● (1010)

HEALTH

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 23rd report of the Standing Committee on Health, entitled “Saving More Lives: Improving Guidance, Increasing Access and Achieving Better Outcomes in Breast Cancer Screening”.

[Translation]

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

In conclusion, I would like to thank our committee's support team, including the clerk and the analysts, for their hard work.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I move that the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, presented on Wednesday, December 14, 2022, be concurred in.

I am very honoured to be here to speak on behalf of the tremendous members of my riding, North Island—Powell River, as well as on behalf of many people across this country, largely women, who married people in the military after they turned 60.

What is unfortunate about this is that we are having this concurrence debate on something that started in Canada in 1901. It was a piece of legislation that was put in place to make sure that young women did not marry older military men for their pension. It was put in place that, if they were married after 60, the person they married would not be eligible for any spousal benefits when they died. They called it the gold digger clause. The rationale was that a person would only marry someone over 60 who had served our country because that person was waiting for their pension.

Routine Proceedings

Here we are. It is 2024, and this rule is still in place. It is shocking that it has an impact on so many people. What is really upsetting to me and to people who have lived through this is that, in 2015, when the Liberals were put into power, the Prime Minister's letter to the Minister of Veterans Affairs stated very clearly that this was to be remedied. It was time to deal with this and to make it fair. Unfortunately, even though this was written to two ministers, in 2015 and 2017, it then suddenly disappeared from the mandate letters of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. It was clearly there before, and nothing was done.

I know that some members in the House, especially the Liberals, will think about 2019 and say that they did do something, that they put in place \$150 million to start to support some of these people, largely women, who are marrying people after 60 who served our country or who served as RCMP officers, and put it aside for them. They were going to find a process and make sure that they got a bit of a survivor's benefit. That was done in 2019.

Again, I just want to point out that it is now 2024. It is over five years later, and how much of that money has been spent? How much has gone to these amazing women who, in some cases, were married for 25 and 30 years and who cared for the people who served our country as they aged? Zero dollars has gone out to those women.

The minister and her team came to visit us in committee just over a week ago, and I asked about this again. This may surprise some, but people from all over Canada contact my office and talk to me about this issue; it is having an impact on them. I do not know how people feel in the House about having elderly women, in some cases in their eighties, call their office to explain this. What I have heard again and again is a woman saying she is not a gold digger. She married her spouse because she loved him, and she cared for him as he aged. Now that he is gone, she cannot afford the basic necessities of life.

I do not want to hear that anymore. It upsets me that people who care for the people who served our country feel as though they are second-class citizens with the mantle of gold digger on their shoulders. We had a whole study about this in the veterans affairs committee a couple of years ago, and that is what I am talking about. What was very distressing about that study was listening to couples who were in this current circumstance, some of whom did not know. They went out and served their country. They found a spouse, and they were happily married. Then they found out, after they were married or in a common-law relationship, that their spouse would not get any survivor's benefits. Some who found this out went back and asked for information, and they were told then.

• (1015)

One of the recommendations in the report is a very basic one, which is to please tell the people who serve us that if they find love after 60, they will be penalized. Then the government said, "Do not worry; we have this program, and you can implement it." It is called the optional survivor benefit program. What they can do is give up a percentage of their income every month to put aside for their loved one. The pickup on this program is extremely low and I think all of us in this House instinctively know why. It is because veterans do not have huge pensions to begin with. What are they

going to do? Are they going to commit to poverty through their whole time with their spouse so their spouse can have a pittance when they are gone? It is shocking.

One veteran spoke to me about what he had done. He loved his spouse so much, so when he found out about the optional survivor benefit, he put it in place. He put part of his pension every month, every year away for her. Sadly, his spouse developed a serious illness and passed away. For years he had been putting money away for her. It was his money, part of his pension, that he was saving for her through this program. When she passed, he asked what was going to happen to that money, and the government said, "It is gone now; that is ours."

When we think about this, people are choosing to live in poverty so their spouse can have a pittance when they pass and then something like this happens and they lose absolutely everything. The department officials were assuring me that when the veteran lost their spouse, not to worry because they get the same pension; they are no longer deducting from it once they lose their loved one. Never mind that the money veterans put aside for a specific reason just disappears into the coffers.

When we in this place think of injustice and unfairness, we have to really look at what is happening and really understand that we are asking people to care for the people who served our country as they age, during, in some cases, some of the hardest physical, emotional and mental times for these people, and we are asking their spouses to just go without. Never mind that people live way longer now than they did in 1901. Never mind that in 1901, already this was a sexist, misogynistic law, because it was. To assume the only reason people would marry a veteran was for their money is shameful, and that we are still practising that today is shameful.

The other thing that came up again and again is one of the recommendations in this report that I hope all members in the House take time with, because this is a simple injustice. We saw this happen again and again, and it was like a dance. We would talk to people at Veterans Affairs, and they would say, even though it is in the mandate letter from the Prime Minister, "It is not us; it is National Defence." Then we would go to National Defence officials and ask them. They would say, "No, it is not us; it is Veterans Affairs."

We have veterans, including RCMP veterans, all over this country who are fighting this. They are standing up and saying, "This is not right. This is not fair. We do not want our loved ones to be in poverty when we go because we cannot get that pension for them, that survivor's benefit." They do not even know who to advocate to because these two departments keep switching it back and forth. That is simply unfair and really shameful.

Routine Proceedings

● (1020)

I keep thinking about the people who came and spoke with us. One of the stories I found most frustrating in this job was of a couple, a veteran who was 59 and his partner, who were planning to get married and then the pandemic hit. What happened during the pandemic? I think all of us know: Everything sort of fell apart for a while. By the time they could figure out how to get married, he had reached the age of 60. Because of a pandemic, he could not get married before 60 and now his spouse will not get a survivor's pension.

I look at things like that and I think it is so ridiculous. What else has been surprising is how many veterans have contacted my office who did not know. We have actually had people call us and say they got married because they were worried that if they waited until they were 60, their spouse would get nothing. It is totally shocking.

I think of Walt and Norma. They both testified at our committee. One of the things that will always stick with me is Walt saying to the committee that he just wants Canada, the country he served, to understand that his wife is worth a survivor's benefit. They are married. They care for their family together. They have a grandchild who has some particular needs. Walt and Norma are a big part of providing support for those needs, which is what people do in a family. What Walt is worried about is that if he goes before Norma, she would not be able to afford and maintain their house, she would not be able to have space for that granddaughter and that whole family who need the support and care, and everything would start to fall apart. That is unfair, and Walt feels bad. It is shocking to me that we are in a situation where Canada is literally making people feel guilty for finding love after 60.

I want to do a special shout-out to Madelyn, an amazing woman who lives very close here in Ottawa. She got a hold of me to talk about the fact that she has survived a beautiful person, Roger, who served our country, and things are tough for her. Madelyn, with tremendous grace and dignity, is addressing her day-to-day issues with as much dignity as she can, but she is struggling because she will not receive a survivor's benefit after Roger's passing. She was one of the women who called me and said, "Rachel, I promise you, I'm not a gold digger." Then she said Roger was a lot of work sometimes at the end. It was a lot of work for her, but she would have done it again, even if it was hard and frustrating, because she loved him.

I did the responsible thing and I said, "Okay, let us ask the PBO to do a bit of a report on this and how much it would cost." There is no doubt it would be a change, but here is the thing that people have to understand: The increase to the actual payments that people are making today would be minuscule. I look at this place and I look at the fact that this government promised in 2019, in the budget, \$150 million to help out these women, largely. About 97% of survivors are women.

Some of these women are struggling financially every day. Since 2019, there has been money in the coffers put aside specifically to support these women that has not moved forward. The only thing the government paid for was some research done during COVID, but it was legitimate research and it was very clear that we need to make this right and help these women out, so here we are.

Is there not a way for the government to figure out how to use that \$150 million to get these women a little money and, while it is doing that, to figure out, on the other end, how much the government can start getting paid into this system to make sure that in the future, survivors are covered after 60? This is not rocket science. This is about accepting and understanding that specific people are struggling in our country because we have an unfair rule that was made in 1901 and we have never, ever fixed it. It is something the current government committed to doing. It was put in two different letters to the Minister of Veterans Affairs that said to make it right and fix it, and then it disappeared.

● (1025)

Everywhere I go, I am surprised. A couple of years ago, I was in Campbell River at a fundraiser, talking to people, and this gentleman came up to me and said, "Thank you for fighting on the gold digger clause. I am that person. I am 61, I am dating, but I feel uncomfortable that if I actually find someone I want to marry, I am going to have to explain to them that there will not be anything for them." That is startling.

This summer, I went to New Brunswick, and when I was there, several people contacted me. They had heard me and knew I was coming, and they met with me just to talk specifically about this issue. I remember sitting at a restaurant when I was there and I met a lovely couple who were married. He was older than 60 when they got married, and she has a pension. If she goes first, he gets her pension, her survivor's benefits, but if he goes first, he cannot return the favour. I think that is shocking and very concerning. It does something that I think all of us should care about: It makes senior women poorer in this country.

We know for a fact that the poorest seniors in Canada are women, and here we see this cycle continue. We are penalizing women for their caregiving duties, not acknowledging them, not accepting the tremendous amount of support and free labour that they do, and we take away their survivor's benefit. It is absolutely shocking. I think of Elva in my riding. Her husband was a World War II veteran. She is my constituent and I appreciate her service to our country through loving her husband, and she needs that survivor's benefit.

I also want to point out that the following organizations are in favour of eliminating the clause: the RCMP Veterans' Association, the Royal Canadian Legion, the National Association of Federal Retirees, the National Council of Veteran Associations and the Armed Forces Pensioners'/Annuitants' Association. These are important organizations that have all come behind it and said, "Yes, this is something we need to make right." We need to stop punishing veterans and their loved ones for finding love later in life. We have to stop it. They deserve better. They served our country and we need to do better by them.

Again, if the government were to eliminate the clause, the additional cost to the pension fund would be less than a 2% change on an annual basis. I know that sometimes we really have to think about money, and I appreciate that. I come from a long line of people who were struggling financially, and I come from the non-profit sector. We did everything we could to spread everything as far as we could, and we really had to pinch our pennies and take care. I appreciate that, but I think there is a cost associated with this, and that cost is leaving women who care for the people who served our country in poverty and with the burden of financial insecurity. This does not address that issue. If we are a country that is about fairness, about respecting those who served us, then we have to make sure that a survivor's benefit is there, that veterans get the care they need and so do their loved ones.

In conclusion, in Canada we should not be punishing veterans for finding love later in life. We should not be punishing them and we should not be punishing their whole families by not providing a survivor's benefit.

• (1030)

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

The question I have for the member is in regard to the military. I served in the Canadian Forces. There is a very close relationship between the military and the RCMP, even though they are completely independent of each other, and even federal civil servants. I am wondering if she is suggesting that we apply the same principles in this situation to other federal employees.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, we asked the PBO to do that work, and that was the number I gave members. That was not just for veterans. That was not just for RCMP veterans. That was for everybody who is excluded after 60. It is a less than a 2% increase. I think it is the right thing to do. I think there could be an approach implemented so that the \$150 million was used to get us to a place where other people would be included.

There could be a really targeted approach. I think it could be very thoughtful. Unfortunately, we are not seeing anybody willing to take that risk. When we know that there has been \$150 million waiting and not one survivor has received a cent, I mean, that is shocking to me. We need to make that right, and that should be done immediately.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very fortunate to have, just north of my riding, Parkwood hospital. A lot of veterans go there to get services for rehabilitation, physio or any of those types of things. I recognize the impact on the families. So many people are involved in the care of those families. I am just wondering if there is anything to show how much.

Looking at the fact that women have been the caretakers, is there an analysis of how much the government has actually saved because of the women who have married? I am thinking about my own mom and dad and their care for one another, and how much that actually saves the health care system as well.

Routine Proceedings

Is there a review on how much the government actually saves, recognizing that the spouse participates in the care of that veteran?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I do not think there is one specifically in this particular case, but I think it outlines one of the things that we have studied repeatedly in the House, which is the free labour of caregivers. If we look at that quantification, we see again and again largely women caring for people and how much work they do.

I want to talk about what we heard repeatedly from veterans. I think of Bob and Sue, an RCMP veteran and his wife. He talked about that, saying that in the future he knew that she would be looking after him and how he felt crappy knowing that, when he was gone, she would not have any survivor's benefits to honour that labour. How do they ask for that? It is a really interesting idea of the difficulty this brings to a relationship, when veterans and their spouses have to talk about the fact that a veteran is asking their spouse to care for them and they will do their best to care for their spouse, but when the veteran is gone, they cannot leave them anything because of this law.

We hope that the government, which talks about being a feminist government, does a very good analysis of how this is actually incredibly sexist, as 97% of whom it impacts are women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, what an extremely interesting exchange we are having. Since I am critic for the status of women, I have heard about this issue, this injustice. The question asked by the Conservative member who spoke previously is interesting. It reopens the debate on how unpaid labour can be better recognized. Caregivers who have to care for someone else when they retire is indeed one example of unpaid labour.

Yesterday I attended a meeting of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie's Network of Women Parliamentarians. We discussed the fact that, unfortunately, women are still too often penalized in retirement. I will not even mention the debate on Bill C-319. So many women have written to me saying that a 68-year-old woman cannot get the same pension as a 78-year-old woman. It makes no sense. My colleague supported Bill C-319, and I hope that her party will continue to support the Bloc Québécois's bill.

This is all just common sense. The clause by which women are discriminated against after age 60 and are not entitled to the pension makes no sense. That was in the Bloc Québécois's 2021 platform. We will continue to advocate for this clause to be abolished. I know that my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles will give a magnificent speech later on this topic.

This is more of a comment than a question. I do not understand. Right now, I realize that, at least when we discuss committee reports in the House, we can discuss important issues. It needs to stop. Something needs to be done now. Let us abolish this provision.

Routine Proceedings

● (1035)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her work. I was the seniors critic for the NDP for a lot of years and the unfairness that women seniors face is, quite frankly, shocking.

When I was elected in 2015, I remember knocking on my first door and a young woman answered who had two children. She told me child care was so expensive that she was making about \$30 a week. She stopped working to care for her children, but she was worried about not paying into a pension and CPP and what that would mean for her when she got older.

When I think of senior women and this situation, I see this cycle of keeping women in a place where they are going to be impoverished, where they cannot rock the boat because they do not have financial security, and that worries me. Women are often the caregivers of their families. These are women who love these men and care for them no matter what, but we are punishing them. They should not be punished for loving someone.

I have been asked why I keep calling it the gold digger clause because that is not what it is called anymore. I use that language because that is the history of this, and the impact is still the same. Until the impact changes, I am going to keep saying “gold digger” because that is the right thing to do.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, the gold digger clause was invented after the Boer War. That is how far back it goes. Like my friend from North Island—Powell River, I have constituents who are going through this. I have been working on this with her predecessor, the former veterans critic for the NDP, Peter Stoffer, a great MP for Sackville—Eastern Shore in Nova Scotia.

I want to tell one quick story. Chic Goodman, a war hero, joined up and lied about his age. He joined when he was 15 years old in the Second World War. He volunteered and was part of the liberation of the death camps in the Netherlands. He was honoured and got the French Legion of Honour award, but he married Nancy when he was 60. He kept asking me if I could fix this. I told him that all I could say was that we had the support and a letter from Bill Morneau, former finance minister, saying he was going to fix it now. I asked him to please not die because this injustice had to get fixed. He died at 96 and Nancy is a widow. By God, this has to get fixed.

I am moved by the words of the member for North Island—Powell River. Every member in this place should be moved by this. I have asked for two things of the Minister of Finance in the fall economic statement: fix this and fix the unfairness to single seniors.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Speaker, I know the member has been working on this issue for a long time. The part that is so painful is meeting widows. Widows call me, earnestly promising me that they did not marry their partners just to get their pensions. That they perceive it that way, to me, is a great disservice to this country.

I think of Kevin and Tracy. Kevin served our country and continues to fight this. He is one of my best allies in this process. Not only is he working on this, but he helps so many veterans. Veterans

and their spouses are committed to making sure that their stories and realities are heard. I listened to one spouse talk about when her husband came back from the war. He could not bear to hear the explosions in the kids' games and the whole family had to change when he was home again. The amount of work that caregivers provide is tremendous. We cannot dishonour the veterans who served our country, including RCMP veterans.

I think of Pat and Kelly. Pat is a retired corrections officer. They did work for us. We cannot punish them for finding love after 60 years of age when there are ways to fix it. I am really interested in having that discussion. I know it is not simple, but it needs to be fixed.

● (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to address what I know is a very important issue. As I have indicated, I had the honour of serving in the Canadian Forces for just over three years. One of the most memorable things I experienced was meeting with and marching with World War II veterans. We learn a lot in the different discussions we have with veterans.

Spouses of veterans play an absolutely critical role in providing the types of supports that go far beyond, I would suggest, in many ways, a more typical marriage. There is a profound impact on individuals who have been through war, whether World War II, the war in Afghanistan or other wars Canada has been engaged in over the years. War has a profound impact on soldiers who are returning, and family members often have to make significant sacrifices in order to cater to the needs of that returning soldier. I have a deep amount of respect for the family unit, and in particular the spouses of veterans.

Having said that, before I go into details on this, I wanted to take the opportunity to highlight why we are having this particular debate today and maybe express a bit of my frustration. As we are talking about veterans and the Canadian Forces, one of the government bills we introduced quite a while ago for debate would have had a very significant impact on our Canadian Forces and those who are serving today. We talk about survivor benefits and how this impacts women disproportionately by a long shot. The legislation we introduced would have taken issues related to sexual harassment and exploitation out of military courts and put them into civilian courts. That is one aspect of a number of pieces of legislation that the government has been trying to get through.

Unfortunately, what we have seen for the last number of weeks, and I think it has been eight or nine weeks now, is a Conservative opposition that has made the decision to play a multi-million dollar game here on the floor of the House of Commons. It has decided to play a very destructive, self-serving game for the leader of the Conservative Party, and it is at a substantial cost.

As a direct result, different debates have been taking place. I do not blame the NDP, because if its members did not bring forward this particular concurrence motion, we would likely be debating another Conservative concurrence vote.

An hon. member: But we're not.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, we're not, because the NDP kind of beat them to it. However, that is a side issue for right now.

The point is that the House should be dealing with the substantive measures of legislation actually before the House. Every day, legislation is called upon. The fall economic statement is being presented next Monday as a direct result of the behaviour of the official opposition.

• (1045)

For those who want to follow what has taken place, let us go back eight or nine weeks, and one will find that issues of this nature, dealing with benefits for veterans' spouses, are being debated in this fashion, today, because of a motion the Conservative Party brought forward then. That motion, which was actually introduced by the Conservative Party, was to have a report brought to the procedure and House affairs committee. The Conservatives have put up speaker after speaker, and now, I believe that there have been well over 200 speakers on that motion of privilege.

In order to change the topic, we have seen different opposition parties bringing forward concurrence reports. The purpose of that, from the Conservative Party's perspective, is just to talk about anything but the privilege issue because Conservative members have run out of things to say repeatedly on the privilege issue. The Bloc and the NDP have brought in concurrence reports because they are tired of listening to the Conservatives talk about the privilege issue and the Conservative concurrence reports.

The government has been looking to any opposition party for that change, whether it is the Conservatives, which is not likely, whether it is the Bloc, which is not as likely, or whether it is, possibly, the NDP. The concurrence report brought forward today, dealing with benefits for veterans' spouses, upon the death of veterans, is here—

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order.

I would like to be assured that the parliamentary secretary will talk about the content of the report, because thousands of people are affected by this situation. I am sure that they would like to hear the government's response and find out why their spouses will not be able to benefit from the survivor's pension in the future.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): After the hon. member's point of order, the hon. parliamentary secretary still has 13 minutes to come back to the essence of the debate.

We hope that he will do that.

[English]

I remind the hon. member that we must have some relevance.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think it is important for people who might be following the debate to understand why we are debating this today. If the member were to look, the member would see that we get hundreds of reports brought in from standing committees and that there are detailed responses to all of the reports. When the member stands up and asks me to tell him something about the report, if the member would like, if he does not have access to the Internet, I would be more than happy to provide him with the government's response to each and every one of the recommendations.

This is part of the issue. These concurrence reports typically mean that a standing committee has done wonderful work investigating a wide spectrum of issues, such as the issue we are talking about today. The reports then come back to the House for the House to concur in. There is already a detailed response. For example, I want to highlight recommendation number three because I think it cuts to the chase. This is after a great amount of discussion and debate in the committee. I am not too sure when this report was brought to the House, but I suspect it was quite a while ago. It is being used as a way to change the topic. However, instead of changing the topic, we should be dealing with government business and with private members' business.

I am trying to get the point across that we have witnessed, in the last nine weeks, borderline contempt of Parliament because we are not able to do the things we should be doing to serve all the people of Canada, including the people of Quebec, the people of Manitoba and people from coast to coast to coast.

The member asked a very good question. The member who introduced the concurrence report cited example after example of individuals, and we all know there are many people this is affecting. Equally, there are hundreds of thousands of people who are being ignored because we continue to allow the abuse of a matter of privilege, and we are not able to address the issues Canadians expect us to address.

If I go to the specific response, for example, on recommendation number three, it says, "That the Government of Canada immediately adopt regulations to make the Optional Survivor Benefit (OSB) available to both common-law spouses and legally married spouses." If we go through the responses, there are a number of recommendations. I highlighted this one because I thought it was quite interesting to read the response to the report. It states, "The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation as work is currently underway to amend the regulations under all three of the Federal Pension Plans (CFSA, RCMPSPA, PSSA)".

I will stop there because that is the reason I asked the person moving the motion, in regard to talking about the military. I hear a lot of sympathy for the military. I can assure all members of the chamber that I am very sympathetic, being someone who served in the Canadian Forces, and someone who marched on Remembrance Day with World War II veterans and with others. I fully understand the important role that families play. I am very interested to see how this issue can be advanced and can be addressed. However, we should also take into consideration, at the same time, the RCMP. I suggest that the same principles we apply here would also apply to the RCMP.

Routine Proceedings

● (1050)

I would argue that if we were to talk to federal civil servants in Canada, we would find a very keen interest in the federal civil service also being able to qualify. I was not a part of the committee when they were having these discussions. I do know that, like many other issues committees deal with, they would come back with a report, and typically, if we were in agreement in trying to move the issue forward, we would concur in it. If we were to debate every report, we would never be able to have a private member's hour and would never be able to have government legislation pass. That is why my comments at the beginning were more so regarding my concern about what is happening on the floor of the House of Commons today.

We can now write off this whole fall session as a direct result of that, but we are coming back in the spring. I am hoping that we will see parties, whether it is the Bloc or it is the NDP, recognize that we need to move forward because that is in the best interest of Canadians.

Let me continue on with that one recommendation because there is detail to it. It states, "The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation as work is currently underway to amend the regulations under all three of the Federal Pension Plans...to make the Optional Survivor Benefit available to both common-law spouses and legally married spouses."

I was standing up, hoping to get another question, because in some of the examples being raised by the New Democratic Party, she made reference to an individual who was not able to get married because of the pandemic. Common law, from my understanding, still would have applied. We need to ensure that, at the very least, we recognize that, because there is no doubt that it would not have been an issue for that couple in that situation. He was under 60. She did not make it perfectly clear, but it sounded as if they were potentially living as a common-law couple. That was worth noting.

This is noted in the government's response:

The CFSA, which governs the Canadian Armed Forces Pension Plans, contains provisions that permit a retired member to marry after retirement allowing the spouse to have survivor benefits upon their death, provided that they were married or entered a common law relationship prior to their 60th birthday—an age in line with the compulsory retirement age of a CAF member.

That is why I make reference to the whole issue of common law.

CAF Veterans who are members of the Regular Force Pension Plan and marry after the age of 60, excluding in common-law marriages, can provide this Optional Survivor Benefit for their new spouse if they apply for the Optional Survivor Benefit within one year of their marriage; and, they agree to reduce their current level of pension in exchange for providing a survivor pension to their new spouse in the event of their death. This means that a portion of the retired members' pension would be reallocated to fund their spouses' "survivor benefit." This option is only revocable upon the death of the spouse or divorce and as noted previously is currently not an option for common-law relationships.

In looking at the details of the report, I say this because I am anticipating, unfortunately, that we will continue to see more concurrence reports being brought forward.

● (1055)

If there is a response, if the Conservatives really want to be able to contribute to the debate from an opposition perspective, what

they should be doing is addressing the actual report that has been brought to the attention of the chamber. If they feel they want to have a debate and a vote on this, then they should be providing some detailed comments in response to the report. I would find that most interesting.

I have indicated that for every recommendation in the report, there is a response. I know that the Minister of Veterans Affairs very much approaches things with an open mind. We need to recognize that the issue involves not only Veterans Affairs; two or three departments ultimately have to coordinate any sort of changes.

Members should recognize that the government itself, whether it is the Prime Minister, me or my colleagues, is very much sympathetic. In fact, I believe that in the 2019 budget we allocated \$150 million. That is a significant amount of money. I know there was some ridicule a bit earlier with respect to that money's not necessarily having been accessed, but it was allocated. The government is in fact interested in pursuing the issue in a positive way.

I would suggest that we look at ways, as a Parliament, particularly on the floor of the House of Commons, to somehow get over the privilege issues, stop some of the concurrence motions that are coming and get on to the legislative agenda of the government, private members' bills and so forth.

Having said that, I move:

That this question be now put.

● (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The motion is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity, as always, to be able to stand and ask important questions.

When it comes to the specifics, this is related to pensions and survivors benefits for veterans and military servicemen and women after the age of 60. However, it does open up the bigger conversation about many of the challenges that so many Canadians, in particular veterans, are facing when it comes to food insecurity, homelessness and, in particular, the cost of living associated with those things.

A comment was made yesterday by the Prime Minister that inflation was down. Would the parliamentary secretary acknowledge that is misleading, especially to individuals on fixed incomes, like pensioners? Inflation is not down. The costs of things are not going down; it is the rate at which costs are rising that has slowed.

Would the parliamentary secretary—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, it sounds like the member for Kingston and the Islands also has an opinion on the matter.

Would the parliamentary secretary acknowledge that prices have not gone down when it comes to what Canadians are actually paying for things at the grocery store?

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, one of the encouraging things that has been happening over the last eight or so months is that not only has inflation gone down but interest rates have also gone down.

We have also been looking at the overall performance of the economy. We continue to look at ways in which we can invest in and support Canadians. We have programs, such as the dental program, the pharmacare program and the national school food program, that are helping Canadians in a very real and tangible way. At the same time, we are able to keep tabs on inflation and interest rates.

When we compare Canada to virtually any other country in the G20, we see that we are doing exceptionally well. However, that does not prevent the government from continuing to look at ways in which we can support Canadians. A good example of that is that we are giving a tax holiday for the GST on a number of products, which, by the way, the member who posed the question voted against, along with the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, if I were to summarize the parliamentary secretary's speech, I would simply say that we should not be talking about this today. We should not be talking about the report that recommends that survivor's pensions should be available to people who married later in life. We should not be talking about this because, in his opinion, the report should have remained on the shelf. It was collecting dust, and that was perfect. The government was happy.

We should not be talking about the Conservatives' motion of privilege either. What we should be talking about are the government's priorities, but as it happens, this report deals with the government's priorities. It has been in the ministers' mandate letters since 2015, and it still has not been resolved. It has been almost 10 years, and the government is still twiddling its thumbs.

Meanwhile, there are people who will not get a survivor's pension when their spouse dies. Today, age 60 is far from old. Today at 60 people still have a life to live, and it is normal for situations to change.

Does the parliamentary secretary understand that it is high time for the government to finally wake up and put an end to these archaic practices? In Quebec, the problem has been resolved. All people have to do is make a call, fill out a form, and it is done.

Why is it that nothing ever gets resolved in the federal government?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, I was in the forces, and I happen to be 62, turning 63, years old. I understand the age factor also.

At the end of the day, the member is right. The only thing he is wrong about is the fact that it is not the Liberal Party's priorities; it is Canadian priorities that we should be talking about. What we should be talking about is the type of legislation that is on the

books. We should be talking about many of the private members' bills. There are all sorts of things that the House of Commons should actually not only be talking about but also taking action on. That means passing legislation and passing a fall economic statement.

There are many different things we could be doing for Canadians, but the Conservative Party and the light-blue Bloc continue to want to filibuster. It does not mean that we are not concerned about the issue at hand; I am concerned about the issue at hand, and we all are. However, there are the issues and priorities that Canadians have, and that is what I will continue to push for.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I share my Bloc colleague's frustration with the member's attempt to distract from the issue at hand. Any attempt to suggest that there are more important things we should be talking about in the House of Commons this morning is a direct disservice to the senior women who have been denied survivor benefits for so many years, many of whom are living in poverty.

I was so moved by my colleague from North Island—Powell River's excellent speech regarding the issue, and the dedication she has shown, yet I read the government's official response to the report, and what I read is an excuse and I read tacit support for a policy that is fundamentally unjust.

Therefore I would ask the member for a very direct yes or no answer to this question: Does he or does he not support recommendation 9, "That the Government of Canada repeal the 'marriage after 60' clause in both the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act"?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member makes reference to recommendation 9, and there is actually a response to that recommendation. It is one sentence and two paragraphs, and it goes over to the next page. I would encourage the member to read that particular aspect.

What I do take exception to is a member's trying to put words in my mouth. It is not correct to say that I do not care about the issue. I care about the issue. It is the same as if I were to say to the NDP—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a point of order. Exactly which standing order is it?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I do not believe it is consistent with the Standing Orders to suggest that a member said something that the member did not say. I did not say—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): This is a kettle and pot situation.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, let us put it this way: If we went through the hundreds of reports and I were to identify reports that I believe are more important to Canadians, does that mean that the New Democrats do not care about the other reports or the other issues?

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I can assure the member that there are many different serious issues in concurrence reports. The one before us is an important one, and there are lots of important issues. However, passing legislation, passing a fall economic statement, dealing with private members' business and getting work done for Canadians are also important. That is what—

• (1110)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have a couple things to say to my hon. friend the parliamentary secretary.

I want to agree with him profoundly that the cries for justice for spouses of people who have served in the armed forces should move us particularly. Equally, it makes no sense to deny spousal benefits to other classes of civil servants and other people covered by the superannuation act. The whole notion of “marriage after 60” should be stricken from all the rules around pensions.

I do say to my hon. colleague the parliamentary secretary that it is a bit much to say that some people will say the \$150 million was not adequate. Not a single penny has moved toward the people who are disadvantaged by the gold digger clause that affects the widows and survivors of our veterans. It was a sham move by the former finance minister Bill Morneau to get out of doing what he promised to do, which was to remove the clause entirely.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I respect the comments the member is making. It is one of the reasons we have standing committees, and the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs continues on. It might be a good agenda item for that particular committee to look at the \$150-million allotment that was given back in 2019, and why it has not been accessed. Maybe there are some things we can be doing to push the file through faster.

I have always believed that there are a number of areas within government we can always look at improving. I share many of the member's concerns. It is not to say that the government or Liberal members are not concerned about this issue; I genuinely believe we all are and that it crosses all political parties.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very happy that you are in the chair today. I know that you have a very good sense of humour. Looking at my desk, I feel like I am having a yard sale. I forgot my own glasses at my condo, so I am using some from the lobby. They are women's glasses, so I hope I can carry them off. Maybe I could exchange with my colleague across the way.

It is truly an honour and a privilege to stand here on behalf of the people of Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan. This is an important issue for our riding because, not only do we have two military bases, but we have a lot of veterans who live and reside within the riding. Before I go any further, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot. I am making sure that I am dotting my i's and crossing my t's.

I appreciate everything that has been shared today by my colleagues in the NDP and in the Liberal Party on this very important

subject. One of the things that was brought up was priorities. I want to focus on that for veterans right now. I am one of those members who have served. I did not serve for very long, and I did not do anything that was heroic or dramatic. I think of those who have put in a lot of time, who have served overseas, and who have encountered, seen and witnessed things that we, as Canadians, have not.

What they experience and what they bring back to this country is sometimes hard for them to understand, including the devastation that men can do to each other. They come back to this country and walk through grocery stores where things are aisled up. There is milk everywhere, and there are eggs and groceries in abundance. We live in a country of abundance, and that is what they are fighting for. However, they do not understand what they have witnessed in other countries, where people are fighting for scraps and where people are treating each other inhumanely.

That stress and that trauma manifests. One of the biggest challenges we deal with in veterans affairs is post-traumatic stress disorder. My cousin served in the PPCLI and was in the Medak Pocket, in Croatia. He came back and has faced those challenges. He shared with me what he has dealt with.

We know that it is not just the person who is serving in the military who experiences that. They bring that home with them. They come home and their spouses do not understand why their husband or their wife has changed. They could not wait for their spouse to come home and to start their lives over again. They missed their spouse. The kids missed their parents. Things happened. They were not able to spend Christmas together. They want to make up time, but there is something missing in that person. There is brokenness. Sometimes marriages fall apart, and we understand that. People can move on. They rebuild their lives, and they go and get married again. Some get married when they are over the age of 60, and this is what we are here to talk about.

We are here to talk about the meaning of this gold digger clause. It has to be said that this is, culturally, an old comment made over 100 years ago. We now live in a different culture. The Canadian Forces and Canada have evolved, and our engagements, where we have been deployed and what we stand for, have changed. This is one of the issues that was brought to the veterans affairs committee for us to study.

• (1115)

The committee has conducted many studies. For some of these, even with my own experience as being someone who has served, I have to say I was horrified. I was horrified to hear what some of our witnesses had experienced and gone through, but it is important to keep our eyes and ears focused on the times and on what we are experiencing. Time and time again, we are hearing about the challenges veterans are dealing with upon retirement.

The cost of living crisis is impacting veterans. More veterans are using food banks than ever before because of, as my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot mentioned earlier, inflation. Inflation has impacted veterans, who are on fixed incomes. If they have remarried and their spouse is helping them out, as we talk about this gold digger clause, which I will get to, they are finding their dollar, their buying power, is not going far enough. It is not meeting the needs of today's grocery prices, and veterans are finding challenges. They are cutting corners. They are cutting meals.

I have heard heartbreaking stories of the spouses who have had to care for them. They have fallen in love. They love their partner and need to care for them. They made a commitment. They made an oath in front of the church, in front of their families, that they would stand by them through sickness and in health. Many of these veterans are dealing with issues related to the war, because of, for example, carrying backpacks, or they have physical or mental ailments. These spouses over the age of 60, who are there to care for them, are being left out. We understand that, so that is why it was so important for us to do this report. It was important for us to listen to the people who are caregivers now for those they love who have served.

One of the challenges we have dealt with in this file is that, after hearing the heartbreaking stories, we are finding that this file has gone from pillar to post. We understand we just cannot change one pension act. There has to be a holistic and inclusive look at this. We understand that, but one of the challenges is whether this is a priority or not.

One of the disappointing things we recently heard about is that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has had to take on another portfolio. One of the biggest concerns for the Conservative Party is whether there is enough focus being put on veterans, after all the horrific stories we have heard time and time again of neglect, of not being a priority for the Canadian government and of continually being put on the back burner. Is this department now being put on the back burner because the Minister of Veterans Affairs has another portfolio to look after? That is one of the questions the Conservative Party has. Is the government focusing on this file?

• (1120)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is an important motion and discussion that the NDP has brought forward today, and I would like to thank the member for North Island—Powell River for doing so.

The member referenced Conservatives and veterans, and I wanted to put on the record what the terrible Harper regime did to veterans. It was the most disrespectful period in our nation's history. The Harper Conservatives slashed personnel and eliminated hundreds of positions. They closed district offices, forcing veterans, often with disabilities, to travel across provinces to try to get the services that were systematically being denied by the Harper regime. They denied disability benefits, and perhaps in one of the most cruel examples of disrespect by Conservatives of our nation's veterans, they denied 20,000 funerals for veterans. They were people who had laid their lives on the line for this country, and Conservatives treated them in the most disrespectful, dishonouring way possible.

Routine Proceedings

Will a single Conservative member stand and apologize for the despicable treatment of our nation's veterans—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are quite over the time provided.

The hon. member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan has the floor.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Madam Speaker, I was actually serving when Mr. Harper was the prime minister, and I have never in my time been more proud than when I was wearing the uniform and was a serving member of this country. I was proud of my uniform, and I was proud of my government at that time.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was in opposition when the member's current leader sat at the cabinet table with Stephen Harper. In fact, that leader was Harper's point man on many different issues. One of the issues that came before us at that time when we were in opposition was the fact that the Conservatives were shutting down veterans' offices. I think the total number that they ended up closing down was nine.

Obviously, as a government, we have opened nine and maybe even a possible tenth one. I will ask members to not quote me on the tenth one, but I am wondering if the member would agree that maybe there is a little regret within the Conservative benches, maybe not with the leader of the Conservative party, but with other members of the Conservative caucus, that they should not have closed down those veterans' offices.

• (1125)

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Madam Speaker, I have heard my colleague's question. In his time speaking about this matter, he talked about priorities, and the priority, for not only veterans but also everybody in this country, is the cost of living. It is time to axe the tax. It is time to look after the people of this country. It is time to listen to what is going on, look at the cost of living and give people hope instead of these little carrots that they throw out at Christmas time for a couple of months of GST cuts.

It is time to axe the tax. Let us do it for the Canadians. Let us do it for the veterans.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is true that many women have contacted me with regard to this clause as it relates to veterans.

What I also understand from my colleague's speech is the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder and its lifelong repercussions. I discussed this with the ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. PTSD can indeed have dire consequences. These people have needs. Recently, we have seen an increase in the number of homeless veterans living on the streets.

Repealing the clause making these people ineligible for a survivor's pension is crucial. It is important. Lastly, does this morning's debate not prove that we need to stop shelving reports and do something to show our respect for everything our veterans have done and achieved for our country?

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[English]

Mr. Fraser Tolmie: Madam Speaker, I think one of the most touching witness testimonies was of a veteran from Quebec who came to the veterans committee with a suitcase of claims that had been either neglected, rejected or denied, and it was heartbreaking. She could not even get a ramp for her wheelchair to get into her own home. People had to help her in and out, and after the committee, after being promised, she was denied. They had to get a third party organization to help this woman. She had served our country. I find it disgusting, and I think the priority should be focusing on veterans and getting—

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

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an honour to rise and talk about the important issues facing Canadians.

Before I get into the substance of my speech, let me first thank, on behalf of the people of Battle River—Crowfoot, and, because I represent a military base, camp Wainwright, the thousands of serving men and women who don our nation's uniform and do the hard work that is required to keep our nation safe. In spite of the challenges we face, these dedicated men and women are absolutely an incredible example of what it is to be the best of our country. Along with that, because of having a military base in Wainwright and the small towns and communities that surround it, there are many veterans whom I have the honour to represent.

As we go into the Christmas season, especially at a time when often emotions run high, and times can be difficult, whether because of economic circumstances or emotional circumstances for those who have faced loss, let me start by thanking the men and women who have served and who are currently serving our nation. All those veterans and servicemen and servicewomen are the best of what our country is.

We are here talking about an interesting subject, which reminds of the early months when I was first elected. I heard from a veteran, Tom, who shared a bit of his story with me. He reached out to my office before COVID, which seems like a long time ago. As a newly elected MP, I heard from Tom and he described a little bit about himself. He was a technician in the armed forces. He had served in a number of overseas deployments, had retired and was now doing contract work with DND. However, he had spent much of his life, as is the story of so many who have served our country, travelling and did not call any one place home for very long. He had just settled down in a small town in rural Alberta, which is, of course, the greatest place on the planet. After getting settled there, he bought his first house, which he was very proud of. He then found love and got married, but much to his surprise when wanting to make sure that his wife was taken care of, while updating the pension documents and associated paperwork, he learned about this clause that would eliminate the ability of his spouse to be entitled to his pension. If memory serves correctly, he was just over the age of 60, and so had just fallen out of the qualification range. He was now having to make difficult decisions in terms of long-term planning for his family, because of the implications of this clause.

I remember very specifically the grace with which his request was made, as Tom explained that he wanted to see that this was fixed so that others did not have to go through what he went through. I would highlight that while this was part of the mandate of, I believe, two or three consecutive ministers of Veterans Affairs, there were some proposed changes, which were clarifying changes that did not actually fix the substance of the issue, but clarified some of the rules around marriage versus common-law in the superannuation acts affected. However, this is still a concern that many veterans have to face.

We deal with this on other public policy issues, such as CPP, OAS and other seniors' benefits. At the time when many of these things were brought into effect, the average life expectancy of Canadians was significantly lower than it is today. As a result, the calculations associated with these programs were based on a life expectancy that was generally much lower. Thankfully, because of advancements in health and whatnot, we see that the average life expectancy now of men and women in Canada is pushing 80, and I believe for women it is a little above 80, which is good news for Canadians, but it has also changed the way that many of these things are calculated. The context in which that happens has in fact changed.

● (1130)

In 1901, this policy was brought forward. Circumstances were very different in terms of what an average Canadian family life would look like. We couple all of those things together and now we have individuals who are simply falling through the cracks.

Let me highlight how important it is that we honour and respect our veterans because they are putting their lives on hold. It is not that they get into the military. I do not know that I have ever heard of a military serviceman or servicewoman who gets into the military because they want to serve for the pay. They get into it because they want to serve our country; they want to do what is best for our country. I am proud to serve in a caucus with a number of veterans, and get to hear their perspectives, including the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, who spent some time in military service. I think he does not boast enough about his time with the Snowbirds, the pride of the Air Force. Those incredible men and women put their lives on hold and not for financial gain. There is a sacred obligation that the government has to ensure that they are taken care of.

When it comes to what is really a technical issue of ensuring that family members are able to have peace and security, as life can be unpredictable, we need to ensure what should be predictable at a time when men and women face circumstances that so often are, by nature of their service, unpredictable, and the consequences that go along with that. I know about that very well from some of the things that happened in my own life last fall.

I would just highlight that this is, I believe, incumbent upon all of us. Camrose is the only city that I represent, a small city, about 18,000 people, where my main constituency office is. I remember John, who lives in Camrose. He was a veteran who was very outspoken and very stereotypical in terms of the demeanour we would expect from a military man. He had very strong opinions and was not afraid to share them with me. I knocked on his door in the 2019 election, again in the 2021 election, and we had great conversations. He pointed out to me, which I am highlighting again today in the House of Commons, the irony that an MP qualifies for a pension after six years, but that is certainly not what is afforded to our veterans, although they have put their lives on the line for our country.

I think that highlights how quite often there is a disconnect in the way we approach thinking about what public service is. We must do everything we can to ensure that our men and women who put their lives on the line are, in fact, given dignity and respect. It highlights how difficult it is for all Canadians, specifically those who are on fixed incomes, like those who are pensioners, and the fact that someone may have a pension that may increase by 2% or 3%, sometimes less, sometimes, if someone is fortunate, a little bit more than that, but yet their costs are significantly more than that.

I asked the parliamentary secretary earlier if he could explain to Canadians how celebrating the rate of inflation coming down does not actually mean cost savings. It is important to highlight that and just highlight another important aspect here, which is the help that veterans need.

I want to give a shout-out. During the first week of September, I had a great conversation with members of the Worthington branch of the Royal Canadian Legion in Wainwright, Alberta. That is home to camp Wainwright, one of the army's training facilities. I am very proud to represent that. I had a great conversation with the president of the legion and other representatives, including some veterans, who shared practical steps that the government could take and, in some cases, not even steps that would cost much in terms of the dollar amount, but just to help make sure that barriers are removed and that veterans are respected.

Something interesting came up which I will put on the record here, just as I wrap up my speech. We need to make sure that, when a veteran calls for help, it is a veteran who answers the phone. That seems to me like common sense. Sometimes when a veteran is facing a difficult circumstance, making sure they have somebody who answers the phone who is in fact a veteran would give them the calming security they need and help to ensure they get the response that they need.

When it comes to the important issue of this particular clause and the larger issues surrounding veterans, I am glad to have had the chance to intervene today.

• (1135)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for all the rhetoric and melodrama that we have been exposed to today by Conservatives about their support for veterans, can the member explain to Canadians why two nights ago he and all of his colleagues voted against \$900 million worth of supports for veterans?

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Before he goes on about it being a budget bill, that Conservatives are opposed to budget bills by default and they will always vote against them because they vote against the government, I will say that it would have been very simple for the member to ask for the items related to Veterans Affairs to be removed from the vote and voted on separately. It would have been possible for him to have just voted on the \$900 million for veterans and voted against everything else.

Can the member tell us why he voted against the \$900 million worth of supports to veterans only two nights ago?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, Canadians do not have confidence in the government and the Prime Minister. Conservatives are ensuring that when it comes to matters of confidence, of which, if that member is not aware, every spending bill is a matter of confidence, it is time for a change. It is time for a carbon tax election because Canadians do not trust the Prime Minister, the government and the member.

Conservatives are taking a stand to make sure that the perspective of Canadians is increasingly being made known. I know that for a fact because people in Kingston are reaching out to us and sharing that exact opinion. They are tired of the member, they are tired of the government, and it is time for change. That is what Conservatives are offering.

• (1140)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, in his speech, my colleague spoke about the fact that seniors on a pension are on a fixed income that has not kept up with the rise in inflation over the years. We should review how pensions are indexed. That might be a solution.

The Bloc Québécois also introduced the bill because this is not right. There is something unfair in the fact that a 68-year-old senior does not receive the same amount as a 78-year-old senior. I hope that my colleague's party will continue to support Bill C-379.

Lastly, the clause for surviving pensioners who marry after age 60 makes no sense either. It is high time that we show respect for retirees. There are simple measures we can adopt.

What does my colleague think about repealing this clause as soon as possible? It shows that this morning's debate is important and useful.

[English]

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, it was the now Leader of the Opposition, at a time when spending was spiralling out of control and hundreds of billions of dollars of cash were being injected into the economy, who very clearly articulated the consequences of that would be the inflationary situation we find ourselves in today and the long-term impacts we will have, even as the target inflation increases come into what the Bank of Canada considers a target zone.

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What is an indisputable fact is that the Prime Minister and the Liberals, supported by the NDP, have made life unaffordable for all seniors. The consequences of that have a devastating impact on Canadians' ability to make ends meet, to afford the food, heat and fuel they need in order to survive. It is the Liberals who are taking away the Canadian promise that, not so long ago, Canadians could count on.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was quite shocked by the member for Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan's intervention. I want to give the hon. member the opportunity to reflect on what was asked and, hopefully, with integrity, he will honestly answer the question.

Between 2006 and 2012, the government rejected more than 20,000 applications to veterans' funeral and burial expenses, more than two-thirds of all requests, forcing veterans to file a costly \$34-million class action lawsuit that took them six years to get the benefits they were owed. Would the member not acknowledge that was inappropriate and certainly not supportive of veterans in their most dire time of need?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I am proud to represent, as I mentioned before, camp Wainwright, many active servicemen and servicewomen and veterans. On Remembrance Day, I stopped by the Drumheller legion and had some great conversations. Veterans want us to make sure we are removing the barriers that exist currently, especially the bureaucratic barriers, to ensure they get the benefits they deserve.

In my final words, in case I do not have an opportunity to rise again, I wish a very merry Christmas to the Speaker and everyone in this place. Because we are talking about veterans, I wish a very merry Christmas to our past and present serving men and women in uniform.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are debating the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs entitled “Survivor Retirement Pension Benefits (Marriage After 60)”.

This is a complex issue. In October and November 2022, the committee met three times for a total of six hours and heard 19 witnesses. I am going to dive right back in there. I learned only an hour ago that I was supposed to speak about this. I will do my best, but I repeat that it is a complex issue.

We cannot say that it is all the government's fault, but we also cannot say that it is all the veterans' fault. Still, there is work to be done. To set the stage and understand the issues at stake, I would like to start by presenting six factors as something of an appetizer.

Most pension plans, regardless of whether they are public or private, contain clauses that guarantee benefits for the beneficiary's surviving spouse or children should the beneficiary die. That is standard practice. The terms of these clauses can vary greatly, but they almost always involve a clear distinction between the individual who was still paying into the plan at the time of their death and the beneficiary who may be entitled to benefits. Let us start with that.

There is another very important factor. If the individual was retired at the time of death and was already receiving pension benefits, most pension plans will consider their spouse eligible for a survivor's benefit if, and only if, they were already the beneficiary's spouse before the beneficiary retired. That is the crux of it.

In other words, if a beneficiary enters a new relationship, a new union, after having started receiving pension benefits, the beneficiary's spouse is not eligible for a survivor's benefit if the beneficiary dies. That is the long and short of it. We at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs inherited this file.

In the case of Canadian Armed Forces retirees, spouses are also excluded from the survivor benefit if they began their relationship after the member began drawing pension benefits. However, there is an exclusion clause in the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act that does not apply when the member begins drawing benefits, but instead when they turn 60.

Sixty is the mandatory age of retirement in the CAF. In other words, if a military member begins receiving pension benefits at 55, the exclusion clause does not apply immediately. If the retiree marries or remarries before reaching 60 years of age, the retiree's spouse would be eligible for survivor benefits. This is the important part.

The act contains a clause entitled “Marriage after sixty years of age”. Apparently, this is a common occurrence. I cannot wait until I am 60 so I can get married again. Oh wait, I forgot, I have never been married. The “marriage after 60” clause, named after the title of subsection 31(1) of the Canadian Forces Superannuation Act, has been frequently criticized in recent years. In the 1990s, the courts ruled that this “marriage after 60” clause was not discriminatory.

● (1145)

That is a problem too, and it may raise some issues. The courts ruled “that the clause was not discriminatory, or if it was, the resulting exclusion was based on reasonable grounds.” That is the context.

In the Minister of Veterans Affairs' and Associate Minister of National Defence's 2015 and 2017 mandate letters, the Government of Canada made eliminating the “marriage after 60” clawback clause an absolute priority “so that surviving spouses of veterans receive appropriate pension and health benefits.”

The first problem is that it did not happen. It was in the minister's mandate letter, but it did not happen.

The government subsequently abandoned the legislative approach [which we might say was the ideal approach] and did not eliminate the “clawback clause.” In Budget 2019, it instead announced the creation of a Veterans Survivors Fund:

To better support veterans who married over the age of 60 and their spouses, Budget 2019 announces a new Veterans Survivors Fund committing \$150 million over 5 years starting in 2019–20 to Veterans Affairs Canada. With these funds, the Government will work with the community to identify impacted survivors, process their claims and ensure survivors have the [adequate] financial support they need.

With all that said, we can see that there are some huge challenges, such as gender equity, equity between veterans and the general public, and equity between benefit plans. Another challenge concerns the fact that 80% of veterans or military personnel who leave the forces are men, and 20% are women. Obviously, this has huge financial implications. If 80% of veterans or military personnel who leave the forces are men, it means that 80% of the spouses of these veterans or military personnel are women who may not inherit or receive an adequate pension. The amounts involved are huge.

The transfer in question is not easy. This is not how things usually work in the public service, which is relatively gender equal. Obviously, this issue is extremely important.

What impact does this have? If the military pension plan were to be harmonized with the public service pension plan, the financial impact would be enormous. A brief assessment from two or three years ago mentioned the figure of \$1 billion. This means it would cost \$1 billion just to put the plans on an equal footing. In fact, it would have an even greater impact.

If the government were to do that, which we all want it to do because we want everyone to be treated properly, it would also have to renegotiate the collective agreements for 400,000 public servants. We cannot use legislation to equalize, adjust or change plans without anticipating that other public servants might react. They are going to put their hand up and say that they, too, deserve it. A few things will then need to be reviewed and adjusted.

• (1150)

Clearly there is quite a confrontation or discussion ahead for the government and the unions. Despite the fact that it was in the mandate letters, the government then considered the possibility of injecting the tidy sum of \$150 million over three years to try to compensate. It did it. It provided the money. The problem is how that money is used.

This brings me to the first recommendation of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs:

That the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence work with the Minister of National Defence and the Minister of Public Safety to issue a declaration that gives a definitive answer to which department is responsible for survivor pension benefits of Veterans.

As always, when the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs submits recommendations, we receive responses from the government that are practically always favourable. The Government of Canada agrees with this recommendation. Generally, it is the implementation of these recommendations that creates little problems.

This leads me to another recommendation that the committee made:

That the Government of Canada immediately table a document explaining in detail the reasons for creating and maintaining clauses denying survivors' pensions when the relationship began after the pensioner reached age 60....

Two years later, we are still waiting for an answer, a follow-up or potential solutions. In its usual gracious manner, the government responded to the committee's recommendation by saying that it agreed and by explaining the reasons for these provisions. It spent a whole page explaining why it agrees. The problem is not whether it

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agrees or not. If a solution is being considered, we just want to see it put in place as quickly as possible.

The following recommendation is also very interesting:

That the Department of National Defence and the Department of Public Safety take vigorous action to ensure that members of the Canadian Armed Forces and of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have all the necessary information about their pension plan, and have access to financial advice to make the most informed financial decisions before they retire.

I really like the word "vigorous" in this recommendation. I mention this recommendation because it implies that the retiring member should be advised by someone. There are people in the government who are capable of advising the member. That is not a problem. However, this involves a level of financial planning that mere mortals and military members may not be used to doing. They were deployed, and usually there were people at home who took care of their affairs. They were off doing their job. Significant planning needs to be done. The department is essentially saying that military members should think about putting money aside while they are still serving in combat roles or elsewhere.

Earlier I was talking about the \$150 million that the government injected. In theory, that is great. However, when the military member leaves the Canadian Armed Forces, they may not be in the best mental state to ask for help. Many of them end up with post-traumatic stress. Returning to civilian life is not easy. When a person has worn the uniform for 10, 15 or 20 years and has to get dressed the morning after leaving the Canadian Armed Forces, they do not know what to put on. They do not know how to dress themselves. They do not know how to function outside of this society that was regulated to the nth degree. It sounds silly, but that is how it is.

• (1155)

Nevertheless, they are being asked to do that before they leave the armed forces. They are being asked to come up with a financial plan. If not, there is the \$150 million provided by the government. That is great. The services are there. That is not the problem with Veterans Affairs Canada. The problem is accessing them. The veterans must not have it done for them. Rather, they must be referred to the appropriate resources, in this case the necessary financial resources, that could make up for it, because this \$150 million could be used to enhance or adjust the spouse's pension plan.

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Now we are getting into the technical details. I taught plenty of university courses in more than one faculty for 10 or 11 years, and I am pretty good with money matters. However, when we had to look closely at this report, at the implications and the figures, it was a complex affair. When we got to the \$150 million and saw that they had access to it, I wondered how I would have reacted. Where would I have gone for help? There is a door I have to knock on, but what do I ask for? That is evidently still a problem for our veterans. The fact that they do not find it easy to ask for help needs to be taken into account. A veteran is a hero, someone who fought for their country, someone who theoretically does not necessarily need help. It is someone who thinks and says they are independent. Just asking for help, in a case like the one we are looking at today, does not come easily.

In addition to all the inherent problems, we have a Liberal government with two departments, the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs Canada, that do not talk to each other, that operate in a vacuum. When a military member leaves the military and becomes a veteran, they cross over into another silo, another zone. The fact that the two departments do not communicate obviously creates problems, including those in the case we are discussing today, the survivor's pension.

As I said earlier, yes, they can get help. There are 32 Canadian Armed Forces transition centres. When a member leaves the armed forces, they are entitled to a few hours of training to prepare them for what comes next. Once again, however, they may not be in the best mindset to be making decisions, to be listening, to be seeking help. However, there are people there. There are 32 centres that are there to help.

In conclusion, I would just like to tie this issue in with the Bloc Québécois's request to increase the pensions of seniors between the ages of 65 and 74. Most, if not all, of the people involved in the case we are discussing today fall squarely in that camp. The Bloc Québécois wants a 10% increase because we calculate, based on the figures we have, that this segment of the population needs more financial assistance than anyone else. That is our position, and the government is aware of it. The connection I am making is that we are talking about survivors, pensions at age 60, and so on. Once again, it is seniors who are bearing the brunt of the failures in our system. It is always easy for the Liberal government to target people in this age group, because they probably are not going to take to the streets with signs.

● (1200)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I do not know the answer to this question, and that is why I want to ask this specific question in regard to the province of Quebec. The member made reference to the federal civil service, and I made reference to that earlier too, with the RCMP, and having survivor benefits and how that should also be taken into consideration in regard to our civil service and the RCMP.

Can the member provide his thoughts in regard to, let us say, first responders in the province of Quebec or the Quebec civil service?

Is he aware of what sorts of survivor benefits there would be in situations of that nature?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Madam Speaker, we are talking about 400,000 public servants who are affected or who could be indirectly affected. I was saying that, if the government were to go along with the requests for adjustments, then collective agreements would have to be reviewed. As for how things work in Quebec, that is a different story. We are talking about federal benefits here.

That would be my answer.

● (1205)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to sincerely thank my colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles for clearly defining the problems that veterans face when they leave the military and return to civilian life. I especially appreciated his tribute to those who have worn the uniform. He gave a great description of the reality of being out of uniform. For people like us, who have never served in the military, a return to civilian life seems perfectly normal, but that is not the case. There are hundreds of military members and veterans in my riding, and I am prepared to attest to that.

My colleague clearly established that there are many aspects to this debate. Is there a specific recommendation that he would like the government to implement?

Since partisan politics have no place in a debate like this, what is the first step that any government should take to improve the transition from military to civilian life?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Madam Speaker, my colleague usually has some very brilliant questions.

For me, the number one recommendation has to do with support and assistance for members leaving the armed forces. We deal with this regularly in our constituency offices. Programs exist, but they are not necessarily sufficient or adapted. We understand that; it is all part of a big machine. However, help and support should be facilitated. Once again, veterans defended our values and our democracy. We owe them so much, even though they are no longer in the military, just as we owe seniors so much.

I recently stood by a soldier who was on a hunger strike. He says he went from "hero to zero". He is asking for help, but he does not know how to ask for it. He needs someone to support him when he asks for help. I would say that it is often this type of thing, no matter which government is in power.

We do not forget veterans, but we do not think about them very often.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think that today we all agree on the wording of the motion.

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It must be said that the federal government has not always treated veterans with respect. I am mostly talking about the Harper years, when the Conservatives ran roughshod over all services for veterans. They even denied them the right to have their disability recognized. They denied 20,000 veterans a funeral. It was appalling. So far, the member for Carleton has never apologized for how shamefully veterans were treated for years.

Does my colleague agree that the Conservatives owe a heartfelt apology to all the veterans they mistreated during the years of the Harper regime?

Otherwise, what should Canadians take away from their refusal to apologize to veterans?

Mr. Luc Desilets: Madam Speaker, I see that my colleague wants to take this in a more political direction. Some might say that is why we are here.

Yes, the Conservative Party can certainly be criticized for some things, including the cuts it made, but it also did some positive things. Personally, I am more interested in finding solutions. Anyone can hit others when they are already down. They can hit, ask and demand, but I prefer to compromise and come up with solutions that work for everybody. Talking about parties and cuts and all that is not the solution. The solution is about human beings. People are at the heart of this issue. We must ask ourselves how we can respond appropriately, no matter which party is in power. With our parties, our platforms and our agendas, we all have our own way of responding to these issues. Again, as I said in my previous answer, I think we have to remember the human aspect. Veterans Affairs is one of the few departments that deal with human beings.

People should be at the heart of everything, and we should take much better care of them than we do, regardless of the party in power.

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have two quick questions and a brief commentary. First off, during the study, did the committee look at the fact that the prescribed age of retirement of 60 is really no longer relevant? Just recently, at Remembrance Day, I met two serving members in my own neck of the woods. One just completed basic training at 54. Another one is serving at 58 and still continues to serve and is able to serve past 60, because the military is doing that now.

Secondly, the member talked about post-traumatic stress, its impact and how it does not necessarily happen right away. It can happen decades later. The fact of the matter is that, within the military, the rate of divorce unfortunately is a lot higher than even in civil society. That is an impact that this specific clause and issue faces.

As for my brief commentary, as someone who is only 50, who did serve and who may be lucky enough to find that special someone after 60, it really scares me, to some extent, to think that this future loved one may be left in the dust if we do not fix this.

I would just like the member's feedback on that.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets: Madam Speaker, I absolutely love the member who just asked me a question. I had the opportunity to serve with him on a memorable mission. I was afraid of him before the mission, but he has since become a friend.

His first question is about the 60-year age limit, and it is a good one. People can join the army at 17 or 18. They might stay in for 10 years or they might have a very long career. I understand that we have to pick a number and set a limit, because there has to be a starting point and an end point. Right now, the age limit is 60. Yes, that is something the committee considered.

Honestly, I do not know what the ideal solution is. This whole issue involves very serious actuarial data. People can enlist in the army when they are young or when they are older. Age 60 is the limit. Personally, I do not think that is all that great. We might change that when I am the minister. Just kidding. Age is indeed a challenge in this file.

As far as PTSD is concerned, my colleague is absolutely right. I do not think many military personnel leave the forces and are diagnosed with PTSD right away. It can happen five, 10, 15 or 20 years later. I have a good friend in my riding who served in Afghanistan, but it was only about two years ago that things really started falling apart for him and he was diagnosed. If there had been adequate follow-up and support when he left the armed forces, he might not be suffering from PTSD today, as such a high percentage of military personnel are. As I said, early support and prevention are key.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time today with the incredible member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

I am quite honoured to be able to stand and speak to this debate today. I am very grateful to the member for North Island—Powell River for bringing this forward to the floor of the House of Commons. I have been listening to today's debate very carefully. It is something that all parties clearly feel there needs to be action on. We have seen, of course, that action has not been taken by the current administration or the administration prior. There is a clear indication that this piece of our legislation is deeply wrong.

I am a proud advocate for the well-being of Canadians and a strong supporter of our veterans. I am here today to talk about the provision within veterans' pensions that some call the gold digger clause. I am deeply grateful that we have the opportunity to have this debate, because what has been happening for far too long is that this piece of policy, this piece of how we deal with veterans, is cruel. It is unjust, and for too many veterans and too many veterans' families, it means financial insecurity, unfair restrictions and unnecessary hardship.

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To give a bit of a sense of what the gold digger clause is, in Canada, this refers to the rule that denies spousal benefits to any surviving spouse who marries a veteran after the veteran turns 60. This provision applies to all veterans, but it is extraordinarily discriminatory. It assumes that there is an ulterior motive for marriage, that those marriages are not based on love or partnership and that they are not genuine marriages. This is an absolutely appalling thing to say to our veterans. It punishes honest, committed relationships. It disregards the rights and dignity of both veterans and their partners.

Obviously, this is very misogynistic as well, when we consider that this has a disproportionate impact on the group of seniors who are women. These seniors are already among the most vulnerable and discriminated against, those who will already find life more unaffordable. This is one more way we are making lives more difficult for women seniors. This is appalling, and it needs to be fixed as quickly as possible.

This discriminatory and outdated policy has real and harmful impacts. Many veterans remarry later in life. We have heard about that from many of our colleagues today in the House. They are seeking love and companionship after years of service, but their spouses are denied that financial support simply because of an outdated and old rule. It is not about protecting pensions from exploitation; it is about denying help to families who need it.

The reality is that many of these spouses dedicate their lives to caring for veterans. Often making personal sacrifices along the way, they act as caregivers, as advocates and as companions. When the veteran passes away, the surviving spouse is left without the pension benefits they need to maintain their livelihood. This is obviously a situation that is unjust and needs to be avoided.

I want to tell a personal story. My grandfather was a veteran. His name was Albert, or Bert, McCoy. He was a gunner in the Second World War. I have told this story in the House before. He was shot down over Belgium. He lived in the underground for two years. It took two years for him to come back to my mother and to my grandmother. Sadly, my grandmother passed away, and my grandfather remarried Dorothy later in life. At the end of his life, my grandfather had dementia. He had a number of health issues. He was in his late eighties when he passed away. Dorothy cared for him and provided the love, companionship and care my grandfather deserved.

When I think of the legislation, I do not just think about random policies we need to fix. I think about my grandfather. At the end of his days, as he was suffering from dementia, as he was reliving those moments that he had spent during the war, it was Dorothy who cared for him. She made sure he was loved, and he was given that companionship. To say that any veteran's partner who cared for them does not deserve those benefits, does not deserve to be supported, is really something we should all be deeply ashamed of.

● (1215)

Canadian veterans have made incredible sacrifices for our country. They have served in peacekeeping missions, defended our values abroad and responded to domestic crises. They are Canadian workers. They deserve the utmost respect. Of all workers, they are the ones who have sacrificed the most for this country, for us; how-

ever, the gold digger clause sends the message that we do not trust their personal decisions, do not value their loved ones and do not value their families. This is not the Canada I know. Canadians believe in fairness, in dignity and in compassion. We understand the importance of standing with those who have supported us.

Therefore, we need to look at the report we are discussing today. We need to look at what needs to be changed to deal with this outdated and discriminatory rule and to stop this. We need to modernize the policy so that it supports veterans and their loved ones rather than penalizing them. In this report, we have nine recommendations that were brought forward; the government could act on them right now. In fact, the member for North Island—Powell River brought forward two additional recommendations, which I would encourage the government to follow. I am just going to read these two: “That the Government of Canada eliminate the ‘marriage after 60’ clause from all pension legislation, immediately” and “That Veterans Affairs Canada distribute the Veterans Survivors Fund to the identified survivors, immediately.” It says “immediately.”

We have heard in the House today from many people that this is something that has been going on for far too long; this is something that has not been fixed by the current Liberal government and was not fixed by the Conservative government before it. This is an opportunity for the current Parliament to do the right thing and to actually adopt these recommendations, including the two recommendations from the New Democratic Party, and fix this problem.

In closing, I will just say that our veterans and their families have given so much to our country. They have earned more than just our thanks. They have earned policies that support them through every stage of their life. The gold digger clause does not align with Canadian values, and it is time we changed it. Let us work together to build a system that truly supports our veterans and their families, a system that is based on fairness, justice, compassion and respect.

● (1220)

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the whip is listening, I intend to vote for this, so they can just put that on the record right now.

However, the whole gold digger clause represents an attitude toward women that was just back in the dinosaur age. We now have very capable women serving in the armed forces who may remarry some gold digger guy in the future. Could the hon. member reflect on the fact that maybe the tables are turning and that this is all about equity?

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out to the member that, while he has mentioned the whip, I am not his whip. I hope he is not informing me that he will be voting for the legislation.

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It does not matter who is the veteran and who is the spouse. What matters is that there is a principle of equity, a principle of justice; it is the idea of doing the right thing. I certainly would not hope that we are making decisions as a tit-for-tat scenario. I do not think that is what the member meant, but we need to look at the very basic principles of what is just, what is fair and what shows respect for our veterans. What we have right now does not do so, and we should fix that.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will note that, in the committee's report, many of the recommendations were vague. I would classify the government's response to it as more vague. There is a clause that dates back to early military history when, in fact, perhaps there was some abuse; however, any society evolves, as ours has here in Canada. I believe that there is a fundamental right of people who marry military members to be granted this type of coverage as a result not only of the member's service but also of the caregiving. I think the member agrees with that, but that was my comment.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague correctly says, this is a watered-down report. That is why the New Democrats put two much stronger recommendations in the supplementary report that the member for North Island—Powell River brought forward.

This could and should stop immediately; there is that possibility, and the government has the ability to do that. I cannot help but note that the member, as a member of the Conservative Party, also had that opportunity. Instead, the Conservatives cut supports for veterans. That becomes a bit of a problem when we have the government of the day failing to take the steps necessary to fix the legislation and when previous governments, when they had that opportunity, also failed to take those steps.

The member made an excellent point in that veterans have waited long enough. It is time to fix this.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for such an interesting speech. She often talks about the more human aspect of the many reports made to the House of Commons. It is important we remember that at every opportunity.

I want to take the liberty of circling back to what my colleague spoke about earlier. There is one thing I have noticed in a number of committees, and I wonder if it is particularly true of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. The recommendations are a little vague and, in turn, they receive a very vague response from the government. In the end, the recommendations are accepted, but there is no follow-up afterwards.

Why is the government not taking action, not thinking about the human aspect of all this? I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I am sorry I cannot answer in French, but this is a difficult subject for me.

[*English*]

I thank the member for acknowledging that we try to bring a human lens to the work we do.

The government has the ability to make these changes. As I read from the report, there are two concrete things that New Democrats think need to happen, and I think the member would agree that they could happen immediately. The Government of Canada could eliminate the marriage after 60 clause from all pension legislation, and Veterans Affairs Canada could distribute the veterans survivors fund to the identified survivors. It is the “immediately” piece here.

I agree with her: It is frustrating when we come to this place, and there is a bit of a thoughts and prayers mentality, with people saying, “Shoot, I sure wish that we could get something done here. Shoot, let's do another study and a round table and maybe have a consultation.”

We can do it now, so let us do it now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Edmonton Strathcona for her very important speech on this day when we are honouring Canada's veterans. We will forever be indebted to our veterans.

I also want to thank my colleague from North Island—Powell River for presenting this report and I want to thank her for working hard to ensure that veterans can enjoy these important rights that should be a given. I think there is consensus on the fact that veterans must get their due. It makes no sense that still today, and after decades, veterans' pensions are not paid to their spouses under the pretext that they marry later in life.

An NDP government will not hesitate to rectify that immediately. One of our priorities when we form government will certainly be to resolve this issue. This issue is so easy to resolve that the government promised to do so years ago. However, it chose not to do it. The fact is that it is very easy to do.

The Liberals are not the only ones who failed in their duty to enhance veterans' right to respect and a well-deserved retirement. In 2006, with the Harper government newly in power, the NDP got a motion adopted unanimously in Parliament. However, the Harper government never implemented our proposal. I will have more to say about that later.

The fact is, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals truly respected veterans' rights. I believe that only an NDP government would do so.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

I come from a community that is deeply respectful of our nation's veterans. New Westminster and Burnaby, British Columbia, the two cities I am proud to represent in the House of Commons, have a deep and ongoing engagement with our nation's veterans. The Royal Westminster Regiment is based in New Westminster and the armoury is often the site where we pay respect to our nation's veterans. Legion branch 83 in Burnaby and Legion branch 2 in New Westminster are both organizations that provide remarkable service to the community but are also focal points for respecting our nation's veterans.

Before the city hall in downtown New Westminster sits the cenotaph, where we commemorate those who gave their lives for our country. The names of my grandfather and my uncle are on that cenotaph. Everyone in the community pays respect; in fact, on Remembrance Day this year, thousands of people turned out in New Westminster and in Burnaby to pay respect to our nation's veterans.

• (1230)

There is this gold digger clause, even though Parliament passed a motion in 2006, as the Harper Conservative government was just coming into power; the Harper government refused to implement it and did much worse things. I will come back to that in just a moment. Subsequent to that, we had a new government, a Liberal government, and it does the same thing. It ignores the needs of veterans and discriminates against the spouses of veterans. To our mind, in the NDP corner of the House, we believe it is simply profoundly disrespectful to our nation's veterans.

This is something that should be done today. It could be done today, yet the government has delayed for nine years. The previous government delayed for nine years. It shows a remarkable and profound disrespect for our nation's veterans. This can be done, and as my colleague from North Island—Powell River pointed out, these are real people who are impacted. She mentioned, in a supplementary opinion to the report we are debating today, the case of Walt and Norma Pinsent. She mentioned as well the case of Corporal Kevin Sewell and his spouse, Tracy Evanshen, and what it means, in terms of their lives, that the pensions are denied.

Despite their finding love later in life, there is profound discrimination by the federal government toward veterans who have put their lives on the line for their country, some coming back with severe disabilities or a whole range of challenges. Coming from a family whose family members went overseas, I can tell members about the kind of impact being in service can entail. It is profoundly sad to me that we are not immediately moving to honour our nation's veterans.

A number of Conservatives have stood up today, and I want to come back to the Conservative record on veterans. The Liberals have been restoring some of the damage that was committed during the Harper regime, but I was here in the House. As so many veterans have indicated, because of the discrimination by the Harper regime, the former Conservative government has lost any moral authority forever with respect to the stewardship of our nation's veterans. The Conservatives should never, ever again, in the history of our country, be put in charge of Veterans Affairs because what they did was absolutely reprehensible. It is unbelievable to me how that

party pretends, as the member for Carleton often does, and pays lip service to honouring our nation's veterans. What they did was profoundly despicable, was disrespectful and should never be forgotten.

I want to take a few minutes to go through the litany of the tragic and horrible things the Harper Conservatives did. The member for Carleton has never apologized for a single one of these things.

It was not just slashing services at Veterans Affairs, cutting about a quarter of the services and staff available to veterans. The Harper Conservatives often forced veterans to travel for days across provinces as they closed offices across the country. In the interior of British Columbia, northern Ontario and western Newfoundland, veterans services were no longer available. It was absolutely reprehensible that they would do this.

They denied funerals. The scale is unbelievable: 20,000 applications for veterans' funerals and burials were rejected under the Harper Conservatives. The reality is that if we, as a country, cannot pay tribute to our nation's veterans at the time of their passing, then how can any member of Parliament stand in the House and say they respect our nation's veterans? This is what the Conservatives did systematically, not over one, two, three or four years, but for more than half a decade. They systematically denied tens of thousands of proper burials and funerals for our nation's veterans.

Not a single Conservative has ever stood in the House to say they were sorry or to apologize to our veterans for the profound disrespect they showed in clawing back a billion dollars, denying services, slashing staff, closing offices and denying the legitimate disability claims that came in from our nation's veterans. Time after time, the Harper Conservatives denied those fundamental benefits. The most disrespectful period of time in our nation's history toward our nation's veterans was under the Harper Conservatives, yet since that abysmal period, not a single Conservative MP has ever apologized for it. The Conservatives have never said they were wrong, that they should not have denied funerals and disability claims, slashed offices and clawed back a billion dollars from veterans who needed those services desperately and given it to billionaires. Not a single Conservative has apologized. I hope they stand in the House today and solemnly apologize to our nation's veterans for all of the devastation they have wreaked upon veterans over those terrible years.

Routine Proceedings

• (1235)

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what I want to put as a question, necessarily, to the House leader of the NDP. We are here to debate a concurrence motion that I think is very important on an issue the NDP brought forward that we need to address, which is how we take care of our veterans, and especially this concern of marriage after the age of 60. I do not understand. I liked what the Bloc member who spoke just a couple of speakers ago said, when he was asked a question by this member: that it is not about rehashing the past or fixing the past, which is not going to help veterans going forward.

As a veteran, I get very frustrated when any party speaks and makes veterans a partisan issue. We should be united here. What are the member's recommendations, going forward as a Parliament, so we can all work together to fix this shortfall?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the Conservatives have a record. They need to acknowledge it. They have been disrespectful to veterans and they need to acknowledge it as a party and as members of Parliament. The Conservative Party has yet to acknowledge the incredible harm it did.

Peter Stoffer, the former Veterans Affairs critic for the NDP, passed that motion in 2006. Conservatives were in power for nine years after that and never fixed this disrespect of our nation's veterans. The Liberals have added another nine years on top of that, yet it is so simple to fix. The reality is that the Conservatives have a record they need to apologize for. The slashing of benefits, the closing of offices and the refusal to provide disability benefits all need to be acknowledged. I hope a Conservative, one Conservative, will have the guts to do that today.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must admit I was sitting here stunned at that last question and the desire for non-partisanship after having been subject to Conservative speeches that are nothing more than political rhetoric and exactly that: partisanship.

I can answer the last Conservative question. What could we do for veterans? We could have all unanimously voted in the House two nights ago for the \$900 million going toward veterans, but Conservatives voted against it. Of course they are going to say, "Well, no, we voted against every budget thing. It is confidence." They could have separated that one item on veterans, voted for it, and then showed non-confidence in the government for the other 149 times.

Would the member not agree that two nights ago, when we voted on the estimates, Conservatives should have voted in favour of those funds and resources going toward veterans?

• (1240)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, yes, I agree. Conservatives could have provided support for those veterans funds.

I am even more disturbed by a year ago. Members will recall December 7 and December 8, 2023, a night that will live in infamy in Canadian parliamentary history. Conservative MPs, every single one of them, voted to slash services to veterans. We are not talking about 18 years ago, 15 years ago or even 10 years ago, during the Harper regime, which was the worst period for veterans in Canadian

history. We are talking about a year ago, when Conservatives voted to slash all veterans services. They all voted. We were here for 30 hours and they voted proudly. They smiled as they stood up and voted to slash veterans services.

We are not just talking about two nights ago. We are not just talking about a year ago. We are talking about systematically paying lip service to our nation's veterans. The member for Carleton loves to do that, while Conservatives obviously want to slash, cut and burn yet again, as they did when they were in power and the results were catastrophic for our nation's veterans. If they do not apologize for what they did in the past, how can anyone believe they would not act the same way in the future?

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby raised the important point that in 2006, it was a New Democrat, Peter Stoffer, who first introduced this. In fact, we have introduced it seven times in private members' bills, most recently with Bill C-221, which was introduced in the 44th Parliament by the hon. member for North Island—Powell River. Here we are. We are still here today. Unfortunately, this is a government that likes to lament, send its thoughts and prayers, and say, "Oh, if only there was somebody in power who could actually do something." It could do it. The government could do it right now.

The NDP has fought for veterans for so long because we consider it to be clear that every single person who has served, including all the members in the Conservative caucus who have served, are workers who deserve the utmost respect and not government overreach. This is not just about justice delayed; this is about justice denied. Will the hon. member please expand on the fact that this has been a decades-long struggle for the NDP fighting for workers, fighting for our veterans?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre always has great clarity on these questions. We could do this now. It could have been done a year ago or at any time, but there is no time better than the present. Let us get it done. The government needs to act.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak about the veterans affairs committee report that is before us. The reality is that the Minister of Veterans Affairs has great power, and literally with one fell swoop of a pen she could make this happen if she wanted to. The situation has been going on far too long. The committee report, as I said, was somewhat vague in its recommendations. There was not unanimous support, because there was a dissenting report by the NDP that called for the change to happen as soon as possible; however, I think there was agreement. A lot of witnesses came forward and spoke to this particular issue.

Routine Proceedings

In October 2016 I was given the honour by then leader Rona Ambrose to be the critic for veterans affairs. Admittedly, it was a very difficult time, after the 2015 election, to be the critic for veterans affairs. I had a tremendous amount of advice given to me by the former Conservative minister of veterans affairs, Erin O'Toole, on what I needed to do as the new critic at the time.

I immediately embarked on a cross-Canada tour to meet with veterans, their families, stakeholders and advocates. I was very grateful to do that with the member for Yorkton—Melville, with whom I will be splitting my time. She is a great advocate for veterans and their families.

As I went across the country, obviously coming out of the 2015 election, as difficult as that period was, there were a lot of questions posed to me. I did not back away from any of them at all; I faced them head on. I talked to veterans and their families right across the country and explained to them the challenges that had come out of and in advance of the 2015 election.

Many of the people I spoke to were grateful for the types of programs the former Conservative government had put in, but there were some issues. I faced those issues head-on. The one thing that veterans appreciate more than anything else is telling them the truth. Face their questions head on, admit when mistakes were made and do not necessarily take credit for everything; show some humility. Those are some of the things I tried to do.

I have listened to much of the debate this morning, and the blame game is being used in this place. I will say that this is a very toxic place right now; everybody is looking for political positioning. The NDP and the Liberals are 20 to 25 points behind in the polls, so they are looking to attack the Conservatives in any way they can. That is part of it, and I get it.

However, when it comes to veterans and their families, there should be no attacks or partisan games. Veterans and their families can smell it from a mile away. They know when they are being used as political pawns by political parties, and in much of the debate I have heard today, that is happening. Frankly, veterans and their families do not give a flying you-know-what about what people say; it is what they do that matters.

There were difficult times; I admit that now as I did when I was critic for veterans affairs, but the one thing I was with veterans was honest. If there was something that we could do, we did it; if there was something that we could not do, I would tell them why. It was in that spirit that in 2017, after travelling the country and talking to veterans, their families, stakeholders and others, I proposed my private member's bill, Bill C-378, which would have established a military covenant, an obligation between the Crown and our veterans.

I used the example of Great Britain at the time because it was the only Commonwealth country, and the only country in the world in fact, that had established a military covenant. The covenant would have been based on respect and would have obligated not just the government of the day but also governments of the future to prioritize the needs of veterans and their families.

• (1245)

There were many cases I heard about where benefits were not being applied in a fair amount of time, so I was hoping that, by establishing that obligation on the minister, on the government and on future governments, including our government, veterans would have been respected.

The bill dealt with three basic principles; the minister would have to have taken into account, in every act that they undertook, the three principles. The first is that veterans, as well as their families, survivors in the context of what we are talking about today in the so-called gold digger clause, would have been taken into account and been treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

The second principle is that veterans and their duties are unique among Canadians, which I think we can all recognize. There is an obligation to care for veterans because of the sacrifices made by them, and that obligation extends as well to the experience of their families.

The third core principle in the military covenant that I looked to establish through a private member's bill was that the care, treatment and transition of Canadian Armed Forces in and to civilian life would be dealt with in a timely manner.

I have sat on committees and I have been through many Veterans Affairs reports, including the ones involving transition. I think the number, and maybe the member for Yorkton—Melville can correct me, is that there have been about 13 or 14 reports on military members' transitioning into civilian life, but many of the problems are still a problem.

Oftentimes at committees, when witnesses come and make recommendations to the government, the government responds but the reality is that, in many circumstances, nothing gets done. We wonder why veterans and their families are frustrated when consecutive governments do not fulfill their obligation to those veterans. Unfortunately my private member's bill, Bill C-378, which would have established the military covenant, was defeated in 2017. I was extremely disappointed by the fact that we were not able to fulfill that obligation to veterans and their families.

I will remind members again that service extends beyond the battlefield; it is not just about the men and women who are on the front lines protecting our nation, defending peace and security around the world and the rule of law, human rights and human dignities. The service of the families back home, who worry and who are there to support their family while their military member is deployed, in my opinion, is equal to or greater than the member's service and sacrifice itself.

Routine Proceedings

With respect to the clause in question, the report suggested that there were roughly 9,000 people who would be affected by it. It is interesting, because there was a PBO report in 2022 that showed five-year costs would be over \$1.3 billion over those five years. The Canada pension plan 2019-2020 annual report indicated that the removal of the clause would be less than a 2% change, or less than \$1 billion on an annual basis, of \$38.9 billion in payouts.

Let us put that in context in terms of what this nation is spending as far as foreign aid is concerned. Veterans and their families are not unlike anybody else; they see the amount of money that is going towards supporting other nations. They see the amount of waste. They see the amount of money, for example, in the SDTC scandal of \$400 million.

They are able to calculate all the numbers and figure it out, and they ask, “Why are we not looking after ourselves? Why are we not looking after, as a matter of priority, our veterans and their families?” when they see announcements of billions and billions of dollars going towards what they would consider, because they have told me this, ideological pet projects.

I believe it is incumbent upon us to look after our veterans, not just by the words that we say but also by the actions that we take. Bill C-378 would have established the military covenant and provided respect and dignity to our veterans. I stand by everything I have done as veterans affairs critic, and I will stand by veterans now and forever.

• (1250)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the temptation for me is to talk about how frustrating it is to not be able to deal with other legislation, in particular a bill about issues going from military courts into civilian courts for military personnel who have been subjected to sexual abuse. That bill would have been a wonderful thing to talk about today.

Having said that, we are spending time talking about our veterans, which is a great issue and something I am exceptionally sympathetic to. The member just mentioned he is quite proud of his record. The leader of the Conservative Party sat around a cabinet table where they actually cut seven veterans' offices across the country. Does he have any regrets in making those cuts?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I did not make those cuts.

I think I acknowledged the difficulties coming out of the 2015 election that I had to face as critic for veterans affairs. I had to answer many of the questions that were given to me, which I did it honestly and forthrightly, not in a manner that would allow veterans to be told otherwise. It is the only way I can say it.

Veterans can smell it from a mile away. We have to be honest with them. We have to tell them why. They may not agree, and in many cases they do not. However, if we can do something, we tell them that we can do it, and if we cannot do something, we tell them why. Veterans and their families are tired of being used as political pawns. They want to see action on not just the issue before us but on many other issues as well.

• (1255)

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I definitely congratulate my colleague and welcome the news about trying to explain why to veterans.

Seventeen years ago, when the Harper government was in place, a gentleman named Walt qualified for a pension. He says:

My stress level is resulting sometimes in restless nights. I'm continually assessing our resources. I want Norma to be able to live in her own home and continue to be an integral part of this community. I want to grant her the benefits of my pension and give us peace of mind. I'm running out of sunsets, and this issue is heavy on my heart.

He waited and is still waiting, almost two decades later. Why is that? Can the member explain to veterans across the country why the Conservatives did not ensure that the survivor's benefit was an option for folks like Norma?

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I do not have an answer for that. If I did, I would tell the member. What I can say now, and as I started my speech with, is that with one fell swoop of a pen, the Minister of Veterans Affairs can do anything she wants. Future ministers, with that same pen, can make amends and correct the wrongs of the past. That can be done. The minister has that power; I do not have that power as an individual. However, I can say that I do not disagree with the member on the matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the survivor's benefit cannot be transferred if someone decides to get married after they turn 60. This rule is practically antediluvian. I was not even born when it came into effect. My father was not even born then. My grandfather was not even born then. I am not even sure if my great-grandfather was born then.

It is important to understand that, in 1930, a man's life expectancy was 60 years. In 1945, a man's life expectancy was 65 years. Maybe it makes sense that, back then, getting remarried at the end of one's life might raise the government's suspicions, hence not wanting to allow pension transfers under those circumstances.

Today, a man's average life expectancy is around 80 years. Now, 2024 is not 1930, nor is it 1945. Society has evolved both in terms of life expectancy and in terms of lifestyle. I would like to know if my colleague thinks that the government should evolve, too.

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Bloc member.

A lot has changed in Canada over the years. That pension rule may have been acceptable in the first part of the last century, but a lot has changed now. People live longer and marry for love. People do not simply get married because someone has come back from the war. Things have changed a lot in this country, which is more modern.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it means a great deal to me to be able to stand in this place today and speak to the issues that are impacting our veterans and, specifically, this one issue.

As the previous speaker mentioned, I had the privilege of being the deputy shadow minister for Veterans Affairs when I first came in as a brand-new member of Parliament, and I was able to travel with my colleague across Canada to ensure that we were really learning and hearing what veterans and what Canadian Armed Forces members had to say. That was in 2015, following 10 years of the previous Conservative government.

I remember being told a great deal about new veterans. They are new veterans, not modern-day veterans, as they hate being called that. The next generation of veterans was very upset with the fact that they came back from Afghanistan to a whole new set of rules around care for them with the new veterans charter, which was created just before the Liberal government fell and was adopted by the entire House without the proper oversight.

Since then, it has been a challenge for veterans to appreciate what the new veterans charter did, and now it has been changed more and more. Conservatives say, if we are going to spend a dollar, we have to take a dollar from somewhere else, but this is just a pile-on of one program after another. It is very confusing for our veterans, and they deserve better than they have.

I can say, as my colleague did, there are things here that need to be put right. I have been on the veterans affairs committee for a decade now. I am into my 10th year. My colleague was absolutely right. We have studied transitioning to death and given recommendations. Witnesses have come and talked about what needs to be done to make this means of taking care of our veterans smooth, transparent and fast, but nothing has changed. If anything, things have gotten more difficult. It shows partially the inability of the National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces to work with Veterans Affairs through a seamless transition.

In the government's response to this very issue, it says that the Government of Canada agrees with most of these recommendations. However, it then goes on to explain that:

The Minister of National Defence, under the CFSA, is responsible for the overall management of the pension plan.... In support of the Minister's role, the Department of National Defence [and] Canadian Armed Forces...are responsible for the oversight of the pension plan, contribution calculations, financial analysis [and all of that].

Then it says the Minister of Public Safety is responsible for the RCMP part, and here is what it says about the Minister of Veterans Affairs: "The Minister of Veterans Affairs has no authority over any superannuation acts."

The minister has no authority, even though the government made a big to-do about making this a seamless transition and that the departments were going to work well together. The government made the Minister of Veterans Affairs the Associate Minister of National Defence, yet, somehow still, nothing seems to be able to be done to solve a lot of these issues.

I can appreciate the fact that, as the member from the Bloc said, this reflects something from, my goodness, decades ago, when the average age of a man, in general, was 60. Today, I am way past that age. I can tell colleagues that 68 is the new 50, just saying. The truth of the matter is that we are functioning in an archaic environment and not taking care of our veterans the way we should be. As a matter of fact, there is proof of that in the way that veterans are feeling about how they are being cared for.

● (1300)

I have the supplementary estimates that we discussed and spoke with the minister about just recently. This is really important. The government asked for an additional \$942.5 million in the supplementary estimates. That is a lot of money.

The bulk of the requested appropriations, the Liberals said, was for pain and suffering compensation applications. It represents an increase of 51.6% compared to what was in the main estimates, so it is a huge jump in funding for pain and suffering. The explanation was that the additional funding is needed to respond to an increase in the number of benefit applications, which includes the pain and suffering, but also higher than expected numbers of veterans who are opting for a lump sum instead of monthly payments.

Huge numbers of veterans are saying, "I'm leaving. I'm getting my pain and suffering. I want it all and I want it now." They no longer have confidence because of the way the government has treated our Canadian Armed Forces and treated our veterans over the course of these last nine years.

Since the Liberals came into power, what we are seeing and what I hear quietly said over and over again by our veterans is, "Here we are in another decade of darkness." That is what they called it the last time the Liberals were in power and decimated the Canadian Armed Forces. There is no way that the government is taking care of our veterans. Right off the bat, the government said the veterans were asking for more than it could give, but there is this slush fund. The Liberals have their friends to take care of.

The confidence of our veterans and our armed forces in the government is pretty well nil. As my colleague asked, do we have work to do when we form government shortly? We absolutely do. Do our veterans know that we have not done everything right in the past? They absolutely do, and we are open about that. At the same time, our veterans are facing the same challenges that every Canadian is.

There are veterans' food banks that cannot keep their shelves full because of the need that is out there. There are more veterans who are homeless now, because they cannot afford rent. They cannot afford a home. There are veterans now who are on the street or couch surfing, because they do not have the ability to take care of themselves or their families. They feel guilty, so they have left their homes and their families.

There is no question that our veterans are not being cared for the way they should be. I have had the privilege of being part of the women veterans study, reflecting on the largest study that has ever been done, actually no study was done until this one was done, on our women serving within the armed forces. It is frightening what they have had to go through.

We have a great deal of work to do to improve life for our armed forces, but I can assure members of two things: We will care for them while they are serving, and we will provide what they need to go to war, something that this government pretends it does not have a role in. We will care for our veterans in ways that meet their needs, and when there is a situation where something cannot be done the way that they would want it to be done, we will have our conversations and we will do our best to come to a consensus. There will be true conversations, rather than organizations of veterans groups set up that the government rarely reaches out to, but claims to have that relationship.

I am so pleased to see that we could have the opportunity very shortly to give credence to what we are saying with what we will do.

• (1305)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting when we listen to Conservatives speak on the whole issue of veterans. I could talk about the veterans' offices that they shut down. There were literally nine of them across the country, but what really intrigues me is the fact that this particular member, along with the leader of the Conservative Party, and in fairness she did not have a choice as she has to follow her leader, actually voted against supports for veterans. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars.

Can the member tell us why she votes against them? On a side point, why did she agree with her leader to shut down nine veterans' offices across the country?

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased. I was worried that the member would not ask me that question. Here is the truth that needs to be shared in the House, which veterans know. When we took government and had to deal with the extreme load of debt of the previous government, we went to every department and said that we needed them to help out and to please inform us of where cuts could be made. I think it was 5% with Veterans Affairs. We would then respond to that. The decision to cut those nine offices came from the bureaucracy of Veterans Affairs.

I can tell the member that in my city of Regina, I went to the office when they reopened it. The bulletproof glass was there. The lights were all off. I knocked on the glass, trying to get someone's attention. Finally, someone came. I said that I was the new member for Yorkton—Melville and that I would love to come and just thank them for what they are doing.

Do we know what? My veterans asked why they did not leave it where they put it, in the mall. We could—

• (1310)

The Deputy Speaker: I was too optimistic there.

Routine Proceedings

It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith every question on the motion now before the House.

[*Translation*]

The question is on the motion that this question be now put.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, given this important report, to broaden respect and services for veterans, respecting their spouses, we would ask for a recorded vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division stands deferred until later this day at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

* * *

PETITIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to represent my constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands, acknowledging that I work on the territory of the WSÁNEĆ people, today standing on the lands of the Algonquin and Anishinabe people. I acknowledge their extraordinary generosity and patience.

Petitioners have asked me to present the following, calling to the House's attention that Canada is legally bound by the terms of the Paris Agreement to seek to hold the global average temperature increase to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The government must take, according to the petitioners, bold climate action to ensure that we play our part to avoid runaway climate change.

The petitioners urge the government to set more ambitious targets so that we have any hope of holding to 1.5°C, and work with provinces for the combined efforts, federally and provincially, to reduce greenhouse gases dramatically.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to be as brief as possible:

We, the undersigned citizens and residents of Canada, draw the attention of the House of Commons to the following:

Whereas:

Louis Roy of the Quebec College of Physicians recommended expanding euthanasia—

—

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As you know, we are not supposed to be reading petitions into the record.

The Deputy Speaker: I want to make sure that we are summarizing the petitions that we are presenting.

The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall: Mr. Speaker, the petitioners are calling on Canada to do the following: because Louis Roy of the Quebec college of physicians recommended expanding euthanasia to babies, from birth to one year of age, who come into the world with severe deformities or very serious syndromes, this proposal for the legalized killing of infants is deeply disturbing to many Canadians, and infanticide is always wrong. These citizens are calling on the Government of Canada to block any attempt to allow the killing of children. This will probably take a new government.

FALUN GONG

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in regard to the Falun Gong. It is a traditional Chinese spiritual discipline, consisting of meditation exercises and moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion and tolerance. We are very concerned about the fact that the Chinese Communist Party is persecuting practitioners extensively.

Canadian lawyer David Matas and former Canadian secretary of state for Asia-Pacific David Kilgour have investigated and they have information on that. The Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting has over 1.5 million petition signatures. The European Parliament has passed a resolution condemning this behaviour.

Therefore, they are requesting that the Canadian government pass a resolution to establish measures to stop the Chinese Communist regime, amend Canadian legislation to combat forced organ harvesting and to publicly, if the government would, please, call for an end to the persecution of the Falun Gong in China.

• (1315)

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a very important petition to present to the House.

The petitioners are bringing to the attention of the government the RCMP's recent report that the Government of India has interfered in Canada's elections and murdered, threatened and extorted Canadians on Canadian soil. The petitioners also indicate how deeply troubling they find it that foreign interference is occurring in Canada.

The petitioners also mention that they are concerned that the leader of the Conservative Party has not received his security clearance. They are calling upon the leader of the Conservative Party to get his security clearance, and take the action necessary to help stop foreign governments from interfering in Canada and targeting Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as coincidence has it, I, too, have a petition on the very same issue.

The petitioners are asking that the leader of the Conservative Party get the security clearance, given the issue of foreign interfer-

ence. What we have witnessed in Canada is everything from extortion to murder to interference in the leadership of the Conservative Party through foreign interference. We have had Conservative MPs involved in foreign interference.

What the petitioners really want to see is the leader of the Conservative Party doing the honourable thing and getting the security clearance.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present petitions on behalf of Canadians from across the country.

The first petition I have to present today is about concerns around what is going on in Turkey, Pakistan and Bahrain, where officials have committed gross violations against human rights. The petitioners are concerned about over 300,000 people who are being jailed without reason. Several international human rights groups have confirmed gross human rights violations happening in Turkey.

The petitioners are calling on Canada to closely monitor this situation and to place sanctions on 12 Turkish officials who are responsible for these atrocities. The petitioners also call on the Turkish, Pakistani and Bahraini governments to end all violations against human rights in their country.

MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition comes from Canadians from across the country who are concerned with the attacks on religious freedom within the Canadian Armed Forces.

These Canadians support the Canadian Armed Forces chaplaincy program, and believe that our servicemen and servicewomen should retain the right to public expression of religion. For many of our men and women in uniform, the courage and conviction to risk their lives is rooted in their faith.

The petitioners call on the Liberal government to honour our Canadian traditions of public prayer and to stop undermining the rights of Canadian veterans.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition I am presenting comes from Canadians from across the country who are concerned with the expansion of medical assistance in dying, and that Parliament is to consider the priority to ensure that supports are in place for mental health for everyone in Canada.

The petitioners also note that vulnerable Canadians must be given suicide prevention rather than suicide assistance. Folks who have signed this petition are also concerned that medical assistance in dying risks normalizing suicide as a solution for suffering from mental illness.

The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support Bill C-314 to stop the expansion of medical assistance in dying to those with mental illness.

FIREARMS

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the next petition comes from Canadians across the country who are in support of the health and safety of Canadian firearms owners.

The petitioners recognize the importance of owning firearms, and they note that this is a part of our Canadian heritage. The petitioners also note that there is sometimes a significant impact of hearing loss caused by the use of firearms.

The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to recognize the use of sound moderators as hearing protection devices in Canada. The petitioners call on the government to protect legal firearm owners by the use of these devices.

* * *

• (1320)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED MISLEADING STATEMENTS BY MEMBER IN COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising with respect to the notice of a question of privilege, which I provided to you under Standing Order 48, concerning the third and final report of the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, which was tabled in the House of Commons earlier today.

In brief, when the member for Eglinton—Lawrence, then the minister of public safety, appeared before the committee on April 26, 2022, he made repeated assertions that the NDP-Liberal government invoked the Emergencies Act at the request of law enforcement. This now-infamous claim by the former minister, made at the committee table, went viral—

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is always important in a question of privilege to be factually correct. The former minister would not have referred to the “NDP-Liberal government”. Therefore, I would ask that the member respect the rules around a question of privilege and stick with the facts.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. member's intervention with respect to that. I will again just remind those who are presenting questions of privilege here to be factual and, of course, as efficient as they can with the time they have before them and stick to the facts.

Privilege

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, this now infamous claim by the former minister, which was made at the committee table, went viral as police officer after police officer and official after official denied it before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and before the Public Order Emergency Commission. Documentary evidence further substantiated just how wrong the former minister's claim was.

With all reports from all three bodies now formally before the House in the present session, the House is seized with irreconcilable claims for which the air must be cleared. As we know, it is a contempt to mislead the House of Commons or any of its committees. I will therefore argue that the member for Eglinton—Lawrence deliberately misled the special joint committee, giving rise to a prima facie contempt.

The committee's third report details, in the first paragraph of the justification section of chapter 7, under “Invocation of the Emergencies Act”, the former minister's evidence to the committee on April 26, 2022, which states:

Some witnesses before the Committee cited the public safety concerns as justification for Cabinet's decision to invoke the Emergencies Act. For instance, [the] former Minister...told the Committee that the federal government received advice “that law enforcement needed the Emergencies Act to be sure that they [would] resolve, for example, ambiguities around those who were staying close to ports of entry.” He reiterated that “we invoked the Act because it was the advice of non-partisan professional law enforcement that existing authorities were ineffective at the time to restore public safety.”

For good measure, the former minister's other comments to the committee that night include the following:

The government remained engaged with [further] enforcement throughout to ensure that they had the support and the resources they needed. However, when efforts using existing authorities proved ineffective, the advice we received was to invoke the Emergencies Act.

He went on to say, “The advice we were getting was that law enforcement needed the Emergencies Act”. He was also quoted as saying, “As we took our decision in what we could do to respond, we were following the advice of various levels of law enforcement, including the RCMP and...commissioners”.

That last quote is particularly important, bearing in mind what the committee reported, beginning at the 10th paragraph of the section on co-operation among different levels of policing found in chapter 5, “Police Response to the ‘Freedom Convoy’”. It states:

There is evidence to suggest that police leadership had not exhausted all available tools to bring the protests and blockades to their conclusion when the federal government decided to invoke the Emergencies Act. At the [Public Order Emergency] Commission, a 14 February 2022 email from [then commissioner of the RCMP] Brenda Lucki to the chief of staff to [the] former Minister...states that:

This said, I am of the view that we have not yet exhausted all available tools that are already available through the existing legislation. There are [circumstances] where charges could be laid under existing authorities for various Criminal Code offences occurring right now in the context of the protest. The Ontario Provincial Emergencies Act just enacted will also help in providing additional deterrent tools to our existing toolbox.

These existing tools are considered in our existing plans and will be used in due course as necessary.

Privilege

I want to pause for a moment to note three things. First, on September 22, 2022, the committee adopted a motion with a view to achieving efficiencies in its own proceedings. It states:

...deem the evidence, including testimony and documents, received by, and published on the websites of, standing committees of the House of Commons and the Public Order Emergency Commission, in relation to the February 2022 public order emergency and matters consequential to it, to have been received by this Committee and may [have been] used in its reports....

Secondly, as we know from the Rouleau commission records, the former minister's chief of staff forwarded the RCMP commissioner's message directly to the then minister. It is Rouleau commission document ssm.nsc.can.00002280.

Thirdly, former commissioner Lucki's statement about not exhausting all available tools was emboldened with red lettering to attract the attention of the minister's eye.

• (1325)

It is clear that the member for Eglinton—Lawrence was put on clear notice that invoking the Emergencies Act was not the RCMP's advice, in sharp contrast to what he had claimed at the committee table. Going back to the third report, picking up four paragraphs later, we read, “[then Ottawa police chief] Peter Sloly told the Committee that the [Ottawa Police Service] had a plan ready to clear downtown Ottawa, and the [Ottawa Police Service] maintained control of the plan during his tenure as chief of police.”

His tenure ended the day after the Emergencies Act was invoked. Mr. Sloly testified before the committee on October 6, 2022, and is quoted on page three of the evidence saying, “There were no explicit conversations that I had with other levels of government regarding declarations of the Emergencies Act at all three levels.” He then immediately clarified this, adding, “We did have conversations with the City of Ottawa around their emergency, but not the other two levels of government.”

Other witnesses before the special joint committee also testified that they had not requested the invocation of the Emergencies Act. The then RCMP commissioner Brenda Lucki is quoted on page 10 of the evidence for May 10, 2022, saying, “No, there was never a question of requesting the Emergencies Act.” When pressed to confirm that statement about whether she ever asked for the invocation of the act, she firmly answered, “No.”

The then emergency preparedness minister, now the Minister of National Defence, testified on June 14, 2022, at pages 22 and 23 of the evidence, that he had not heard any advice or request from the police asking for the invocation of the Emergencies Act, adding, “Quite frankly, I would have been quite surprised if the police had actually made a policy recommendation or asked for any legislative authority.”

On October 27, 2022, former Ottawa mayor Jim Watson confirmed, at page 14 of the evidence, that he had not sought any emergency declarations. On November 3, 2022, Ontario police commissioner, Tom Carrique, confirmed, at page 17 of the evidence, “I can tell you that I am telling you the absolute truth, sir. At no point did I provide or request that the Emergencies Act be invoked.” He then added, “I did not provide any advice of that nature, nor am I aware of anyone from my legal team providing such advice.”

Those statements alone show there was irreconcilable evidence before the committee, which has now been reported to the House, but the concern just does not stop there. In parallel to the special joint committee's work, our procedure and House affairs committee was conducting its own study of security arrangements on or near Parliament Hill, hearing from a number of pertinent policing and security witnesses who appeared in the aftermath of the former minister's famous claim.

The evidence that it heard was reported to the House in that committee's 19th report, tabled on December 14, 2022. Firstly, on page 13, we read the former minister's own take:

During the appearance by [the then minister of public services and procurement and the then minister of public safety], some members of the Committee asked questions about the invocation of the Emergencies Act. In particular, it was asked which police agency asked for the Emergencies Act to be invoked?

In response, [the member for Eglinton—Lawrence] stated that

there was a very strong consensus among law enforcement that the Emergencies Act was necessary as stipulated in the letter from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police....

Turning to page 23 of the 19th report, we see, “When asked about the invocation of the Emergencies Act by the federal government, [the then Ottawa interim police chief, Steve] Bell stated the [Ottawa Police Service] had had conversations with its partners and political ministries, but did not directly request that the Act be invoked.” Former chief Bell later testified before the special joint committee on November 3, 2022, at page 2 of the evidence, that, “No, we never made a direct request for the invocation of the act.”

• (1330)

Later in that same meeting, on page 9, he confirmed, “That's correct. There was no direct request made from the Ottawa Police Service.”

Now, let us go back to the procedure and house affairs committee's 19th report on page 26. It says, “Asked whether the [Police Service of Gatineau] was able to manage the disruptions in Gatineau caused by the Freedom Convoy, [Service Director] Mr. [Luc] Beaudoin indicated that it was able to do so, in particular thanks to the collaboration of its partners and the coordination centre.”

Moving to page 29, we learn this:

When asked if the [Parliamentary Protective Service] had requested the invocation of the Emergencies Act in February 2022, [then acting service director, Superintendent] Mr. [Larry] Brookson answered no. He noted that there was no benefit whatsoever in the invocation of the Emergencies Act for PPS, because it is not a policing organization, so it received no additional powers through the Act.

I would pause here to add that former Superintendent Brookson confirmed this evidence for the special joint committee during his appearance there on September 29, 2022, on page 10, of the evidence.

Mr. Sloly, the former Ottawa police chief, had also appeared before the procedure and House affairs committee, which reported on page 37, “that he did not ask the federal government to invoke the Emergencies Act. He was not aware of anyone making that request in the [Ottawa Police Service].”

The then Ottawa City manager, Steve Kanellakos, was also a witness, and in the 19th report, on page 48, it states, “Mr. Kanellakos was asked by the Committee whether the [Ottawa Police Service] had requested the invocation of the Emergencies Act. In response, he stated that he was not aware of any such request.”

Mr. Kanellakos, in his opening statement to the special joint committee on October 27, 2022, on page three of the evidence, also said, “To my knowledge, the city never requested the invocation of the act.”

Next, let us turn to the report of the Public Order Emergency Commission, which was tabled in the House on February 17, 2023, sessional paper 8530-441-17.

First, on page 115 of volume 1, Commissioner Rouleau wrote:

A question that arose during the Commission’s hearings was whether Cabinet was advised of Commissioner Lucki’s view that not all existing tools had yet been exhausted in Ottawa. She had expressed this view to [the former minister’s] chief of staff less than an hour before the Cabinet meeting began, but this was not passed on to Cabinet.

Later, the commissioner expanded on this on page 92 of volume 3. He said:

A question that arose during the Commission’s hearings was whether Cabinet was advised of Commissioner Lucki’s view that not all existing tools had yet been exhausted in Ottawa. Less than an hour before the Cabinet meeting began, Commissioner Lucki responded to an email request from [the former] Minister[s]...Chief of Staff, Mike Jones, for a list of emergency measures that might assist law enforcement in bringing the protests under control. Commissioner Lucki suggested a number of tools but added that in her view, all of the tools available through existing legislation had not yet been exhausted. She noted that there were instances where charges could be laid under the Criminal Code, and that [Ottawa]’s recent declaration of emergency would also help in providing additional tools.

Mr. Jones forwarded Commissioner Lucki’s email to [the former minister] and Deputy Minister [Robert] Stewart half an hour before the Cabinet meeting began. The comment about the sufficiency of existing tools was not incorporated into the speaking notes that Commissioner Lucki sent to [the former] Minister...and the [then national security intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister, Jody Thomas] a few minutes before the start of the meeting.

In addition to these three reports, the former minister testified to the special joint committee, which is also contradicted by the government’s response to Order Paper Question No. 613, signed by the then minister’s parliamentary secretary. Through this written question, the government was asked, “With regard to the government’s invocation of the Emergencies Act earlier this year: did any police force make a request for the Act to be invoked, and, if so, what are the specific details of any such requests, including which police forces submitted a request, and on what date each such request was received by the government?”

• (1335)

The then parliamentary secretary’s response danced around the heart of the question, but she nevertheless answered, “the RCMP did not request for the act to be invoked”. She reiterated, “With regard to the RCMP, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police did not make a request for the act to be invoked.”

Privilege

All in all, the former minister’s claim to the special joint committee, found in its report that is now before the House, has been flatly contradicted by all other evidence on the question before the House.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, at page 81, provides a list of established grounds for contempt, including “deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee (by way of statement, evidence, or petition)”. This point is reiterated at page 112.

For its part, the United Kingdom House of Commons Committee of Privileges has also recently considered the matter of a minister misleading Parliament. That committee’s fifth report, tabled in June 2023, notes at paragraph 6 that “misleading intentionally or recklessly, refusing to answer legitimate questions, or failing to correct misleading statements, impedes or frustrates the functioning of the House and is a contempt.”

The importance of accurate information being provided to Parliament has been underscored in a number of rulings in this House, including by your predecessor, Mr. Speaker, on March 3, 2014, at page 3430 of the Debates, which states:

This incident highlights the primordial importance of accuracy and truthfulness in our deliberations. All members bear a responsibility, individually and collectively, to select the words they use very carefully and to be ever mindful of the serious consequences that can result when this responsibility is forgotten.

The United Kingdom’s privileges committee, meanwhile, explained, at paragraph 8 of its fourth report, tabled in March 2023, the following:

The expectation is that when the House hears from Ministers, what it hears is the truth as far as the Minister knows it. The House considers legislation and scrutinises government activity on the basis that what it is told is accurate. Parliament expects and requires proactive candour and transparency. This is what is necessary for the House to do its job properly. If a Minister makes an inadvertent error they are expected to correct it at the earliest opportunity. Mistakes inevitably happen and corrections are made routinely. There are, every year, roughly 100 corrections per year by Ministers who have inadvertently misled the House. The more important the issue, the more seriously the House will take any question of misleading.

There is a well-established test for determining whether deliberately misleading information has been provided, which, for example, the Speaker explained in his February 15 ruling, at page 21158 of the Debates:

It must be proven that the statement was misleading; it must be established that, when making a statement, the member knew it to be incorrect; and finally, it must be demonstrated that the member intended to mislead the House.

In the circumstances, I would respectfully submit that all three branches of this test can be made out.

First, the overwhelming body of evidence, in fact, basically every source of evidence other than the former minister himself, which I have already quoted, contradicts the former minister. There can be no reasonable conclusion other than the fact that his statement to the committee was misleading.

Privilege

Second, the email from the then RCMP commissioner to the former minister's chief of staff, who in turn forwarded it to his boss, makes it quite clear that the former minister was on notice of the actual opinion of the country's top cop. In the face of it, how could he plausibly claim that law enforcement actually made the request?

Third, the context of the former minister's comment, in trying to manage concerns regarding an extraordinary assertion of legal powers by the federal cabinet in response to a protest against its policies, is one that goes to explain the likely intention behind it: to syndicate the responsibilities for such a controversial decision onto the shoulders of non-political institutions like the police and away from the political actors who actually took the decision.

• (1340)

In any event, intention is not something that, I would respectfully submit, requires, at this stage, ironclad proof, like a confession. Indeed, the procedure and House affairs committee, at paragraph 15 of its 50th report, presented in March 2002, explicitly acknowledges that intention may well be a matter for committee investigation:

As [then clerk of the House] Mr. Corbett explained to the Committee, it is not uncommon for inaccurate statements to be made in the course of debate or Question Period in the House. The issue is whether the statements were made deliberately, with the intent of misleading the House or its Members. In the case where a Member later admits to having knowingly provided false information—as in the Profumo case—the issue of intent is clear. In the absence of such an admission, however, it rests with the Committee to examine all of the circumstances and determine whether the evidence demonstrates an intention to mislead.

The procedure and House affairs committee continued in the same vein at paragraph 39 of the same report, noting that, at times, inferences must be drawn to establish intent:

Intent is always a difficult element to establish, in the absence of an admission or confession. It is necessary to carefully review the context surrounding the incident involved, and to attempt to draw inferences based on the nature of the circumstances. Any findings must, however, be grounded on facts and have an evidentiary basis.

At Westminster, meanwhile, the privileges committee, in its fourth report, wrote at paragraph 6:

If a statement was misleading, we will consider whether that was inadvertent, reckless or intentional. If we conclude it was in any way reckless or intentional we will consider what sanction to recommend to the House. It will be for the House to decide whether to accept or reject our conclusions and recommendations.

It might also be worth noting here the related footnote, footnote 4, of that report:

We emphasise that the Committee is not a court of law, it is a select committee of Parliament, and its processes are parliamentary rather than forensic. The Committee will adopt plain-English definitions of key concepts as used in a parliamentary context.

Parliamentary Privilege in Canada, second edition, at page 234, explains that “before the House will be permitted by the Speaker to embark on a debate in such circumstances...[it must be demonstrated] that a Member of the House of Commons was intentionally misled or an admission of facts that leads naturally to the conclusion that a Member was intentionally misled”. The long list of contradictory evidence would, I suggest, lead naturally to the very strong inference, if not the conclusion, that the special joint committee was intentionally misled.

Next, I wish to address another matter concerning this question of privilege, namely the requirement to rise in a timely manner. On first blush, raising a concern about something that was said over 31 months ago would not be considered timely. However, since it happened in a committee, the clock only started from the moment the third report was tabled in the House, which was this morning. It would have been premature to have raised this concern any sooner.

As Mr. Speaker Regan said on September 27, 2016, at page 5175 of the Debates:

the Speaker cannot pass judgment on matters that are not properly before the House. The authority of the Speaker is limited to studying evidence before the House, such as statements made in the House or matters detailed in reports from committees, and not evidence gleaned from other sources.

Mr. Speaker, your immediate predecessor held on May 11, 2021, at page 7023 of the Debates, “There is no precedent where the Chair has used testimony from a committee without there being a report on the subject.”

• (1345)

This rationale was more fully elaborated on by Speaker Milliken, on February 10, 2011, at page 8030, in a comment quite relevant to the present case, given that the former minister's wild claim became a matter of considerable discussion on the floor of the House:

...the Chair was limited in its ability to act on the full range of that review since much of the proceedings referred to in member's submissions were never officially placed in the hands of the House. The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader was not mistaken in his assertion that any and all statements made in committee, even when those have been repeated verbatim in the House, remain the business of the committee until such time as it elects to report them officially to the House.

...It may sound overly technical but the reality is that when adjudicating cases of this kind, the Chair is obliged to reference material fully and properly before the House.

However, now the information is fully and squarely before the House, in the form of the third report, the procedure and House affairs committee's 19th report and the Rouleau commission's report, as well as the Order Paper question response I quoted. We are now faced with the concern expressed by the Speaker on March 3, 2014, at page 3430 of the Debates:

At the same time, the fact remains that the House continues to be seized of completely contradictory statements. This is a difficult position in which to leave members, who must be able to depend on the integrity of the information with which they are provided to perform their parliamentary duties.

In that case, the Chair found a *prima facie* case of privilege, just as Speaker Milliken did on February 1, 2002, at page 8581 of the Debates, when he said:

The authorities are consistent about the need for clarity in our proceedings and about the need to ensure the integrity of the information provided by the government to the House. Furthermore, in this case, as hon. members have pointed out, integrity of information is of paramount importance since it directly concerns the rules of engagement for Canadian troops involved in the conflict in Afghanistan, a principle that goes to the very heart of Canada's participation in the war against terrorism.

...in deciding on alleged questions of privilege, it is relatively infrequent for the Chair to find *prima facie* privilege; it is much more likely that the Speaker will characterize the situation as “a dispute as to facts”. But in the case before us, there appears to be in my opinion no dispute as to the facts. I believe that both the minister and other hon. members recognize that two versions of events have been presented to the House.

...On the basis of the arguments presented by hon. members and in view of the gravity of the matter, I have concluded that the situation before us where the House is left with two versions of events is one that merits further consideration by an appropriate committee, if only to clear the air.

The same motivation, to clear the air, also inspired another *prima facie* finding by the Chair, on March 9, 2011, as well as the 2014 case I cited.

While the present circumstances do not relate to Canadian participation in conflict abroad, they do relate to the justification for the invocation of the Emergencies Act, a decision that allowed cabinet to legislate without regard to the authority of Parliament or to the usual constitutional divisions of power. A decision of this magnitude must be supported with clarity and integrity of information, just as Speaker Milliken had insisted concerning the deployment of JTF 2 soldiers in Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I would submit that the necessary thresholds have been made out here, allowing for you to make a *prima facie* finding. To allow for the air to be fully and properly cleared, I intend to propose referring the matter to the procedure and House affairs committee so that we might get a definitive report on the issue.

In conclusion, Parliament deserves to receive clear and definitive answers to questions. It must be entitled to the truth. On a matter about sidelining Parliament's own legislative and constitutional authority, the stakes are even higher. That is why I urge you to find a *prima facie* case of privilege in relation to the member for Eglinton—Lawrence in his testimony to the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, for which I am prepared to move an appropriate motion.

• (1350)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will have to review the matter in terms of the way it was presented and possibly come back to the House. It might take me an hour or so to respond to it in great depth, but I will do my best to try to get back to the House, if there is a need to, in the not-too-distant future.

ACCESS OF MEMBERS TO PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP also reserves the right to intervene, but I am rising to respond to what was a frivolous question of privilege raised by the Conservative member for Thornhill a few days ago.

I wanted to start by referencing the fact that, when we look at *prima facie* cases of privilege on obstruction, in every case that has been adjudicated by the House, the question of privilege was raised the same day or the subsequent day. I am thinking of the member for Milton in 2017, the member for Toronto—Danforth in 2015, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley in 2015, the member for Acadie—Bathurst in 2014, the member for Winnipeg Centre in 2012, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in

Privilege

2011 and the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord in 2004.

In the case of the frivolous question of privilege from the member for Thornhill, she waited four days before she rose in the House. She rose in the House to obstruct the member for Burnaby South, who was speaking on the NDP opposition day.

The reality is that this type of weaponizing of a question of privilege is yet another example of how Conservatives are disregarding the Standing Orders we have that clearly govern our activities. The member for Thornhill added to the frivolous question of privilege by raising a whole range of false allegations that have subsequently been repudiated by the member for Edmonton Strathcona, the member for Winnipeg Centre and the member for Hamilton Centre. Given this fact, I think it is very clear that this was a weaponizing of a question of privilege and, yet again, a frivolous question of privilege from the member for Thornhill. She has certainly done this before.

I wanted to raise two citations from our procedural bible, which is what governs our activities in the House. First, I will reference Speaker Milliken's decision from November 5, 2009. At that time, Speaker Milliken had occasion to rule on a strikingly similar incident and referenced a number of other incidents where there were false allegations of a member having knowledge of or being complicit in a disturbance in the galleries. In all of those cases, Speaker Milliken promptly ruled that it was not a question of privilege. This is another example of that. In the case of the member for Thornhill, the fact that she sat on it for four days very clearly shows that it was not a question of privilege that is *bona fide*.

The member for South Shore—St. Margarets rose to say that he had to postpone a meeting, and that was his justification in this hour-long weaponization of a question of privilege, which was solely designed to block the member for Burnaby South from speaking on the NDP opposition day. I wanted to reference, again, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, which states the following:

In order to find a *prima facie* breach of privilege, the Speaker must be satisfied that there is evidence to support the Member's claim that he or she has been impeded in the performance of his or her parliamentary functions and that the matter is directly related to a proceeding in Parliament.

The fact that a stakeholder postponed a meeting is not directly related to proceedings in Parliament.

I contrast that, of course, with how the Conservatives acted when we had the takeover of downtown Ottawa, with 600 businesses closed, seniors not being able to get access to groceries and people with disabilities not being able to access their medications. It was a complete calamity. We saw businesses that flew a pride flag being vandalized, with windows broken. The Happy Goat Coffee Company on Elgin Street, for example, was vandalized by convoy extremists. Despite the fact that we had to move through every day with the obstruction, intimidation, insults and jeers that were thrown at members of Parliament, at no point did Conservatives want to entertain any sort of question of privilege there.

Statements by Members

That is a case where there were severe restrictions on parliamentary activity. The case of the member for Thornhill is simply ludicrous. The fact is that sat on it for four days, and she is trying to weaponize a question of privilege. This should be treated as what it very clearly is. After she threw false allegations, she did not respond in any material, factual way in terms of what actually transpired.

• (1355)

We have heard from the member for Winnipeg Centre, the member for Edmonton Strathcona and the member for Hamilton Centre. Each member has repudiated the false allegations that were made that day.

This weaponizing of a question of privilege, raised days after the fact, was solely intended to block the member for Burnaby South from speaking with respect to the NDP's opposition day. This touched on GST relief and making the relief permanent with respect to essential goods, including home heating, cellphone bills and Internet bills, all of which are family essentials. Conservatives opposed this; however, instead of speaking against it in the House, which would have been the honest and honourable thing to do, Conservatives created obstruction that day. They obstructed the member for Burnaby South's ability to intervene, and they raised a series of speeches, none of which touched on the question of privilege in any meaningful way.

I submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that this was a frivolous question of privilege. It should not have been entertained in the first place. The false allegations have been completely repudiated. What that would leave you with, Mr. Speaker, is a rejection of the member for Thornhill's raising of a frivolous matter yet again, which she has done to try to weaponize a question of privilege.

I would implore my Conservative colleagues to start respecting the orders and procedures that govern us, as well as the values and traditions that govern us in this place, and to stop making a mockery of the House of Commons.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to highlight the relentless efforts of Canada's only non-profit organization focused on advancing Lyme disease research. Located in Vaughan, this is the G. Magnotta Foundation.

It is a deeply personal cause to the founder and president, my dear friend, Rossana Magnotta. After losing her beloved husband, Gabe, to Lyme disease, she has rallied our community to raise awareness, fund research and improve Lyme disease testing and treatment for all Canadians.

Just a few weeks ago, the G. Magnotta Foundation renewed its commitment to Lyme disease research with a \$2-million gift over the next two years to the G. Magnotta lab at the University of Guelph. Along with dozens of friends and neighbours, on Septem-

ber 18, I joined Rossana and the lab director, Dr. Melanie Wills, at the annual Vaughan Walk for Lyme to show our community's hope and resolve to combat this terrible disease.

Embodying the G. Magnotta lab's mantra, "Driven by passion. Fueled by philanthropy", the unmatched generosity of Vaughan residents is once again a beacon of hope for a healthier future for all. I thank Rossana and the entire team of the G. Magnotta Foundation for their leadership.

* * *

CHRISTMAS

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 1994, my mother visited me when I was living and studying in England. We toured Canterbury Cathedral, where she wrote out a prayer request. The prayer has stayed with me from that moment on; it was "Salvation for my family." The true gift of salvation came when a baby was born in a manger in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago. It is a gift if we acknowledge who that baby was, who he came to be and what he did on the cross for us. His name was Jesus, Emmanuel, God is with us.

Christmas will not be the same without mom and dad this year, having lost them both in October, but they lived lives of faith and knew Christ. I know hope still remains. The reminder of the gift of salvation comes every Christmas. I want to wish everyone who hears my voice a very merry Christmas and a very happy Scottish Hogmanay. May God bless everyone, and may everyone have a merry Christmas. No one is alone.

* * *

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN MILTON

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a real privilege to highlight two incredible organizations in Milton that are making a profound difference in our community.

I would like to acknowledge the Special Friends Network and its inspiring dream kitchen initiative. By partnering with the Halton Down Syndrome Association, chef Brandon Bousfield and team are creating opportunities for those with special needs to develop employable skills, build confidence and create lasting friendships. With help from the Optimist Club of Milton, they are delivering some of the meals they create to people who need a bit of help over these holidays.

I also want to commend the Tiger Jeet Singh Foundation on its 16th Miracle on Main event. It was amazing. It included a toy and food drive, and it is a true testament to the spirit of giving and celebration. It is very heartwarming to see local families, businesses and volunteers all come together to ensure that every family in Milton, and across Halton region, has a really enjoyable Christmas holiday season.

Both organizations embody the true meaning of community, compassion, generosity and care. I am so proud to support the work they do. I am so grateful to everyone in Milton for building a brighter place for everyone.

I am really looking forward to seeing everybody this year. Merry Christmas and happy holidays.

* * *

[Translation]

SAWMILL'S NEW FACILITIES IN LAC-SAINT-JEAN

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on December 4, my beautiful riding of Lac-Saint-Jean celebrated the official inauguration of the Bois Francs Bio Serra's new facilities. The company will change its name to Mono Serra Group Scierie.

With an investment of nearly \$25 million at a time when the forestry industry is facing numerous challenges, I am both proud and optimistic to see such a project come to life in the municipality of Sainte-Monique. It is a relief for the mayor, for the workers and for the community as a whole.

The company, which is acquiring modern equipment and facilities, will be able to optimize its use of wood fibre, increase its productivity and develop new products. I would be remiss if I did not congratulate Mr. Lifrairie, Mr. Lemay, Mr. Laberge and the entire Mono Serra team on their vision. With this project, Mono Serra has truly found the key to success. Congratulations to the whole team.

* * *

[English]

ORLÉANS

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as 2024 comes to an end, I want to extend my warmest wishes to everyone in the House and to the people of Orléans.

As the representative of the most beautiful riding in Canada, I want to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of the residents of Orléans. Their unwavering support, leadership and dedication to our community has made a profound impact. Together, we have built a strong and vibrant community that I am proud to represent.

● (1405)

[Translation]

I hope this time of year brings peace and joy to all and that everyone will enjoy spending time together with their loved ones.

[English]

I also wish everyone a fantastic start to 2025, a year of new opportunities, dreams realized and continued success. I wish a merry Christmas, happy holidays, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanza and happy new year to Orléans.

Statements by Members

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, the Liberal government has unleashed crime and chaos from coast to coast to coast. Nationwide, violent crime has skyrocketed by 50% since the Prime Minister took office, while violent gun crime has increased by 116%, and they are using weapons that were smuggled over our insecure border.

Let us look at the numbers closer to home. In Saskatoon, crime has absolutely exploded, and it is the result of the decisions made by the out-of-touch NDP-Liberal government. Violent crime is out of control. For youth, it is up over 113% since 2019 alone, and assaults and robberies saw the largest increase. Already, 2024 is the worst year on record for Saskatoon in the number of murders, and the year is not over yet. The NDP-Liberal coalition does not care at all about victims. Only common-sense Conservatives would bring home safe streets by securing our border and giving jail, not bail, to violent, repeat offenders.

* * *

RAY STORTINI

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to the Hon. Ray Stortini, who recently passed away. Ray became one of the first judges of Italian descent appointed to the bench in Ontario. He was a champion for fair representation and legal aid.

Ray was proud of his Italian heritage and west end upbringing in the Sault. He shared his traditions, stories and experience by documenting them and publishing several books. He was a force outside of the courtroom, actively volunteering on many community boards, including the soup kitchen, Ken Brown Recovery Home, Algoma University, the YMCA, Children's Aid Society, Algoma Public Health and the St. Joseph Island Lions Club.

Ray was a family man and a dedicated husband who was always there for his wife, four children, 12 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Ray's motto was, "Leave the woodpile higher than you found it." He was truly a northern Ontario great.

I want to thank Ray for his lifetime of service. He will always be remembered.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Brampton, safety is a major concern. Community safety must be our top priority. Doug Ford's government should make it their priority as well. Instead, they have been blaming the federal government for their failure. The Government of Ontario needs to get its act together. According to a CBC investigative report, since 2020, 56% of charges in Ontario were "withdrawn, stayed, dismissed or discharged before a decision at trial".

Statements by Members

We have passed tougher bail laws, created new offences and tougher penalties. We also gave the Government of Ontario \$121 million to help prevent gun and gang violence. It is time for the province of Ontario to take action, stop playing blame games and provide money for policing and the justice system.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Bernard Génereux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, still today, after nine years under this Prime Minister, Canadians once again have to suffer the consequences of this Liberal government's lack of leadership.

The Prime Minister is having a fiscal spat with his Minister of Finance over the budget, which will certainly exceed the \$40-billion deficit mark, a limit she herself promised. Endless broken Liberal promises are becoming the hallmark of the Liberals. The Prime Minister is imposing inflationary policies and then gets mad at his minister when she, surprise surprise, is unable to manage Canada's economy.

Who is going to replace the Minister of Finance once the Prime Minister fires her? It is none other than Mark Carney, an unelected individual responsible for the carbon tax, who has already penalized Canadians with this inflationary and irresponsible tax.

The solution is simple: They should just stop. They should stop spending, stop increasing taxes, stop the inflation and stop the deficit.

It is not complicated. They should just stop.

* * *

● (1410)

[English]

RED RIVER MÉTIS SELF-GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION AND IMPLEMENTATION TREATY

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 30, I was honoured to attend the signing of the Red River Métis Self-Government Recognition and Implementation Treaty in Treaty 1 territory, the homeland of the Red River Métis, with the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

It was the first of its kind. This co-developed modern treaty will recognize the Manitoba Métis Federation as the government of the Red River Métis with an inherent right to self-government and law-making powers over its own citizenship, elections and other internal operations. Furthermore, this signing marks an important milestone on the path of reconciliation as Canada's first self-government treaty with a Métis government. This is about self-determination as stipulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I look forward to continuing to partner with indigenous governments on future self-government treaties as we move forward towards true reconciliation.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet.

He forced his finance minister to blow through his ridiculously high \$40-billion guardrail, and now he is getting ready to throw her off the fiscal cliff so he can replace her with his phantom finance minister, carbon tax Carney. This is a man who will spend whatever it takes and take our country down with him, as long as he gets to stay on as the Prime Minister. Even members of his own caucus are sounding the alarm on his self-made, miserable, reckless, fiscal disaster.

The Liberal member for Saint John—Rothesay says that it is time to show fiscal restraint. The Liberal member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River says that his preference would be for zero deficits, but admits that it is never going to happen.

The Prime Minister will not listen to his own caucus. He will not listen to anyone, but maybe he will get the message that we have been sending him, again and again. It is time to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime. Let us have an election so our common-sense Conservative team can get our country back on track.

* * *

LEADER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet.

This week the Prime Minister's fake feminism was on spectacular display. He is smashing Canada through the \$40-billion fiscal guardrail and pushing his female finance minister off the glass cliff to make way for carbon tax Carney. He did it with his justice minister, he did it with the Treasury Board president and now he is doing it to the finance minister, after crushing the \$40-billion safeguard she put in place.

Just two days ago, he stood in a room full of equality stakeholders and advocates and said, "I am and always will be a proud feminist". It is beyond insulting that he says that as he actively plots to destroy the \$40-billion fiscal guardrail and replace his female finance minister with an unelected stooge, while blaming the women around him for his poor choices. It is pure hyper hypocrisy.

This fake feminist Prime Minister is not a feminist. He is an opportunist, and he is not worth the cost.

The Speaker: I would just like to remind members about a ruling that I made before about people who are outside of Parliament, to make sure that they are judicious in their choice of words, especially since they cannot be here to defend themselves.

* * *

AFFORDABILITY MEASURES

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to highlight the affordability measures our government is implementing to help Canadians save more of their hard-earned money. Starting on December 14, the new GST and HST tax break will allow Canadians to keep more money in their pockets during this holiday season.

Additionally, we celebrated a significant milestone in affordability and health care this week, the one-year anniversary of the Canadian dental care plan. Since its launch, over 1.2 million Canadians have received vital dental care. Before the CDCP, one in four Canadians skipped dental visits due to financial constraints. Cost should never be a barrier to health care in Canada, and we remain committed to ensuring accessible care for all.

I wish all my constituents and all Canadians a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

* * *

• (1415)

JOHN HORGAN

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about my friend, my former MLA, my constituent, a proud resident of Langford, and the 36th premier of B.C., the Hon. John Horgan.

On Sunday, I will be attending the memorial service for John, where we will gather to honour the lasting legacy he leaves for his family, his community and our beautiful province. I had the privilege of knowing John for almost 20 years, and I have a lot of fond memories of our relationship. He was an excellent purveyor of dad jokes, often repeating them, again and again. Among my favourites was his quips that, in our region, we have to drive west to get to East Sooke, drive east to get back to the west shore and drive north to get to South Cowichan.

The relationship we enjoyed did not change when he was premier. Even when he was at a busy community event surrounded by people, he would always make sure to point me out, saying, “Hey, there’s my MP.”

John was one of a kind. I will sincerely miss him.

* * *

[Translation]

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ASSOCIATION COOPÉRATIVE D'ÉCONOMIE FAMILIALE DE LA RIVE- SUD

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Association coopérative d'économie familiale de la Rive-Sud in Longueuil, or ACEF Rive-Sud, is celebrating 50 years of con-

Statements by Members

tributing to the community as an organization focused on protecting consumer rights and promoting financial literacy.

Since 1974, the ACEF has helped thousands of people manage their personal finances while advocating for responsible consumption. Through consultations, workshops and awareness-raising initiatives, the ACEF has emerged as a key player in promoting financial autonomy and debt prevention. With a committed and caring team, the Longueuil ACEF stands out by its compassionate and personalized approach. It offers critical support when people are at their most vulnerable.

This anniversary is an opportunity to salute the ACEF's tireless workers and volunteers and to recognize its profound impact on the lives of countless families. Today, as we celebrate its half-century of solidarity and dedication to community service, we hope the ACEF will continue to inspire and support people on the path to a more secure financial future.

To all ACEF members, I wish you a happy 50th anniversary.

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[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet. Next week's fall update is teeing up to be yet another dramatic disaster because, at this point, we are not even sure who the finance minister is going to be by Monday.

The Globe and Mail reports that tensions between the Prime Minister and the finance minister have never been worse and are getting more intense by the day. She wanted to run a gigantic \$40-billion deficit, what she called her guardrail. The Prime Minister is pushing her through that guardrail and over the fiscal cliff. We have now learned that he wants to humiliate her further by firing her and replacing her with carbon tax Carney. Even Liberal MPs are calling out all this chaos by saying that the federal budget is “not an unlimited pot” and “we...need to show fiscal restraint.” That is a little late after nine years.

This week, the Prime Minister has lost control of immigration, the border, spending, inflation, the debt and even his ministers. Meanwhile, common-sense Conservatives on this side are fully united behind our leader and are ready for a carbon tax election.

*Oral Questions***TAX RELIEF**

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this holiday, our government followed through on its promise to put more money back into the pockets of Canadians. With a tax cut for everyone, we are making sure that businesses can succeed and that families can have a little less stress this holiday season.

What is the Conservative leader's response? Instead of supporting Canadian workers, the Conservatives are prepared to cut essential services such as child care, health care and pensions, services that Canadians depend upon every day, while doing nothing to reduce costs for families. Canadians deserve better than what the Conservatives are proposing. Our tax cut announcement is a perfect example of how our government is ensuring that workers and families can afford what they need and help save for what they want, while Conservatives shout empty promises.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

FINANCE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet, and the fiscal feud over the \$40-billion guardrail is worse than we ever thought. New reports show that the Prime Minister is set to replace Canada's first female finance minister with his old boys' network pal, carbon tax Carney. Canadians are on the bus, watching in terror as the Prime Minister yanks her out of the driver's seat so that Carney can send us smashing through the guardrail and over the cliff.

Does the finance minister still have her hands on the wheel, and will the deficit be below that \$40-billion guardrail?

• (1420)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the first question from the Conservatives relates to the economy and the finance minister. Let us talk about the work she has been doing on behalf of Canadians.

Yesterday, we had a 50 basis points interest-rate cut announced by the Bank of Canada. That was the fifth time in a row, leading the entire G7, that we have seen the interest rates come down from the Bank of Canada. On Saturday, we have further great news for Canadians, which is a GST tax cut on basic essentials for every Canadian from coast to coast to coast. That is on groceries and things they will buy for their kids for Christmas. That is great news for Canadians, under the leadership of the finance minister.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, even the bank officials admitted that they had to cut rates because the economy is performing so poorly under the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister.

Canada's phantom finance minister has been pulling the strings for a while. Carbon tax Carney has been forcing radical new spending and forcing the finance minister to smash through her \$40-bil-

lion guardrail. Now that Canadians are fed up and angry, the Prime Minister is going to blame the finance minister, dump her and replace her with Carney in a classic example of an incompetent boss blaming subordinates.

Does the finance minister not realize that she is about to join a long list of cabinet ministers who have had their careers and their reputations ruined by the Prime Minister?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am equally delighted that the member is talking about the Bank of Canada because what has the actual Bank of Canada governor said recently? He said, "CPI inflation has been about 2% since the summer, and is expected to average close to...target over the next couple of years."

With respect to inflation, what has Tiff Macklem actually said? He said, "We're no longer trying to get inflation down. Government spending is not pushing against us getting inflation down, we've got it down." That is the handiwork of the finance minister and the government, generating economic growth and being prudent with fiscal management. That is about inflation being on target for 11 straight months.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister had just read a little further, he would have read that this is not because of anything the government has been doing, except causing our economy to slow down and underperform. That is why the bank has taken this step.

A guardrail is something we are supposed to stay far away from. If we even brush up against it, that is a sign we are way off track. If we smash through it, we go flying off a cliff. Now, even Liberal MPs are terrified and are ringing the bell, trying to get off before they smash through the guardrail. One of them said, "I think that if we state that we have a \$40-billion guardrail, we [better] stay within those numbers", and another is begging for a fiscally responsible framework.

Will the Prime Minister allow a free vote, or will he force his Liberal MPs to stay on that bus as it goes—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to reference not just what the domestic Bank of Canada is talking about. Let us talk about what the IMF is stating. The IMF is projecting that Canada will have the strongest economic growth in the G7, on average, in 2023 and 2024. Canada is expected to maintain its position as the country with the smallest deficit as a share of GDP among G7 countries and still, by far, the lowest general government net debt as a share of GDP in the G7.

What is up? It is Canada's growth and leadership of the G7. That is what is up, and we are proud of it.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and of his ministers. I hear there is some sort of spat happening over there. The Minister of Finance promised to cap the deficit at \$40 billion, but the Prime Minister pushed her to spend more.

Will the Prime Minister, a fake feminist, admit that he has already replaced the first female finance minister with the unelected Mark Carney, who is already pulling the strings?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives. When it comes to the economy, Canadians have seen what the Liberal government has delivered. The key interest rate was just cut to 3.25%, which will help families, small businesses and retailers. On top of that, Canadians will soon get a GST break. I know it is Christmastime. I know the Conservatives. Their hearts are in the right place. Let us celebrate this interest rate cut and let us celebrate Canadians and our business owners.

• (1425)

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have seen everything now. An incompetent Prime Minister pushes his Minister of Finance to blow through an already stratospheric \$40-billion deficit, blames her for his failure, and then replaces her with an unelected man. Meanwhile, he struts about on *Equal Voice* and declares himself a feminist. This is sheer hypocrisy.

Will the Prime Minister finally admit that he has turned his minister into a puppet minister by forcing her to break her promise to keep the deficit below \$40 billion?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can see that the members opposite have learned their lesson. I need not even repeat it.

How can a member of the official opposition, a woman from Quebec, attack our Minister of Finance, a woman who introduced the Canada child benefit, who brought in—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I do not like to interrupt members when they are asking a question or responding to one, but I must ask the members for Louis-Saint-Laurent and Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier not to speak until they are recognized by the Chair.

I would ask the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard to restart her answer.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier: Mr. Speaker, Conservative men on the other side can shout all they want, it does not bother me at all. That is all part of being a woman who stands up to men.

Oral Questions

It is shameful that, on the opposition side, a woman from Quebec, a work colleague, has the nerve to attack our Minister of Finance, a woman who introduced the Canada child benefit. We implemented a program to help women with child care. We implemented programs to help children—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, important votes usually take place here in the House but, today, that work is being done in the Senate.

Senators are voting on an amendment that would kneecap Bill C-282 and prevent it from protecting supply management. Unelected representatives will vote on whether or not they should respect the will of elected officials from all parties to protect our farmers in trade agreements.

Did the Prime Minister contact each of his Senate appointments to tell them to vote on the right side, the side of democracy?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. An important vote is taking place in the Senate today.

I will remind her, though, that the Senate is now made up of independent senators, thanks to the Liberal government. This is a concept that my Bloc Québécois colleagues understand very well. Conservative senators, on the other hand, have to toe the party line, and I would be very curious to know what they have been asked to do.

In any case, we made an effort. We have made a concerted effort to pass the right information on to the senators. We hope they understand how important the supply management system is for Canada and Quebec.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to the party leaders. Each one of them voted to protect supply management in trade agreements by passing Bill C-282.

Today, senators will either vote to respect our will or they will vote to reverse our collective decision, in a complete break from the basic principles of democracy. The party leaders must know that the farmers in their ridings are watching them.

Will all the party leaders, starting with the Prime Minister, ask the senators to reject the amendment and pass Bill C-282 in its entirety by Christmas?

Oral Questions

• (1430)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we in the Liberal Party believe in supply management and we will continue to protect it. We also committed to never giving up any share of the market ever again.

The Bloc Québécois introduced this bill, but it did not get it passed alone. We are ready, however. We really made every effort to see this bill through because it is important.

However, we must be careful: This legislation only protects our farmers as long as there is no government that might want to reverse it.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is imperative to preserve supply management for farmers in Quebec and across the country.

Emergency rooms are overflowing and people are unable to find a family doctor. The governments in Ottawa and Quebec City are not doing what they should. What is more, the private sector, which is expensive, is not even getting the job done. This means fewer services for Quebeckers. Let us be clear: Profit has no place in the health care system. Quebec City and Ottawa need to ensure quick and equitable access.

Why are the Liberals doing nothing to defend access to health care services for Quebeckers?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are there to protect our universal health care system across the country. That is why we signed a \$200-billion agreement with each province and territory to improve our health care system.

It is certainly true that there are provincial and territorial responsibilities, but we are there at all times to ensure that people can obtain the care they need.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night the Prime Minister met with the premiers to discuss Trump's tariffs. Canadian workers were not consulted, yet it is their jobs that are at risk. Instead of waiting for the next threat from Trump or for premiers to run off with their own plans, why not create a Canadian plan that protects and increases our jobs?

The Conservatives parrot Trump's talking points, even after they fired 1,100 border officers when they were in power. Canada needs to turn the tables on President-elect Trump by promoting Canadian jobs and a workers' plan in manufacturing and natural resources.

The U.S. has buy America. Where is our buy Canada?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can count on our government to play as team Canada to defend Canada's interests. The Prime Minister met with the first ministers yesterday. I can proudly say in the House that I, along with my col-

leagues, have met with Canadian workers all across the country, from coast to coast to coast, to reiterate how important this trading relationship is. Workers' voices, business voices and all our voices matter in this important relationship, and we are going to keep working hard to make sure that this continues to work for Canada.

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FINANCE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet. The finance minister promised to cap the deficit at an already reckless \$40 billion, but now it turns out he is shoving her through her own guardrail. The fake feminist Prime Minister is setting up Canada's first female finance minister to take the hit for his reckless spending so that he can then officially bring in the unelected man who has been pulling the strings.

Why is the Prime Minister bullying the finance minister into breaking her \$40-billion deficit guardrail promise and forcing her to deliver carbon tax Carney's fiscal update?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives are focused on this soap-opera Parliament Hill grapevine gossip, our Liberal government has been focused on the pocketbooks of Canadians.

Inflation is way down, at 2%. The Governor of the Bank of Canada confirmed yesterday that it is going to stay at about 2% for the next few years. Interest rates are way down. We saw another jumbo rate cut yesterday, which means more money in the pockets of Canadians because they are going to be able to renegotiate their mortgage at a lower rate. We are going to be able to help all Canadians who have loans, and our small businesses and entrepreneurs are going to see costs going down.

• (1435)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot afford the Prime Minister's fake feminism. He had the gall this week to say, "I want you to know that I am, and always will be, a proud feminist. You will always have an ally in me and in my government", while working overtime behind the scenes to throw Canada's first female finance minister under the bus for his reckless spending.

Will the so-called feminist Prime Minister set aside his hypocrisy and admit that he is responsible for forcing the finance minister to break her \$40-billion deficit promise?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was also at the Equal Voice gala the other night and I heard the Prime Minister's speech. I heard him talk about all the tangible measures we have taken as a government to advance equal rights among genders, including a gender-neutral cabinet, \$10-a-day child care and a women's entrepreneurship strategy.

I also heard the speech of the deputy leader of the Conservatives, which completely undermined the whole—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am having trouble hearing the hon. parliamentary secretary answer the question. Members really must not take the floor when others are speaking.

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

Ms. Lisa Hepfner: Mr. Speaker, I was also at the Equal Voice gala the other night, and I truly enjoyed the Prime Minister's speech, which listed dozens of tangible things we have done as a government to advance gender equality, including a cabinet that has equal numbers of men and women, and including \$10-a-day child care, a female entrepreneurship strategy and half a billion dollars going out across the country to end gender-based violence.

Meanwhile, the deputy leader of the Conservatives, in her speech, completely undermined the whole point of Equal Voice. It is very telling what the Conservatives think about equality.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fake feminist Prime Minister is determined to decimate Canadians' lives by destroying the economy, and he will throw anyone under the bus to do it, including his token female finance minister. Canadians know he is weak. They know he has lost control of his cabinet and his spending.

The question is this: Will the first-ever female finance minister have the courage to stand up to the fake feminist Prime Minister and stick to her promised \$40-billion deficit?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is something tangible the Leader of the Opposition could do: In the next election, he could have more women run and get more women in the seats if he really wants to prove his credibility in terms of standing up for women.

Let me give some statistics. Currently in the House of Commons, 16.9% of the women elected sit on the Liberal benches. How many are there on the Conservative benches? There are 6%. Those are the kinds of numbers we are talking about.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the Conservative side of the House, women stand here because we are skilled and are allowed to use our voice. Jody Wilson-Raybould is testament to this.

Oral Questions

There is a fake Prime Minister, but that is not the point. We are not here to talk about gender; we are here to talk about the economy, and it is destroyed under the fake feminist Prime Minister.

Again, if the finance minister is not a token, will she stand up to him and say no and that she will abide by her \$40-billion deficit guardrail to help the economy get back on track and save Canadians' lives?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I know that all members are keen to return to their constituencies for the Christmas break, but until that point, let us please treat each other with respect. That means not speaking when the Speaker is standing or when someone else has been recognized by the Speaker to take the floor.

The hon. Minister of Indigenous Services has the floor.

• (1440)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that woman might feel like a token, but I never do. I earned my seat in the House of Commons, and I am proud of it.

Why do the Conservatives not like numbers? It is because the numbers do not speak in their favour. There are 30% of seats that are taken by women, and fully 17% of the seats are on this side. More than half the women elected are Liberals; the other half are in the rest of the parties combined. Parties should do their job and get more women to run.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, who has long described himself as a feminist, starting in July and through anonymous sources, has repeatedly maligned Canada's first female finance minister by undermining her competency. This week, reports have suggested that the finance minister has been at odds with the Prime Minister, who has been bullying her to blow past her already exorbitant \$40-billion deficit.

There are now female cabinet ministers defending the Prime Minister's decision to bring in an unelected man to replace her job. Why is that?

Hon. Kamal Khera (Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always find it a bit rich when Conservatives talk about feminism, when their own leader will use hashtags on his YouTube videos to attract men who hate women. It is anything but feminist when they bring forward backdoor legislation to ban abortion in this country or when they all vote against increased funding to combat gender-based violence or to support survivors. Their leader does not care about women or equality; he only cares about himself. Shame on them.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that after months of reports that the Prime Minister wanted to turf Canada's first female finance minister, we find out today that he is in talks to put an unelected man riddled with conflict of interest into the role. The Globe and Mail story must have really stung for every single Liberal backbencher who has carried the water of the scandal-plagued Prime Minister for years. Why would they not be getting the job?

Does the Prime Minister really think that there is no one in the elected Liberal caucus who could be the finance minister? Is there anybody; is there no one?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the nature of the questions coming from the opposition today speaks more about its opposition to feminism than it does about our commitment to feminism. That is typical, because actions speak louder than words in this case. When we brought forward things like the Canada child benefit or child care, actual policies that help women, what did the Conservatives do? They voted against them.

When we stand up for a woman's right to choose, what do the Conservatives do? They vote against it and bring in backdoor legislation to make it harder to access sexual health and reproductive rights in this country.

When we work to make contraceptives free in this country, what do the Conservatives do? They stand in opposition. The real fake feminists are the folks on the other side in the Conservative—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord has the floor.

* * *

[Translation]

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the report on Islamophobia tabled by the Standing Committee on Justice yesterday recommends that the federal government implement all of the recommendations made by the Senate in 2023 regarding Islamophobia. However, the Senate's recommendations are an all-out attack on Quebec's secularism, which the Senate considers to be racist and Islamophobic. If this report is intended to combat Islamophobia, it has failed. Instead, it promotes Quebec-bashing by claiming that Quebec's Bill 21 on secularism encourages racism in Quebec. The government must reject the Standing Committee on Justice's anti-Quebec report in its entirety.

Will the government do so?

• (1445)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague is well aware, committees of the House are independent. They have the right and the duty to do the work they want to do. Obviously, their recommendations are shared publicly.

Like all other members of the House, we will review the recommendations and we will see how they can be used or not be used.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Justice is echoing Amira Elghawaby's request that professors be hired based on their religion rather than their skills.

First, why is Ottawa getting involved in the hiring of university professors? Is there a minister of higher education here, and Ottawa forgot to tell us?

Second, this proposal flies in the face of secularism. This brings religion back into our schools. We saw what happened in Bedford and Saint-Maxime. Quebecers want no part of that.

When will this government stop attacking Quebec's model of secularism?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the committees of the House are independent. They do the work that they deem relevant to the well-being of Canadians.

The second thing I would add is that Quebec universities are also independent and do their work as they see fit, with the skills and responsibilities that are their own.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Senate issued a report that blames Quebec's secularism for everything, and the Minister of Immigration said nothing. Amira Elghawaby called Quebecers anti-Muslim, and the Minister of Immigration said nothing. The Standing Committee on Justice tabled a report that repeats the Senate's anti-secularism arguments, and the Minister of Immigration has no problem with that. Ottawa is proposing that teachers be chosen based on their religion and that is totally fine with the Minister of Immigration. On the other hand, when François Legault tries to defend Quebec's secularism, the minister loses his cool and condemns the Premier of Quebec.

Why is this minister attacking Quebec?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois are doing everything they can to pick a fight, cause division and stir up trouble. We are not going to get into that kind of discussion.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending in his cabinet. The Liberals are about to smash through a \$40-billion deficit guardrail. The media is reporting that the Prime Minister is forcing inflationary spending on Canada's first female finance minister by forcing her to break through the \$40-billion deficit guardrail and pushing our country over a fiscal cliff.

Everybody knows that Mark Carney is the de facto finance minister, so why is the Prime Minister bullying the first female finance minister and forcing her to take the fall?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think what we are seeing here today is Conservatives trying to make feminism great again, but what they actually do is not elect women to their party. The leader actually uses misogynistic hashtags that promote violence against women. They do not support reproductive health care for women. They want to ban abortion health care for women.

When it comes to feminism, it is pretty clear that Conservatives are struggling, and this seems like a fight they do not want to take with us.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, feminism will always be great when there is no tokenism.

The hypocrisy of the Prime Minister knows no bounds. He lectures everybody else about progress, saying that women's rights and women's progress are—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1450)

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk will please start again.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Speaker, feminism will always be great when there is no tokenism.

The hypocrisy of the Prime Minister knows no bounds. He lectures everyone else about progress, saying that women's rights and women's progress are under attack.

My question for the Prime Minister is this: Will he park his hypocrisy and stop attacking the rights of women in his own caucus? Is the fake feminist Prime Minister going to really bully Canada's first female finance minister and have her read carbon tax Carney's update on Monday?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Indigenous Services and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that member is fully endorsed by the anti-abortion organizations that look for candidates, indeed, a full 40 of them over there, who bully women when they want to make choices about their own reproductive freedom. It is a little rich for members of Parliament from the opposition to get up and say they stand up for women when on the back side they are working as hard as they can to restrict women's freedom in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Oral Questions

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister, a fake feminist, is losing control. If we look at his record, we can see he has lost control over immigration, over the management of public funds, over his ministers, and the list goes on.

Now he is squabbling with his Minister of Finance. She is already saddling Canada with a huge deficit, but the Prime Minister wants more. He even plans to replace her with Mark Carney, an unelected individual, if she does not follow his orders.

On Monday, will the minister be presenting her economic statement or Mark Carney's?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is disgusting about what we are hearing today is that they have the gall to call our Prime Minister a fake feminist when he has demonstrated his commitment to equality, to women and to women's rights in so many ways.

These people are engaging in petty politics by using hashtags to attract misogynistic men. They are disrespecting a great woman, namely the Minister of Finance.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier had an opportunity to ask a question. I asked some members to be quiet so they could listen to the question. I would ask him to set the same example for others and not speak unless he has been recognized by the Chair.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, settlement services agencies have received notice of massive funding cuts of up to 70% to their budget. This will decimate the delivery of critical services to help integrate newcomers. Two NDP provinces, B.C. and Manitoba, seem to be targeted with the deepest cuts. As a case in point, after three decades of providing essential language training to newcomers, Vancouver Community College will lose all of its funding even though 92% of the students get employment afterward.

Why are the Liberals punishing newcomers, settlement services agencies and VCC's wildly successful language training program?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every five years we review the funding model for the settlement services to welcome newcomers, to make sure they learn English, to make sure they learn French, to integrate them to a new country and to help them to overcome trauma. This is something we can be very proud of as a country. Obviously, this year we have reduced the levels of people we are welcoming to the country. That comes with some cuts and some readjustments, but clearly, this is a sector that is critical to the integration of newcomers. We will continue to fund it generously and continue to help people integrate to this beautiful country that is the best in the world.

* * *

● (1455)

HEALTH

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Albertans are paying millions of dollars in health care fees for their aged loved ones who are stuck in hospitals because there are no spaces in long-term care. This is one more example of how Danielle Smith is turning our universal public health care system into a U.S.-style for-cash system. We know the Conservatives would cut public health care, and in true Liberal fashion, the government is clearly too weak to stand up to Smith's privatization schemes.

Why is the government sitting by while Albertans are forced to pay to get the care their loved ones deserve?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everywhere, every part of our health system must be transformed into a system of prevention rather than a system of illness. We are doing our part. In fact, I would point out just this week, we announced that one and a quarter million Canadians received care under dental care. We are moving forward with pharmacare. We have deals with every province and every territory. Yes, provinces must be held to account and be responsible for their share, for the portion they carry and have burden for. We will lead nationally and we demand that everybody rise to this moment to transform our health system.

* * *

*[Translation]***THE ECONOMY**

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the holiday season should be a stress-free time for all Canadians, but we know that this is unfortunately not the case for many of them. Some families really struggle with the extra holiday expenses.

I would really like to hear the minister tell us about our government's plan to help those families in these tough times.

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from introducing the Canada child benefit and the Canada workers benefit to cutting taxes for small businesses, we will always be there for Canadians. By giving Canadians a GST holiday, we are putting a little more money in their pockets during the holidays.

The grinch on that side of the House have nothing to offer but vacuous slogans and empty promises. While the Conservatives busy themselves with political games, our government will work to provide real and meaningful support to Canadians.

* * *

*[English]***FINANCE**

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister lost control of spending in his cabinet. He sent this spending spat spiralling out of control, forcing his finance minister to smash through her \$40-billion deficit guardrail promise. He then solidified his fake feminist credentials by appointing carbon tax Carney as a de facto finance minister after using her. Even the PBO confirmed they smashed through their \$40-billion deficit guardrail by at least \$6 billion.

Will the Prime Minister confirm the deficit is not a penny over \$46 billion?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to ask members to not make noise. There are rules in this place for us not to be slamming desks anymore.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it seems we have lost decorum in the House in part because the Conservatives have been attacking female elected representatives, women in the House who represent women and men across the country proudly. If the Conservatives are really interested in asking questions of the economy, I do have answers for them.

Yesterday, the Bank of Canada lowered interest rates yet again, making it easier on Canadians to buy a new home, making it easier on families that need to renew their mortgage, making it easier on Canadians who have loans. We are keeping our eye on the ball. We are keeping our eye on the interests of Canadians.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the last times the bank dropped 50 basis points on the interest rate were 9/11, the global financial crisis and COVID. Carbon tax Carney's comeback fuelled his fiscal feud further. The weak Prime Minister used the finance minister to rack up debt. Now, he is going to replace another female minister, but this time with Davos elite carbon tax Carney. All of this just to smash through his \$40-billion deficit guardrail and drive Canada's finances off a fiscal cliff.

Once again, will the Prime Minister confirm the deficit will not be a penny past \$46 billion?

• (1500)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, listening to the Conservatives today, we would think that the Conservative Party of Canada wanted interest rates to be higher. We would think the Conservatives want inflation to be higher, listening to their talking points today in the House of Commons.

We have invested in Canadians and we have invested wisely. We have ensured that 110,000 more Canadian women have entered the workforce thanks to our early learning and child care program. This has saved families nearly 30% in child care. It has also created \$32 billion of greater wealth in our economy. We are growing the economy and we are doing it wisely.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has lost control of his finances and of his cabinet. We all know that he and the Minister of Finance are quarrelling. She promised Canadians that the deficit would not exceed \$40 billion. That was her fiscal guardrail. When someone goes over a guardrail, they do not just stop—they fall right off the cliff.

Can the Prime Minister assure us that the deficit will not exceed \$40 billion?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives appear to be asking questions about the state of the economy, but they are desperate to deny the fact that, just yesterday, the Bank of Canada lowered interest rates to help all Canadians.

That is good news. It will make life more affordable for families who need to renew their mortgages. It will mean lower costs for our SMEs and our entrepreneurs. It will help young people who are purchasing their first home.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister has completely lost control over spending and his ministers. He is imposing drastic increases and sacrificing his own Minister of Finance to replace her with a man by the name of Mark Carney, who is not even elected. Canadians, who are already victims of the disastrous management of this government, are suffering the consequences of the deficit.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the deficit will not exceed \$40 billion?

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already answered that question. I would like to know something. We on this side of the House have brought in programs to support women. How is it that the Conservative Party voted against investments in programs such as age well at home, when we know that women live longer than men?

The Conservatives voted against the child care program, they voted against the program to feed kids at school, they voted against the dental care program. The list goes on.

Oral Questions

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is no longer any doubt about it: The CARM app is a fiasco.

There was already talk of a 50% cost overrun and a \$556-million price tag. However, by last March, maintenance costs had already pushed that price tag up to \$625 million. At this rate, we could well be over the \$800-million mark. Not to mention that CARM must also have been costly ever since it was rolled out, because it crashed 22 times in one month.

As of today, what is the real cost of this fiasco?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as it has been clarified in the House, the CARM system was to replace a 36-year-old system that was at risk of failure. This process was actually developed in 2010 under the previous government. It was to address concerns raised by the Auditor General of Canada that we risked 20% of our goods at the border being misclassified. We are going to ensure that the new system is working and that there are not delays at the border.

• (1505)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is expensive when the Liberals go digital. There is the Phoenix payroll system, which is still giving public servants nightmares after nearly nine years. There was ArriveCAN, which was supposed to cost \$80,000 and ended up costing \$60 million, benefiting shady companies that did not even deliver any services. Now there is CARM, which cost at least \$625 million, and quite likely more. That said, we do not know the real cost because the government is refusing to disclose that information today, as we have just seen.

Why is it that every time the Liberals go digital, it becomes a scandal?

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question because it is an important reminder that the CARM system is replacing a 36-year-old system that put at risk the assessment of \$40 billion worth of duties and taxes annually.

We have to make investments to ensure that the border system, the processing of these taxes and duties, is being done efficiently and effectively for today's businesses. We have ensured that any IT issues that need to be worked out are not impacting borders or causing any delays at those borders.

*Oral Questions***FINANCE**

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of his spending, his cabinet and even his own MPs.

As the government is set to blow through the \$40-billion deficit guardrail, Canadians are feeling it everywhere, including the grocery store, a place the Prime Minister has never been. It is not just Canadians. His own MPs are feeling it. The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River said that his personal preference would be to see the government run a zero-dollar deficit, but that will not happen.

Since the Prime Minister will not visit grocery stores and will not listen to Canadians, will he at least listen to his own Liberal MPs and decide not to run a dime over \$40 billion?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the member opposite talk about groceries, because I have great news for him. The House actually passed a GST tax holiday over the next couple of months to reduce the cost of groceries. I am sorry. I forgot that the member and all members of the Conservative Party voted against that, because even though they say they want a tax break for Canadians, when it comes time to actually give them one, they are opposed to it.

On this side of the House, we are happy to be able to provide that extra relief to Canadians on groceries, toys for kids, clothing for kids and other essential items.

Mr. Ryan Williams (Bay of Quinte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is so out of touch, it does not even understand that is only saving Canadians \$4.51, because there is no GST on groceries, just pop and chips.

Here is another number: The unemployment rate is up to 6.4%. The Prime Minister has lost control. As the government is set to blow through the \$40-billion deficit guardrail, it has its own MPs thinking about unemployment. The member from Saint John—Rothesay said that it is not an “unlimited pot” and, importantly, the Prime Minister and the finance minister are not even talking.

Before the Prime Minister loads his MPs on the unemployment bus, will he tell them about the \$40-billion deficit guardrail or will he just drive them over the fiscal cliff?

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many Canadians, the GST tax holiday actually makes a difference. Just because it does not make a difference for that member of Parliament, does not mean it is not meaningful for many Canadians.

When I speak to constituents in my community and to small business and restaurant owners, they have told me how important this GST tax holiday is going to be for them over the next couple of months. Just because the tax break is not meaningful for Conservative MPs, that does not mean it is not meaningful for Canadians.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of his spending and his cabinet. He is also bullying the finance minister into crashing through the \$40-billion deficit guardrail.

Even Liberal MPs are uncomfortable with the financial consequences. Ask the member for Saint John—Rothesay, who was quoted calling for “fiscal restraint”, or the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, who said that he wanted a “zero deficit”, which we all know is not going to happen with the NDP-Liberal government.

If the finance minister crashes the deficit through the \$40-billion guardrail, will the feckless Prime Minister allow a free vote for his MPs?

• (1510)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Conservative member chose to talk about bullying in his question after today's question period has been fraught with bullying from Conservative members.

To get back to what is important to Canadians, I would like to talk about the economy. When looking at the numbers, we can see that consumer confidence is up. We see consumer spending is up. Folks are looking forward to the tax holiday that is also coming up. On Saturday, we will be removing federal taxes, removing the GST from everyday goods, in order to help Canadians with a tax cut I know they need.

* * *

[Translation]

DENTAL CARE

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I had the pleasure of visiting dental assistant students at Willis College on the first anniversary of the launch of the Canadian dental care plan. Thanks to this program, more than three million Canadians are now able to see a dentist. One in four Canadians were not going to the dentist because of the cost.

Could the minister explain how the program is making life more affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank our colleague from Ottawa—Vanier for her excellent question.

The bad news is when we ask the Leader of the Opposition why he is against the Canadian dental care plan, he says it is because it does not exist and he discourages seniors from registering for it.

The good news for Canadians is this deception is not working. More than one million Quebecers and three million Canadians are already successfully registered for the Canadian dental care plan, which is saving them on average \$750 a year since they registered.

That is very good news for all Quebecers. It is bad news for the Conservative leader.

[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has lost control of spending and his cabinet. A former adviser to two prime ministers, Robert Asselin, has said the rising debt burden limits Canada's ability to act during future economic slowdowns and unforeseen circumstances. The Minister of Finance set a fiscal guardrail of a \$40.1-billion deficit in her last budget, which looks drastically off the rails. This is not just a number. It is a glaring sign of systemic overspending and poor fiscal planning.

The Liberals' choice now is clear. Will they heed their former adviser or drive Canada's deficit off of a cliff?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this member is so off the rail that he forgot that Canada actually is the land of opportunity and possibilities. Members do not need to ask me. They can talk to CEOs who have invested in this country. Just in 2023, we landed the largest investment in Dow's history in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta.

I think the Conservatives should all rejoice. It is Christmas. I hope they are going to put that in their Christmas cards to their constituents and thank the Liberal government for bringing jobs to Alberta.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a minister who has never seen a cheque he did not want to sign of Canadian taxpayer dollars. Former Liberal adviser Robert Asselin also stated, "You can't pick and choose fiscal anchors as you go, and renege on a commitment you made only a year ago". There is a huge disconnect here. The Prime Minister wants to spend his way to popularity and the finance minister is trying to hang on to a shred of fiscal accountability.

Liberals are famous for taking no lessons, but this one is an obvious choice. How far past the guardrails is the Prime Minister pushing the finance minister's credibility?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, actually, there is more good news for the Conservatives to share in their Christmas cards. Let me talk about another investment in Canada. This time, BHP, the largest mining company in the world has made the largest investment in its history in Saskatchewan. It is close to \$20 billion, the largest investment in its history.

I hope again that, in the Christmas cards they are going to send to their constituents, they are going to thank the Liberal government for bringing jobs to western Canada, growing our energy sector and making sure that Canada is—

• (1515)

The Speaker: The hon. member for South Shore—St. Margarets.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal minister is so informed, he does not even know that Canada Post is on strike. He is another lost cabinet minister.

Oral Questions

More leaking Liberals are speaking out about the economic disaster of the Prime Minister, who has decided to crash through his \$40-billion deficit guardrail promise, an obscene number on its own. The Liberal MP for Saint John—Rothesay said that Liberals "need to show fiscal restraint", like that is going to happen.

Crashing through his promised \$40-billion deficit will increase the cost of food. If the deficit guardrail is broken and driven right through, will the Prime Minister allow his Liberal MPs a free vote?

[Translation]

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have already answered that question.

I would like my colleague from Atlantic Canada across the way to tell me how the Conservatives could have voted against investing in small craft harbours. How could they have voted against investing in the Coast Guard? In the supplementary estimates, how could they have voted against investing in gasoline so that the Coast Guard can go help and rescue our fishers when they run into problems at sea?

It is shameful.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from supporting the wildfire response here in Canada to deterring aggression through our multinational battle group in Latvia, members of our armed forces have continuously stepped up to keep Canadians safe so that we can live in a more secure and peaceful world. For our armed forces members who are separated from their families while on deployment, this can be a hard time of the year.

Can the Minister of National Defence tell us how our government continues to support our armed forces so they can do the crucial work of keeping us safe at home?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member for Sudbury for her hard work on our very hard-working defence committee.

As we head into the holiday season, I would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all members of the Canadian Armed Forces and to the entire defence team. They have answered the call to serve and defend their country, and they have our confidence, our pride and our gratitude. I also wish to extend our thanks to their families and all those who support them in this essential work.

*Routine Proceedings**[Translation]*

I wish all members of the Canadian Armed Forces happy holidays and a happy new year.

* * *

*[English]***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 70 years, friendship centres have served as vital community hubs for urban indigenous people. Now they are on the front line of Canada's mental health crisis, the toxic drug crisis and catastrophic climate events like floods and forest fires, but federal funding has not kept up. The National Association of Friendship Centres is clear in that it needs \$62 million of federal funding annually to meet demands.

The Liberals keep letting indigenous people down with their chronic underfunding. Will the government finally provide friendship centres with long-term, sustainable funding?

Hon. Ya'ara Saks (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. Friendship centres provide essential services to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Their network offers culturally appropriate, mindful support to navigate health care systems, find safe shelter and learn indigenous languages, and they support our indigenous communities when they go into urban centres and provide mental health services. With this work, \$32 million goes to them every year, and our government has committed an additional \$60 million through budget 2024.

There is more work to do. Friendship centres do incredible work across communities in Canada, and we will work with them.

* * *

*[Translation]***EMPLOYMENT**

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, many businesses in my region are having a hard time renewing work permits for their temporary foreign workers because they have exceeded the new threshold, which was lowered to 10% by the current government. With unemployment at its lowest, the survival of these businesses hangs in the balance, not to mention this is also about people. Indeed, these workers and their families will have to leave the country through no fault of their own.

What measures is the Prime Minister considering to help these businesses hold on to their essential workers while complying with immigration rules?

• (1520)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since taking office, this government has made significant changes to this program. The temporary foreign worker program must meet actual labour market needs for Canadians. We are adjusting the program to reflect changes in the labour market.

We are listening to what Canadians need, and we are going to take effective action.

* * *

*[English]***JOHN HORGAN**

The Speaker: Colleagues, following discussions among representatives from all parties, I understand that there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence in memory of John Horgan, former premier of British Columbia.

I invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Regarding Bill C-63, if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for—

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion, given that Bill C-63, the so-called—

Some hon members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS*[English]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE****VETERANS AFFAIRS**

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: It being 3:24 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the previous question to the motion to concur in the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[Translation]

Call in the members.

• (1535)

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

*(Division No. 924)***YEAS****Members**

Alghabra
Anand
Angus
Arya
Bachrach
Bains
Barron
Battiste
Beech
Bergeron
Bibeau

Ali
Anandasangaree
Arseneault
Atwin
Badawey
Baker
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bendayan
Bérubé
Bittle

Routine Proceedings

Blair	Blanchet	Samson	Sarai
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney	Sauvé	Savard-Tremblay
Blois	Boissonnault	Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Boulerice	Bradford	Serré	Sgro
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe	Shanahan	Sheehan
Cannings	Carr	Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Casey	Chabot	Simard	Sinclair-Desgagné
Chagger	Chahal	Singh	Sorbara
Champagne	Champoux	Sousa	Ste-Marie
Chatel	Chen	St-Onge	Sudds
Chiang	Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)	Tassi	Taylor Roy
Collins (Victoria)	Cormier	Thériault	Therrien
Coteau	Dabrusin	Thompson	Trudel
Damoff	Dance	Turnbull	Valdez
Davies	DeBellefeuille	Van Bynen	van Koeverden
Desbiens	Desilets	Vandal	Vandenbeld
Desjarlais	Dhaliwal	Vignola	Villemure
Dhillon	Diab	Virani	Weiler
Dong	Drouin	Wilkinson	Yip
Dubourg	Duclos	Zahid	Zarrillo
Duguid	Dzerowicz	Zuberi— 209	
Ehsassi	El-Khoury		
Erskine-Smith	Fisher		
Fonseca	Fortier		
Fortin	Fragiskatos		
Fraser	Freeland		
Fry	Gaheer		
Gainey	Garon		
Garrison	Gaudreau		
Gazan	Gerretsen		
Gill	Gould		
Green	Guilbeault		
Hanley	Hardie		
Hepfner	Holland		
Housefather	Hughes		
Hussen	Hutchings		
Iacono	Idlout		
Ien	Jaczek		
Johns	Jowhari		
Julian	Kayabaga		
Kelloway	Khalid		
Khera	Koutrakis		
Kusmierczyk	Kwan		
Lalonde	Lambropoulos		
Lamoureux	Lapointe		
Larouche	Lattanzio		
Lauzon	LeBlanc		
Lebouthillier	Lemire		
Lightbound	Long		
Longfield	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)		
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacDonald (Malpeque)		
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)		
Maloney	Martinez Ferrada		
Masse	Mathyssen		
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)		
McDonald (Avalon)	McGuinty		
McKay	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)		
McLeod	McPherson		
Mendès	Mendicino		
Miao	Michaud		
Miller	Morrice		
Morrissey	Murray		
Naqvi	Ng		
Noormohamed	Normandin		
O'Connell	Oliphant		
O'Regan	Pauzé		
Perron	Petitpas Taylor		
Plamondon	Powlowski		
Qualtrough	Rayes		
Robillard	Rodriguez		
Rogers	Romanado		
Rota	Sahota		
Sajjan	Saks		

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Arnold	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Berthold	Bezan
Block	Bragdon
Brassard	Brock
Calkins	Caputo
Carrie	Chambers
Chong	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Deltell
d'Entremont	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeschen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Ellis
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Ferreri	Findlay
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gladu
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Hoback
Jeneroux	Jivani
Kelly	Khanna
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Kurek	Kusie
Lake	Lantsman
Lawrence	Lehoux
Leslie	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
Maguire	Majumdar
Martel	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McLean
Melillo	Moore
Morantz	Morrison
Motz	Muys
Nater	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Perkins
Poilievre	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Ruff
Scheer	Schmale
Seeback	Shields
Shipley	Small

Routine Proceedings

Soroka
Stewart (Toronto—St. Paul's)
Strahl
Thomas
Tolmie
Van Popta
Vidal
Viersen
Wagantall
Waugh
Williams
Zimmer— 119

Steinley
Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake)
Stubbs
Tochor
Uppal
Vecchio
Vien
Vis
Warkentin
Webber
Williamson

Chen
Chong
Collins (Victoria)
Cormier
Dabrusin
Damoff
Dancho
Davies
Deltell
Desbiens
Desjarlais
Dhillon
Doherty
Dowdall
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Ehsassi
Ellis
Erskine-Smith
Falk (Provencher)
Ferrerri
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Freeland
Gaheer
Gallant
Garrison
Gazan
Genuis
Gill
Godin
Gould
Gray
Guilbeault
Hanley
Hepfner
Holland
Hughes
Hutchings
Idlout
Jaczek
Jivani
Jowhari
Kayabaga
Kelly
Khanna
Kitchen
Koutrakis
Kramp-Neuman
Kusie
Kwan
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lapointe
Lattanzio
Lawrence
Lebouthillier
Lemire
Lewis (Essex)
Liepert
Lloyd
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney
Martinez Ferrada
Mathysen
May (Saarich—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
McGuinty

Chiang
Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek)
Cooper
Coteau
Dalton
Dance
Davidson
DeBellefeuille
d'Entremont
Desilets
Dhaliwal
Diab
Dong
Dreeshen
Dubourg
Duguid
Dzerowicz
El-Khoury
Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Findlay
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser
Fry
Gainey
Garon
Gaudreau
Généreux
Gerretsen
Gladu
Goodridge
Gourde
Green
Hallan
Hardie
Hoback
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Ien
Jeneroux
Johns
Julian
Kelloway
Khalid
Khera
Kmieciak
Kram
Kurek
Kusmierczyk
Lake
Lambropoulos
Lantsman
Larouche
Lauzon
LeBlanc
Lehoux
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lightbound
Lobb
Longfield
MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor
Majumdar
Martel
Masse
May (Cambridge)
Mazier
McDonald (Avalon)
McKay

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The next question is on the motion to concur in the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, on this important motion governing the gold diggers clause, which has disrespected so many of Canada's veterans and their spouses, we would ask for a recorded vote.

• (1545)

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

(*Division No. 925*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultayf
Albas
Ali
Anand
Angus
Arseneault
Ashton
Bachrach
Bains
Baldinelli
Barrett
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bendayan
Berthold
Bezan
Bittle
Blanchet
Blaney
Blois
Boulerice
Bragdon
Brière
Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings
Carr
Casey
Chagger
Chambers
Champoux

Aitchison
Alghabra
Allison
Anandasangaree
Arnold
Arya
Atwin
Badawey
Baker
Barlow
Barron
Battiste
Beech
Bergeron
Bérubé
Bibeau
Blair
Blanchette-Joncas
Block
Boissonnault
Bradford
Brassard
Brook
Calkins
Caputo
Carrie
Chabot
Chahal
Champagne
Chatel

McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 McLeod
 Melillo
 Mendicino
 Michaud
 Moore
 Morrice
 Morrissey
 Murray
 Naqvi
 Ng
 Normandin
 Oliphant
 Patzer
 Pausé
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Powlowski
 Rayes
 Reid
 Richards
 Robillard
 Rogers
 Rood
 Ruff
 Sajjan
 Samson
 Sauvé
 Scarpaleggia
 Schiefke
 Seebach
 Sgro
 Sheehan
 Shipley
 Sidhu (Brampton South)
 Sinclair-Desgagné
 Small
 Soroka
 Steinley
 Stewart (Toronto—St. Paul's)
 St-Onge
 Stubbs
 Tassi
 Thériault
 Thomas
 Tochor
 Trudel
 Uppal
 Van Bynen
 Van Popta
 Vandenbeld
 Vidal
 Viersen
 Villemure
 Vis
 Warkentin
 Webber
 Wilkinson
 Williamson
 Zahid
 Zimmer

McLean
 McPherson
 Mendès
 Miao
 Miller
 Morantz
 Morrison
 Motz
 Muys
 Nater
 Noormohamed
 O'Connell
 O'Regan
 Paul-Hus
 Perkins
 Petitpas Taylor
 Poilievre
 Qualtrough
 Redekopp
 Rempel Garner
 Roberts
 Rodriguez
 Romanado
 Rota
 Sahota
 Saks
 Sarai
 Savard-Tremblay
 Scheer
 Schmale
 Serré
 Shanahan
 Shields
 Sidhu (Brampton East)
 Simard
 Singh
 Sorbara
 Sousa
 Ste-Marie
 Stewart (Miramichi—Grand Lake)
 Strahl
 Suds
 Taylor Roy
 Therrien
 Thompson
 Tolmie
 Turnbull
 Valdez
 van Koeverden
 Vandal
 Vecchio
 Vien
 Vignola
 Virani
 Wagantall
 Waugh
 Weiler
 Williams
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 Zarrillo
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NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Business of the House

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, the time provided for Government Orders will be extended by 24 minutes.

* * *

● (1550)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it being Thursday, it is time for the highlight of many people's week: the Thursday question.

However, before I move to that, as this is the last Thursday before we rise for the Christmas adjournment and we will all be back home in our ridings meeting with our constituents and providing them assistance with all sorts of issues, I just want to take this opportunity to wish all my colleagues, on all sides of the House, a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

I am thankful for the excellent work that is done in the House to support members in their work. I offer a special tribute to the pages, many of whom are away from home going to school, and I know that many of them will be returning home as well; and to the House of Commons support staff, who make sure that we are served at a most excellent level of professionalism so we can carry out the work on behalf of our constituents.

We are about to enter the period of time when the days stop getting shorter and start getting longer again, which is of course a beautiful metaphor for what Christmas is all about: the light of our saviour, Jesus Christ, coming to redeem mankind. For those people who celebrate other holidays, especially Hanukkah, there is a similar metaphor with the light that comes with the lighting of the menorah over that period of time as well.

I want to wish all Canadians who happen to have tuned in just in time for the Thursday question a very merry Christmas and a happy new year. I wish the same especially to my government counterpart across the way. Maybe she could take this opportunity to tell us and all Canadians what the business of the House will be for the rest of this week and into next week as well.

The Speaker: Before I invite the hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to answer, I would like to thank the hon. member for his good wishes; similarly, I wish all Canadians happy holidays.

The hon. government House leader has the floor.

Hon. Karina Gould (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank my hon. colleague for the kind wishes. Of course, I extend my merry Christmas and happy holidays to him and to all members of the House as well.

This is the last Thursday question and answer for the period. It is something I look forward to every single week, and I look forward to returning to it in January 2025.

Privilege

In response to my hon. colleague with regard to next week's business, as we will be returning for a couple of days, as was announced earlier this week, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be presenting the fall economic statement in the House at 4 p.m. next Monday. I know that Canadians across the country and all hon. members in this place will be looking forward to it.

As you well know, Madam Speaker, the last few months have posed several unique challenges around the House of Commons, but I would also like to extend my gratitude to you and to your three fellow chair occupants for all your hard work.

[Translation]

I would also like to pay tribute to the staff who work so hard to help us accomplish so many important tasks, starting of course with the Clerk of the House, Eric Janse, and his colleagues at the table. Our gratitude extends to the House of Commons administration across all sectors and services, to those who provide security services in the parliamentary precinct, and to the pages in the House. We are served by a remarkable group of people, and we are truly always grateful for what they do.

[English]

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to all of the members' staff on the Hill and in our constituency offices for their dedication and tireless efforts.

On behalf of the Liberal members of Parliament, I would like to wish everyone a very merry Christmas, a very happy Hanukkah, happy holidays and all the best for the new year.

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

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Madam Speaker, I was hoping to rise to be able to wish everybody very happy holidays. Is that something I am still able to do on behalf of the NDP?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will allow the hon. member to do that.

• (1555)

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron: Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise on behalf of people, of course, in my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith and on behalf of the NDP to say a big thank you to everybody here on the Hill.

As a newly elected member of Parliament in 2021, I am just astonished by the incredible amount of work that is put into allowing us to be here every day, and by all the people who make it happen: the pages, the security personnel and all the people who are making sure that we are fed and that we have what we need to be able to do our job on the Hill representing constituents. Of course I want to also thank, on behalf of the NDP, all the staff here on the Hill, as well as at home in our constituencies.

I want to wish everybody very happy holidays. Happy Hanukkah. Merry Christmas. I hope everybody enjoys time with loved ones over the holidays.

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED WITHHOLDING OF DOCUMENTS FROM THE SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE DECLARATION OF EMERGENCY

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising further to the notice I provided to the Chair under Standing Order 48 concerning the third and final report of the Special Joint Committee on the Declaration of Emergency, which was tabled in the House of Commons earlier today.

In brief, on May 31, 2022, the committee adopted an order for the production of several unredacted documents related to the government's declaration of a public order emergency in February 2022, as well as the regulations and orders that were imposed in relation to it.

The committee was particularly concerned with receiving, and specifically ordered, the production of a copy of the government's legal opinion for invoking the Emergencies Act. As outlined in the report, the then deputy minister of justice and deputy attorney general of Canada wrote to the committee refusing to produce the legal opinion.

The material facts are outlined in the third report's chapter 10, aptly titled "Access to Information and Documents". I will recap the essential points for the benefit of those who are not familiar with this particular saga, followed by citing pertinent authorities.

In establishing the special joint committee, the House conferred upon it, among other authorities, the power to send for persons, papers and records. I would refer the Chair to subparagraph (m)(ii) of the motion adopted on March 2, 2022, found at pages 471 to 473 and 480 to 484 of that day's Journals. The Senate conferred the identical authority on the committee in subparagraph (l)(ii) of the motion, adopted on March 3, 2022, as recorded in a message that the House received and published at pages 487 to 490 of the Journals for that day.

This being the first ever invocation of the Emergencies Act, the mandate to be pursued by the parliamentary review committee required by law to be appointed was something to be settled. As mentioned in the eighth paragraph of chapter 2 of the third report, the committee adopted a motion that, among other things, articulated the scope of the study it would initially pursue. The mandate included "the options that the Government of Canada utilized during the invocation of the Emergencies Act" and in the "study of each option...the necessity, implementation, and impact of that option."

Seized with the House's authority to compel the production of documents, the committee sought to do just that with a view to discharging the mandate it had defined. As the committee explains in the 10th paragraph of chapter 10 of the third report, "The Committee also learned that an internal federal government legal opinion had been drafted to determine whether invoking the Emergencies Act was justified under the circumstances, but the Committee was unable to obtain a copy given that solicitor-client privilege was invoked."

We have since come to know, thanks to the access to information system, that it is a 10-page opinion and forms tab C of the Clerk of the Privy Council's February 14, 2022, memorandum to the Prime Minister to secure his formal approval for invoking the Emergencies Act.

The committee elaborated on this matter later in chapter 10, beginning at paragraph 15, which stated:

It is worth noting that on 31 May 31 2022, the Committee adopted a motion '[t]hat an Order do issue for all security assessments and legal opinions which the government relied upon in determining that' the various thresholds under the Emergencies Act had been met and that the temporary measures exercised under the Act were consistent with the Charter.

• (1600)

For the benefit of the Chair and the House, this is the full text of the order that the committee had adopted:

That an Order do issue for all security assessments and legal opinions which the government relied upon in determining that

(a) the threshold of "threats to [the] security of Canada", as defined by section 2 of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act, required by section 16 of the Emergencies Act, had been met;

(b) the thresholds required by paragraphs 3(a) or (b) of the Emergencies Act, concerning a "national emergency" had been met;

(c) the situation could not "be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada", as required by section 3 of the Emergencies Act;

(d) the Emergency Measures Regulations were compliant with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the analysis relied upon by the Minister of Justice in discharging his responsibilities under section 4.1 of the Department of Justice Act; and

(e) the Emergency Economic Measures Order was compliant with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the analysis relied upon by the Minister of Justice in discharging his responsibilities under section 4.1 of the Department of Justice Act,

provided that

(f) these documents shall be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the Senate, the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons and any legal counsel which the Committee may appoint, in both official languages, within one month of the adoption of this Order....

Referring back to the special joint committee's third report, the 16th paragraph of chapter 10 described what happened next:

On or around 29 June 2022, a letter in response to the Committee's document production order was sent by François Daigle of the Department of Justice, in which he writes that "[u]pon full consideration, it is our Department's determination that all legal opinions in our holdings that would be responsive to the Committee's order are subject to solicitor-client privilege." In his letter, he also states the following:

"Although other countries may have occasionally departed from this rule in Canada, it is solely within the discretion of the Government of Canada and its ministers to waive solicitor-client privilege in respect of legal advice provided to the Crown. For reasons of principle and practice, this rarely occurs, and the general rule remains that such advice will normally be withheld from Committees of Parliament, subject to such ministerial discretion and consideration of public policy."

It is worth mentioning that this letter sets out the grounds for refusal only as they pertain to information protected by solicitor-client privilege, but not by Cabinet confidence.

Elsewhere in Mr. Daigle's letter, found on the committee's website, he wrote bluntly, "I confirm that I am unable to produce legal opinions as sought in the Committee's order."

• (1605)

Chapter 10 then recounts several other instances of the committee being stonewalled by government departments claiming various

Privilege

reasons for not complying with the May 31, 2022, document production order. For the sake of brevity, I will jump ahead to the 29th paragraph. It states,

In the two years following the invocation of the Emergencies Act, the Committee recalled some federal witnesses, particularly to obtain answers regarding its multiple requests for access to evidence, including the legal opinion the government relied on before resorting to the Act.

In February 2024, [the current Minister of Justice] reasserted the government's position that the legal advice in question was protected by solicitor-client privilege, which benefits the Government of Canada, the client in this case.

It is also worth mentioning the 14th paragraph of chapter 10, which notes that the committee used a written questioning procedure. It deployed this to gather evidence more efficiently, but it was further stonewalled by the then national security and intelligence adviser to the Prime Minister, Jody Thomas, about the legal opinion. On December 28, 2022, she wrote to the committee and said, "Due to solicitor-client privilege, I respectfully decline to answer this question." That procedure is described in the special joint committee's minutes for September 22, 2022, as follows: "That the Committee send to each individual organization who appears as a witness written questions submitted by the members of the committee for response", and there follows a series of details about the procedure.

Going back to chapter 10 of the third report, in the 32nd paragraph, the committee summed up its position, and this is a critical point. It states,

In light of the preceding, the Committee is concerned that it did not have access to all the information and documents that the federal government relied on to invoke the Emergencies Act and the related special temporary measures, in part due to the various types of privilege invoked by many of the witnesses.

In adopting its order on May 31, 2022, the committee was exercising its authority, which is described starting at page 984 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, as follows:

The Standing Orders do not delimit the power to order the production of papers and records. The result is a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction. There is no limit on the types of papers likely to be requested; the only prerequisite is that the papers exist in hard copy or electronic format, and that they are located in Canada. They can be papers originating from or in the possession of governments, or papers the authors or owners of which are from the private sector or civil society (individuals, associations, organizations, et cetera).

In practice, standing committees may encounter situations where the authors of or officials responsible for papers refuse to provide them or are willing to provide them only after certain portions have been removed. Public servants and Ministers may sometimes invoke their obligations under certain legislation to justify their position. Companies may be reluctant to release papers which could jeopardize their industrial security or infringe upon their legal obligations, particularly with regard to the protection of personal information. Others have cited solicitor-client privilege in refusing to allow access to legal papers or notices.

• (1610)

These types of situations have absolutely no bearing on the power of committees to order the production of papers and records. No statute or practice diminishes the fullness of that power rooted in House privileges unless there is an explicit legal provision to that effect, or unless the House adopts a specific resolution limiting the power. The House has never set a limit on its power to order the production of papers and records.

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This point was reiterated as recently as the Speaker's ruling on September 26, 2024, at page 25958 of the Debates concerning Sustainable Development Technology Canada documents. Similarly, as noted in Erskine May, 25th edition, at paragraph 38.32, committees of the United Kingdom House of Commons exercise the same powers with the same unlimited scope:

There is no restriction on the power of committees to require the production of papers by private bodies or individuals, provided that such papers are relevant to the committee's work as defined by its order of reference. Select committees have formally ordered papers to be produced by the Chairman of a nationalised industry and a private society. Solicitors have been ordered to produce papers relating to a client; and a statutory regulator has been ordered to produce papers whose release was otherwise subject to statutory restriction.

In recent years, there has been a very high-profile instance of the U.K. House of Commons insisting on the production of government legal opinions when, amidst the Brexit debates on November 13, 2018, it adopted a motion requiring the production of "any legal advice in full, including that provided by the Attorney General, on the proposed withdrawal agreement on the terms of the UK's departure from the European Union including the Northern Ireland backstop and framework for a future relationship between the UK and the European Union."

On December 3, 2018, the Attorney General of England and Wales presented to Parliament a command paper which purported to describe the overall legal effect of the EU withdrawal agreement on November 25, 2018. On the same day, he made a statement to the House, neither the command paper nor the statement made reference to the resolution of November 13, 2018, and the command paper did not purport to be a return to the resolution of the House.

Later that day, after representatives of five opposition parties alleged the government had not produced the documents required, Mr. Speaker Bercow ruled that there was a prima facie contempt at column 625 of the official report.

• (1615)

Subsequently, the U.K. House of Commons, on December 4, 2018, adopted the following motion:

That this House finds Ministers in contempt for their failure to comply with the requirements of the motion for return passed on 13 November 2018, to publish the final and full legal advice provided by the Attorney General to the Cabinet concerning the EU Withdrawal Agreement and the framework for the future relationship, and orders its immediate publication.

In response, the U.K. government produced a complete unredacted copy of the Attorney General's legal advice the very next day. The Attorney General later said that he had complied with the second order of the House, "out of respect of the House's constitutional position", as reported at paragraph 68 of the U.K. House of Commons Procedure Committee's May 2019 report on the power to send for papers.

A fuller description of these events was detailed in the question of privilege raised by the House leader of the official opposition here in Canada on September 16, 2024, concerning the Sustainable Development Technology Canada documents. I adopt his comments for my own arguments for the proposition that the power to send for papers is superior to solicitor-client privilege.

Our own Speaker Milliken held, in his landmark decision on Afghan detainee documents, on April 27, 2010, at page 2043 of the Debates:

It is the view of the Chair that accepting an unconditional authority of the executive to censor the information provided to Parliament would in fact jeopardize the very separation of powers that is purported to lie at the heart of our parliamentary system and the independence of its constituent parts. Furthermore, it risks diminishing the inherent privileges of the House and its members, which have been earned and must be safeguarded.

As has been noted earlier, procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents, even those related to national security.

Therefore, the Chair must conclude that it is perfectly within the existing privileges of the House to order production of the documents in question.

We would do well to recall that the declaration of emergency committee's order concerned the legal opinion that was relied upon to justify the invocation of the Emergencies Act, a decision that allowed cabinet to legislate without regard to the authority of Parliament or to the usual constitutional division of powers.

In a March 9, 2011, ruling, Speaker Milliken cited page 281 of Sir John Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, fourth edition:

But it must be remembered that under all circumstances it is for the house to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient. The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent, when it cannot be at once laid before the houses.

• (1620)

From there, the Chair added, at page 8841 of the Debates:

It may be that valid reasons exist. That is not for the Chair to judge. A committee empowered to investigate the matter might, but the Chair is ill-equipped to do so. However, there is no doubt that an order to produce documents is not being fully complied with, and this is a serious matter that goes to the heart of the House's undoubted role in holding the government to account.

In the present case, the declaration of emergency committee has put the House, both Houses actually, on notice that, "the committee is concerned that it did not have access to all the information and documents that the federal government relied on to invoke the Emergencies Act and the related special temporary measures".

Before concluding, I wish to address briefly Ms. Thomas' failure to answer the committee's written question. Page 1078 of Bosc and Gagnon reminds us:

There are no specific rules governing the nature of questions which may be put to witnesses appearing before committees, beyond the general requirement of relevance to the issue before the committee. Witnesses must answer all questions which the committee puts to them...if the committee agrees that the question be put to the witness, the witness is obliged to reply.... The actions of a witness who refuses to answer questions may be reported to the House.

This is what has now happened here, and I would submit that it contributes to the overall concern about the government denying the special joint committee the information it sought.

Finally, I will turn to the remedy I would propose, namely to have the House order the production of the documents in question. I would submit that that would be a proper remedy in the present case. Bosc and Gagnon discusses, at pages 138 and 987, the scenario in which a committee would report to the House on a case of disobedience to a document production order, which I note would be a contempt, may be addressed by the House adopting its own order for the production of documents.

Indeed, the 2021 case involving the so-called Winnipeg lab documents saw the House, after its first production order was refused, order the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada attend the bar of the House for, among other things, the purpose of turning over the documents that had not been provided.

This was, in turn, modelled on precedent cases, which Bosc and Gagnon describe at pages 131 and 132. In fact, the Order Paper is currently seized with a privilege motion concerning a similar remedy proposed in relation to Stephen Anderson, who did not turn over documents required by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics concerning the infamous so-called other Randy.

Moreover, I would submit that the Speaker's September 26, 2024, ruling on the Sustainable Development Technology Canada documents, at page 25959 of the Debates, speaks to the usual admissibility of such a motion when the defied order is of an ordinary character, like that which, I would submit, the special joint committee adopted.

● (1625)

The Speaker said:

The members who intervened on this question used words such as “unusual”, “novel” and “unprecedented” to describe this particular production order. The Chair agrees with those characterizations. It is indeed unusual, novel and unprecedented for the House to order documents not for its own purposes but for a third party.... Before insisting on the production of documents, as the opposition House leader proposes to do, the Chair believes the House would benefit from having this matter studied further.

Unlike the SDTC documents order, there is nothing unusual about the order that the declaration of emergency committee had adopted yet failed to see realized. Therefore, I would respectfully submit that a motion to insist on the production of the documents is entirely admissible, should you agree there is a *prima facie* contempt.

In conclusion, the NDP-Liberal government gave itself sweeping authority to legislate in this place of Parliament and the provinces, and refused to come clean about the legal authority for doing so. Without straying too far into debate, the Rouleau commission heard testimony from the former CSIS director David Vigneault that the events of February 2022 did not meet the threshold that CSIS must apply for threats to the security of Canada, the same threshold Parliament said must be met before any public order emergency can be declared by the cabinet.

However, Mr. Vigneault testified before the commission that there was some special, magical, “separate interpretation” of the

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threshold that he professionally applied, day in and day out, to justify the decision the Prime Minister and his ministers were hell-bent on making. The fact that the Federal Court of Canada has since ruled that the government's actions in February 2022 were both illegal and unconstitutional only makes it even more imperative that there be full accountability and transparency for the Liberal Prime Minister's unilateral invocation of the sweeping legal powers the Emergencies Act conferred upon him.

It is in this light, Madam Speaker, that I refer you to page 141 of Derek Lee's *The Power of Parliamentary Houses to send for Persons, Papers and Records*, concerning times when the House may need to compel the production of the Crown's law officers' work product. Lee writes, “[Then U.K. home secretary] Sir Robert Peel also acknowledged the power of the House in requiring the opinion of the law officers: ‘They stand in the situation of all other responsible servants of the Crown; and there can be no doubt that they are liable to have their opinion called for, and their official acts revised, where sufficient grounds exist [in the opinion of the House] for such a proceeding.’”

“An example of where the House might wish to require production, Sir Robert Peel said: ‘If there were a suspicion that they [law officers of the Crown] had acted under undue influence, an imputation against them of straining a point in favour of the Crown, the law-officers would be justly liable to have their opinions called for, and their official acts investigated.’”

● (1630)

“Similarly, Sir Robert Peel said: ‘I will suppose a case where the law-officers gave a wrong opinion, or where there was an opinion given against which the Government acted; in either of those cases, I admit, the House would be justified in calling for the production of the opinion.’”

That is why the special joint committee worked so vigorously to obtain a copy of the infamous legal opinion and is also probably why the government has so steadfastly refused to shed any light on this matter. That is why I urge the Speaker to find a *prima facie* case of privilege in the circumstances and to permit the House to vote on ordering the production of the government's legal opinion.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to thank the hon. member for the information he has brought forward on this question of privilege. Certainly, we will review all of what he has provided and come back to the House on this.

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 Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment; the hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, Carbon Pricing; the hon. member for Calgary Centre, Oil and Gas Industry.

*Privilege***ORDERS OF THE DAY***[Translation]***PRIVILEGE**REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE
AFFAIRS

The House resumed from December 11 consideration of the motion, of the amendment as amended and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to say something before I begin my speech about this motion, which has to do with transparency in the work of Parliament.

[English]

Let me pay my respects to my generous and very impressive colleague from Brantford—Brant. He showed in the last minute exactly what leadership is all about when we talk about judiciary issues, and especially from a lawyer. Yes, we are lawmakers, but most of us are not lawyers. We are not liars, either, but we are not lawyers; that was one of the mistakes I made when I was first elected nine years ago. My hon. colleague from Brantford—Brant showed exactly what a lawyer shall do here in the House, to indicate clearly what we have to do to follow the rules of this Parliament and to follow the rules of this great country, Canada.

[Translation]

This brings me to the subject before us today. We are here to talk about the same subject again, because, unfortunately, the government is refusing to comply with an order from the Speaker to hand over documents to a third party, the RCMP. We are gathered here because we need to restore Canadians' confidence in our parliamentary institutions and in the institutions we create for policies that are intended to be positive.

The purpose of the green fund that we are talking about today is to reduce pollution. That is something that we can all agree on. Unfortunately, there has been some misappropriation and misuse of taxpayers' money in this case, which has led to some ethical problems and, more importantly, to problems related to the trust that people have in our institutions. I will have an opportunity a little later to talk about another case in which we think that public funds are not being properly managed. This is supported by the analyses conducted by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. I am talking about the net-zero accelerator initiative.

Yesterday, in parliamentary committee, we received different groups that are interested in the environment. These are people that I meet regularly as the Conservative Party critic for the environment and climate change. I have met and spoken with the representatives from Nature Canada, who came to see me in my office. We had an instant connection. That was not the case on every political issue, but we felt a mutual trust.

One of the directors was there yesterday at the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. Mr. Akaash Maharaj, policy director at Nature Canada, said that when governments miss their targets or mismanage public funds, that hurts public expectations and undermines public support for environmental

programs. He concluded by saying that it is better to keep modest promises than to have ambitious targets that are not met.

That is precisely where we are. It is better to say nothing at all than to make grand speeches, grand gestures and grand announcements or set ambitious targets without ever being able to meet them. Our approach is to carry out meaningful, effective, realistic and responsible actions that deliver real results.

Let us not forget that, since this Liberal government took office nine years ago, Canada has become the worst country in the G7 when it comes to the fight against climate change. According to a new report by world-renowned scientists recently tabled at COP 29, after nine years of this Liberal government, Canada ranks 62nd out of 67 countries for its performance on climate change. We are not the ones saying that. I am not saying that and neither is the Conservative Party. It is a group of world-renowned scientists who said it. Every year, they submit a performance index for 67 countries. After nine years of the Liberals lecturing everyone, insulting people who do not think like them and taxing people, this Liberal Canada is ranked 62nd out of 67 countries.

Let us come back to the infamous SDTC green slush fund. It was not created by the current government. It was created over a decade ago and was intended to support the work of companies that are seeking to conduct research and to develop techniques and technology that they can directly apply to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. At the risk of repeating myself—as environment critic, I am more than happy to do so—we all agree on the main elements. Where we differ is in the approach.

● (1635)

In his now-famous Quebec City speech, which took place almost a year and a half ago, the member for Carleton and leader of Canada's Conservatives outlined the Conservatives' environmental approach. He defined the pillars of the environmental action we will undertake if we are fortunate enough to win the confidence of Canadians in the next election, which would delight us.

We all recognize that climate change is real, that we must deal head-on with its challenges, its implications and its impact on everyday life. Yes, we need to reduce emissions and pollution, but Conservatives believe we need to adopt approaches that are far more pragmatic than dogmatic. For the past nine years, we have been seeing dogmatic approaches, with the results we know: Canada is the worst country in the G7 and the 62nd country out of 67 according to world scientists.

Our approach will be based on concrete measures. Technically speaking, we agree with the principles behind SDTC's green fund. However, the problem lies with the way these Liberals have managed this fund.

I would remind the House that SDTC had a \$500-million budget. The Auditor General looked into this and found 186 instances of ethics rules being broken. In all, \$390 million of the \$500 million was mismanaged. That is almost four out of every five dollars. Only one in five dollars was managed properly, and four out of five dollars were not managed according to the rules, certainly not according to ethics rules.

What have we seen over the last five years?

It was literally a revolving door. Board members gave each other public money through the programs they were managing. That is not how it is supposed to work. That is not how to earn the public's trust.

The Conservatives are not the ones saying that. I am not the one saying that. It was the Auditor General, who analyzed how the green fund was managed over the past five years. The fund has very good objectives, but, unfortunately, it was managed the Liberal way. That is why their cronies were scratching each other's backs and exchanging envelopes of Canadian taxpayers' money. They were donating to each other's own companies.

Right from the start of this operation five years ago, board members realized that, four times out of five, they were in a conflict of interest. They had to leave the room and leave their seat empty, but in the very next seat, someone else was making the same decision for their own business. The only thing these people should have done was stop and admit that they were the wrong people in the wrong place. There are thousands of people in Canada who know how to run public companies. I understand that this requires a certain expertise in technology and the environment. I understand that, but when board members are in a conflict of interest four times out of five, it is high time they woke up. Everyone needs to have the honour and the sense of responsibility to say that enough is enough and admit it when they are not the right person in the right place.

Instead, the Liberals, who are all about friends helping friends, allowed the situation to continue. Unfortunately, as we saw, this just continued to happen. That is why the Auditor General produced a scathing report indicating that the Conflict of Interest Act, particularly subsection 6(1) and section 21, had been violated because of the private interests of the heads of this organization. The minister was made aware of the conflicts of interest but took no action.

I am talking about former minister Navdeep Bains, who testified before the committee. He was warned that there was a problem concerning an inappropriate situation and he did nothing. A few years later, the Prime Minister appointed another minister. It is a minister for whom I have a great deal of respect and esteem, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain. Unfortunately, according to the Auditor General's report, the current minister “did not sufficiently monitor” what was happening within that organization.

When the information was made public, all of a sudden, the minister, who is also the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain,

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stopped everything. He said that he was stopping everything until the situation could be assessed. However, he only took action when the information was made public, despite the warning that had been given to his predecessor.

• (1640)

Not to mention that leadership comes from the top. The Prime Minister of Canada has been the subject of three ethics investigations. On two occasions he was found guilty of not complying with the ethics rules. When the top of the pyramid, the Prime Minister, does not follow the ethics rules and is found guilty two out of three times of not complying with ethics rules, this has an unfortunate and sad impact and tends to trickle down. That is what is happening right now at many levels of this government and that is what happened with this \$500-million green fund that was so badly managed. That is why we need to tighten things up. That is why we, the three opposition parties, asked that the documents be transferred to a third party. That is an order from the House. The Chair recognized that these documents did indeed need to be transferred to a third party. Naturally, this created a precedent. Everything starts with a precedent, however, so one can certainly be created here.

• (1645)

[English]

However, let me remind colleagues that we are talking about the RCMP; we are not talking about the private business of someone else, Joe whoever, or I do not know who. I have full confidence in the RCMP as a group, as an authority and as being made up of serious people. Yes, I trust the RCMP. If some people in the House have a problem with the RCMP, they just have to say that. That is not what we think here.

We need transparency, responsibility and accountability more than ever; that is why this is a matter of the House. Unfortunately the government refuses to do what the order is telling it to do. As long as the government refuses, we cannot move forward.

[Translation]

As Chantal Hébert so aptly commented not long ago, the Conservatives are taking a lot of flack. We are being accused of slowing everything down. If the Liberals wanted to, they could end this immediately. However, they are not going to do that. The same holds true for the other two opposition parties. They could take action. What we want is to have the order carried out. That was for the green fund. What is happening in the House right now is extremely interesting, but as an old parliamentarian, I urge all Canadians to pay careful attention to what is going on in parliamentary committees.

[English]

Well, I am not that old, even if I have white hair, but after 16 years of parliamentary experience I can tell colleagues one thing: Committees are doing a lot of very interesting work. I know that some colleagues on the other side of the aisle think exactly the same way. Yes, what is happening right now during question period in the House of Commons is very important, but there is a lot of good work being done in committees.

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[Translation]

Speaking of good work, we at the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development have once again shown that another funding entity is sadly being mismanaged as well. So far, the problem is not as serious as what happened before, but that is why we want to delve a lot deeper into the matter. The fund is called the net-zero accelerator. Three key words: accelerate to reach net zero. The goal is to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. By then, this country must have reached net zero. That means picking up the pace. No matter what, the zero target must be reached by 2050. What lessons have we learned after years of this Liberal government?

Let us not forget that we are talking about an \$8-billion envelope. Earlier, we were justifiably upset about \$380 million out of a total of \$500 million being mismanaged. Now we are talking \$8 billion. The commissioner of the environment and sustainable development looked into the management of various things here and there. He wanted to know what that looked like. So far, about half the envelope has been spent. What we are learning is that there is a flagrant lack of objectives, a flagrant lack of respect for the rules surrounding the net-zero accelerator's actual objective. Do not forget that this means net zero by 2050. We need targets. Unfortunately, no progress has been made pretty much anywhere.

We have learned that a mere five of the 17 projects analyzed had targets, according to the commissioner. The whole purpose of the net zero accelerator initiative is to set a target that the entire planet set for itself under the Paris Agreement, namely, net zero by 2050. Billions of dollars are being invested to meet these targets. Now we have learned that, at the halfway point, with \$4 billion spent so far, only five of 17 companies have targets. Of course, it is easy to meet a non-existent target. They get the money, but they have no target.

Here is a great example of that: \$700 million of taxpayers' money was given to a foreign firm that had no reduction targets. Obviously, I am talking about the agreement announced with great fanfare a year and a few months ago, when Volkswagen, a foreign company, received a contribution that could go up to \$18 billion of taxpayers' money. One might even call it a donation. The company was given taxpayers' money via a direct subsidy. That \$700 million has already been paid out. It is important to understand that this is not revenue from the goods and services tax, the GST, because all the GST does is pay the interest on the debt that this government has doubled over the past nine years. That is how bad things have gotten. All Canadians need to know that, when they pay GST, the money is not being invested in the services to which they are entitled. Instead, it is being used to cover the interest on the debt that this insatiable government, which has no scruples about spending and no parameters, has allowed to balloon over the past nine years.

When the government takes tax dollars from working people and hands them over to a foreign entity, one would at least expect it to have real objectives, but there are none. It is disappointing. There is no accountability. Based on how certain targets are calculated, they are sometimes counted twice. I am not the one saying this. The environment commissioner said so. The government is exaggerating the reductions that are being assessed. The government cannot say how much greenhouse gas, or GHG, emissions have been reduced with this project. The government cannot say how much money has

been allocated to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On top of that, five out of 17 projects have no targets. They are, however, receiving funding from taxpayers. That is not the right way to manage taxpayers' money. This means that people may not have the confidence they should have when it comes time to have a proper and intelligent discussion about reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, when this government took office, the mandate letter of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change said the following:

To realize these objectives, I ask that you achieve results for Canadians by delivering the following commitments.

...Support the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry in the implementation of the Net Zero Accelerator initiative, with an emphasis on ensuring that investments drive industrial transition and significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions on a scale consistent with achieving Canada's climate goals and meaningfully transform Canadian industry to lead and compete in a net-zero emissions future.

My goodness, that is well written. It would be even better if those instructions had been followed, but that did not happen. There are always plenty of words, targets, ambition and attempts, but very little in the way of real results. Canada is the worst country in the G7. It is 62nd out of 67. However, the Liberals are great when it comes time to make announcements and put on a big show. Unfortunately, that is what we saw with Lion Electric in Quebec. I take no pleasure in saying that, because I am a proud Quebecker. The government made a big announcement three years ago, but it did not take action when it was time to do so. The result is that, today, the company has invested billions of dollars without achieving any real results.

More than ever, Canada needs a serious government that spends taxpayers' money appropriately to reduce emissions and pollution.

• (1650)

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Conservative member cites a number of studies. I have one that was released today. It comes from two economists at the University of Calgary, Trevor Tombe and Jennifer Winter. These two economists found that the price on pollution has had a minimal impact on inflation since 2019. Most price increases are the result of global factors.

This is a far cry from the nuclear winter that the Conservatives were announcing. The study also says that hyperbole by politicians is nothing new and that voters should keep that in mind. I say all of this to set the record straight.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, the carbon tax issue will be resolved when the government has the courage, the honesty and the dignity to ask Canadians to go to the polls. Canadians will have the opportunity to have a say on that.

The reality is that the report that was tabled by the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development indicates that greenhouse gas reductions projected after 10 years cannot be reliably estimated. Those are not my words. It is the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development who said that.

He said that these projects undergo a quantitative assessment to determine their potential for contributing to a net-zero economy. Their primary objective aligned with the net zero accelerator model is to support our 2050 objectives. Accordingly, the contribution agreements do not include any commitment to reduce greenhouse gases in the short term.

We were talking about words earlier. How can we trust this government that crows about great principles and ambitious targets? As the commissioner of the environment and sustainable development said in his report, unfortunately, there is no way to check this. Barely five out of 17 projects have targets, while the very objective of the net zero accelerator initiative is to set targets.

• (1655)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague highlighted some really important things, including that the Liberal government continues to put forward targets and miss its targets. It is like a constant public relations campaign. I want to thank my colleague for supporting my motion, M-151, to tackle plastic pollution and the House also did, unanimously, in 2018. It led to the first-ever ghost and derelict fishing gear fund. However, what did the government do this year on World Oceans Day? It announced that it is going to host the 2nd International Fishing Gear Innovation Summit. The Liberals talk about their global leadership when it comes to tackling ghost and derelict fishing gear and bringing together harvesters. They are going to host that here in Canada, but they failed to tell the international community that they killed the program. They actually stopped funding this world-class program, but they are going to host a summit to talk about their great program that they killed.

What does my colleague think about the constant public relations campaign when we have really important environmental issues, which I know he and people in Quebec City care about, when it comes to tackling plastic pollution and protecting our planet?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his direct assertion of the fact that the government, unfortunately, is very proud and very strong on announcements but is not strong on results.

It reminds me of something very special. In my home city, Quebec City, there is a company producing plastic products and 95% of its plastic comes from recycled plastic, which is great. The problem is the recycled plastic comes from the Philippines. We have to travel halfway around the world to have access to something that we have plenty of here in this country. More than ever, we need that kind of concrete action to have access to our own recycled plastic and have our own company produce it, instead of having to reach out halfway around the world to access to that product.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there was a privilege motion just before the member stood up and the Conservatives were saying that the threshold to invoke the Emergencies Act has not been met. That is the Conservative Party's conclusion, but Justice Rouleau said in an inquiry that the threshold had been met. The Conservatives say not to believe the judge or the courts, believe the Conservatives.

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Fast-forward to the motion we are talking about now. The RCMP says that the Conservative strategy of trying to release unredacted documents directly to the RCMP is wrong. The RCMP does not want the information. The Conservatives are saying not to listen to the RCMP, listen to the Conservatives.

It seems that the Conservatives are being very self-serving and are completely ignoring things like the RCMP and our judicial independence. Can the member tell us why?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I spoke a few minutes ago about the fact that I have been honoured and privileged to be elected by the people for the last 16 years. I served seven years at the National Assembly and nine years in the House of Commons. I think that my hon. colleague has been a member of the legislature for 24 years?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Twenty years.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Okay, 20 years. Madam Speaker, he is a young man, too.

I have to remind the member that it is quite important to respect the rule made by the Speaker. I know he agrees with me and this is an order from the Speaker. More than that, when we are talking about environmental issues, let me quote what an expert said just yesterday in the committee.

• (1700)

[Translation]

The policy director at Nature Canada said that when governments miss targets or mismanage public funds, it hurts public expectations and public support for these programs. He added that it is better to have modest promises that are met than ambitious targets that are not.

I invite the government to reflect on these words from this highly regarded environmental activist in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague and I have been colleagues together here for quite some time in the House of Commons. He is a fine representative not only of Quebec but of Canada, with lots of experience. One of the things that I found deeply disturbing about this, as somebody who has a background in environmental science, as I worked in that field when I was a much younger man, is the fact that there was not much politics going on at Sustainable Development Technology Canada. There was generally a consensus among all parliamentarians that SDTC was generally doing good things and advancing technology and development in environmental sustainability.

Can my colleague comment on how that has now been ruined by the incompetence of the government?

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Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I know that my hon. colleague is a strong advocate for concrete action to reduce emissions and to reduce pollution. This is what we need more than ever in this country, and especially in the House of Commons. We need to have people who are more concerned with concrete action than big announcements. Unfortunately, with regard to this fund that we are talking about, which we have to identify as the green slush fund, in the last five years, the government used it as a fund to give gifts to some of their supporters. That is not the way to deal with it.

As I said earlier, this is coming from the top, when we have seen the Prime Minister twice recognized as not respecting the ethics rules. If the example is coming from the top, unfortunately, it will fall, with all the dirty stuff, to other administrative corps. That is exactly what we have seen in this. It is not me who is saying that. This is the Auditor General, who published a report saying that 186 times they did not act correctly, which means that \$390 million was not invested correctly out of \$500 million, so \$4 out of \$5 were not treated correctly. This is the Liberal heritage. Shame on them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am going to go back to my first question. The member is an experienced parliamentarian. I would suggest that the motion that we are debating says that we take the issue out of the floor of the House of Commons and put it into a committee. The member knows that because it was a Conservative motion. The Conservatives are holding the floor of the House of Commons hostage because they are trying to push their agenda, which goes against what the RCMP is recommending.

Does he not agree, as a parliamentarian, that it is a little bit more touchy than he is trying to imply?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, it is very disappointing for me to say this, but unfortunately the real hostages in the country are Canadians, because they are hostages of the government. If Liberals want to do something strong, they should call an election and let the people decide, and then we will see where Canadians stand.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the people's House.

Once again today, sadly and unfortunately, we are continuing to have to hold this government to account as it relates to producing documents that have been repeatedly requested by a clear majority in the House and backed by the Speaker's ruling. Once again, it would behoove this government to act upon on that, and then we can move on to other business that Canadians want us to be discussing. However, we cannot do that until we have the assurance of transparency on this very serious matter.

Part of the role of the official opposition is to hold the government to account and to make sure that taxpayer funds are used responsibly, and for good reason. Anyone looking at this right now clearly understands and clearly agrees with the official opposition, and other opposition parties, that there is a definite lack of transparency. Therefore, Canadians are wondering why they are working hard every day to make ends meet while somehow the friends, special privileged groups and organizations that seem to match ideologically with the government of the day are receiving an abundance of funds. It is amazing how much they are getting to fund an

ideology without results. I think that many Canadians share our frustration.

We have a government that soars in the rhetoric of healing the planet, cleansing the oceans, rolling back the tides and bringing down temperatures, but when we look at the reality of it, there are no results. There is a lot of money going out the door, a lot of philosophical debate, a lot of virtue signalling at these grand national stages and conferences around the world. The Liberals go all over and talk about, "We're going to do these great things for the environment. Look at how much money we're spending." However, Canadians are not nearly as concerned about an announcement that is going to spend more money on the government's friends. They want results, and they are frustrated because they are getting no results for the absolute gargantuan amount of money that is being spent.

We need a government that prioritizes the priorities of the people. I think if the Liberals did take it to the people in a carbon tax election, like we have been calling for, they would hear clearly that their priorities around this are not the priorities of the people they say they represent. Need I go any further than the grandiose announcement about planting trees? When we think about it, two billion trees, it is amazing. It is incredible and makes us feel warm and fuzzy that we are going to plant all of these trees. Do members know how many trees have been planted? Only 0.04% of the target number of trees have been planted. It is an amazing outcome for the amount of money the Liberals are spending and how few results we are getting.

People want real, tangible, practical results, which is why we are going to continue to hold this government to account, demand transparency and ask that it release the documents, as the majority of the House, the people's representatives, have clearly asked for and as the Speaker has ruled and said that we deserve. It is time that transparency came to the House. It is time that honesty comes to the people's chamber and that we get the results we want.

We come to this place now where we are looking at a gargantuan amount of money going out the door with no real transparency or accountability, and as a result, Canadians' level of frustration is growing. We see it on their faces. They work day after day to earn the dollars that they have, and at the end of the day, they have more bills than they have money to pay those bills. No wonder they are upset. No wonder they are angry when they look at a government that does not prioritize their needs and does not seem to be concerned about their priorities. Instead, it has all kinds of time and money for its ideology. However, right now, with a nation that is facing an economic crisis with the threat of tariffs on the horizon, basically people are wondering, "Do I pay the rent? Do I get groceries, or do I put gas in my car? Can I buy my kids Christmas gifts this year, or do I make my rent payment?" These are not fictional stories; it is the reality.

• (1705)

Our food bank use has overwhelmingly grown. In my region, food bank usage is up over 30% year over year. That is a staggering stat. People are now wondering, especially seniors on fixed incomes, how they will make it to the new year when they are looking at escalating power bills and fuel costs, and every time they go to get groceries it is costing more. I think we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to be responding to those kinds of needs and those matters. It is too bad that those on the other side will not simply comply with the order of the House, release the documents and get back to work on the priorities of Canadians.

The frustration is real. They are being taxed and burdened. I cannot help but think of that. It is said that history repeats itself. In reality, it probably does not repeat itself, but it certainly does rhyme. We will find rhymes throughout history and cycles within politics, governments and societies.

It is a wonderful time of year, Christmastime. This will come as no surprise to many in the House, but I cannot help but think of the most wonderful story that has been told and is still being told the world over. It is why literally billions will be celebrating this month. It is the wonderful story of Christmas. Anyone might ask how Christmas relates to what we are talking about, but it does.

On that very first Christmas, it was written that it came at a time of taxation. It was a heavy and burdensome time of taxation, and a census had to be done to find out exactly what the population was in that region so more taxes could be collected. The census was rendered and everyone was to return to their place of origin or birth.

A young man by the name of Joseph, who had taken a young, beautiful lady by the name of Mary to be his wife, had to make the journey to Bethlehem. It was not an easy journey. We have a way of romanticizing the imagery. We have these wonderful images of nativity, but it was probably not very pretty nor exciting at the time for this terrified young couple, who were living under accusations and probably being very much falsely accused. The rumour mill was rampant. They were heading out into uncertainty. She was not just early in her pregnancy, but a long way into it.

I do not know about members, but I am thankful that I have never had the experience of carrying a young one inside me, but my beloved bride has, and I must say—

An hon. member: You had the better part.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, yes, I had the better part. I will agree. I remember that when she was with child, I had no way of totally understanding that or relating to it.

Members should picture this and go with me now on this journey. Can they imagine what this couple would have been feeling as they started out and a very pregnant lady is on the back of a donkey going down a bumpy road, very much with child, with a young man?

An hon. member: They're not smooth.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Mr. Speaker, it is not smooth on the back of a donkey. It is not comfortable.

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They are making this journey to a place called Bethlehem. Members can imagine the thoughts they were thinking: "This is not how I imagined it would be, Joseph"; "This is not exactly what I had in mind when we started courting"; and "This is not really what I had hoped for, that I would be stuck on a donkey going to a town I do not know where I have to pay more taxes. That is the last thing I want to be doing when I am about to give birth".

We forget about this part of the story, but it is very real. They must have been feeling overwhelmed and filled with questions, wondering how they were going to get out from under the burden they were carrying, and she is getting more uncomfortable.

• (1710)

We can see that back then, as it is now, it was a time of taxation. It was a burdensome time. It was a time of uncertainty for this young couple. They were feeling the pressure of the moment.

Can anyone imagine what Joseph must have been experiencing? His new bride is about to have her baby and he is going to a town he had not been to in a long time. He gets there and starts looking for a place to stay. He goes to the inn thinking that they finally made it. He knocks on the innkeeper's door and the innkeeper asks how he can help. Joseph says he needs a room; the innkeeper does not know how badly he needs a room because his bride is expecting. The innkeeper says there is no room in the inn for them. There was a housing crisis in Bethlehem. There were no rooms left. They had more people than they had rooms. People were wondering where they were going to go.

To complicate matters, Mary is with child, is about to deliver and Joseph is not a doctor. They have no place to stay and Joseph is scrambling. He asks the innkeeper if there is anything he could do; somebody needs to help him because his bride is about to deliver. Can members hear it and see it? We have to picture it. All of a sudden, the innkeeper says that he does not have much, but there is a stable out back, an old barn. It is not all that luxurious, but it at least gives them some cover for the night. Joseph says that would do; it was fine. Can members see it? Mary is waddling her way back to the barn and Joseph is panicking, saying he does not know what they are going to do and it was so strange.

Then sure enough, that incredible, unbelievable night happened in the midst of incredible uncertainty and great taxation. When they were shut out of one place after another and it looked like all the odds were against them, Mary brought forth the child. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a feed-box. This promised king and prince of peace did not come by way of a palace, was not escorted by a private jet and did not come in a Maserati. He came humbly by way of a donkey, born in a barn out back. He was witnessed by cattle and surrounded by sheep dung. It did not smell good and it was not pretty, but something incredible came out of something very ordinary.

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Mary and Joseph are incredible people through the lens of history, but they did not have large pedigrees, big names or wealth. They were common folk who had exceptional favour on their life and were chosen for an exceptional purpose. A lot of Canadians who find themselves in uncertain times and under the weight of great taxation can draw hope from this timeless story. No matter how ordinary they feel, how stacked the odds may be against them and how many times they may feel overlooked by society and forgotten by governments, there is someone who still knows their name and recognizes them. That is what the story of Christmas is all about, that we are not alone. He came to us.

I love this story because the first ones to be entrusted with the great news of the newborn Saviour and the babe in a manger were not the kings and rulers of the day. Guess who they were. It was the farmers and shepherds, those tending their flocks on the hillside at night with the stars brightly shining. The angels lit up and gave the message. They said they had great news of joy, good news for all people, peace on earth and goodwill to all men. Who was that news given to? It was not given to the rulers of the day. That news was entrusted to the common folks, the forgotten ones: the sheep herders and the farmers on the hillside.

That relates to us as parliamentarians. Some of the greatest news, some of the best ideas and some of the things that will help get our country back on the right track will be found at the tables of ordinary folks, from hearing their stories, listening to their challenges and understanding where they are coming from. If we took time to listen to more shepherds, farmers, truck drivers, oil workers, bucket carriers and waitresses, I think we would gain a lot more wisdom than spending time at fancy conferences, paying big money and listening to the so-called experts tell us things that obviously have misled us in so many ways. If we get back to the people who built this country, the common folks, I think there is wisdom there that can get us out of the malaise we are in now.

• (1715)

I have to wrap up this little story. I am down to five minutes. Oh my land, I have to bring it to a close.

We cannot leave it with the shepherds and the angels singing on high and Mary, Joseph and the baby. There were three others who came. They were called the wise men. I love this about the story. The three wise men, the Magi, came from afar, because wise people recognize that sometimes we have to go a long way to find the truth in life. Sometimes we have to be willing to step out of our comfort zone, come down from our high places and go to the lowly places to find some of the most precious gifts that can be found, and those three wise men were wise indeed.

They were wise enough to seek out the answers to what they were facing in an uncommon place, and they followed a star and it got them to the town of Bethlehem. They came bearing gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

When they showed up with the gold, the gold obviously spoke to financial resources. How can we reflect the wisdom of the wise men? Perhaps we can help the less fortunate with our resources. If we have been blessed with some goods, let us remember to give to good charities that do good things in our communities and make a difference in people's lives in a real way. Let us remember to bring

our finances and our gold to the table. When we give to the least fortunate, we are actually giving it to the king, and it brings honour to him.

The second gift was frankincense. Frankincense was incense, which basically represented the prayers of the people throughout the ages. The good news about prayer is that prayer lives on. The prayers of our forefathers, our moms and our dads, and yes, the prayers of our parents and our own prayers, will live on. When we bring our prayers to God, they are a gift to him. The wise men brought that, and prayers for peace are going on right now all over the world, looking for peace. This time of year, we remember that a promise of peace is offered to us, and we can give that to others.

The last gift they brought was myrrh. What was myrrh symbolic of? Myrrh was the ointment they brought to heal wounds. It represented brokenness. The amazing thing about this king, which is different from other kings, is that the greatest gift we can honour him with is our vulnerabilities and our brokenness. I think a lot of Canadians and a lot of people throughout the world are hurting right now. Christmas can be a time of mixed things. It can be filled with a lot of joy, but for those who have recently lost loved ones, there is a lot of hurt, a lot of pain and a lot of questions.

My own family knows what that is like. I lost a brother during the Christmas season. He was 34 years old. He had three young daughters, and I watched my parents age overnight. He passed away on Boxing Day of 2007, and as a person of faith, I can tell members that Christmas is mixed for us. We have many joyful memories, and we have some painful ones, but I can tell members this: I am thankful for the greatest gift that was ever given at Christmas, because it helped my family. My prayer for everyone in this House is that it helps all of them to know that, yes, he came for everyone on every side of the House, regardless of partisanship or politics, because there are things bigger than politics in life.

That is the greatest gift that was ever given, because his name was to be called Emmanuel, which means "God is with us". He is with us in uncertain times. He is with us in hurtful times. He is with us in painful times and in joyous times, and he promised to never leave us.

With that, to conclude, my wish for the House and for everyone in Canada who is hurting right now is that he may be their Emmanuel, their God, who is with them and with us. Merry Christmas to members and their families.

• (1720)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his impassioned speech this afternoon. I would like to wish him and his family a merry Christmas, and of course, I express my condolences on the passing of his brother.

I was raised in a Catholic household and went to church. I since have not attended church. I have taken a slightly different path personally, but I attended catechism, and I remember Genesis 2:15 told us that people were put on this planet to take care of Planet Earth.

I am also a big fan of Katharine Hayhoe, an evangelical Christian who wrote a book called *Saving Us*. It is a book about how to communicate about climate change and how to communicate the necessity of humans to act, given the impact we have had on our planet, through burning fossil fuels. It is about how to have those conversations, particularly when we come together over the holiday season. If anybody out there is looking forward to getting together with their family, but maybe is not looking forward to having discussions about politics or climate change, I would encourage them to look up *Saving Us* by Katharine Hayhoe. She is brilliant.

I also know that foundational to Christian ethic is that we ought to all support vulnerable people. In my view, Jesus was undoubtedly a democratic socialist. He cared about people first and foremost. I would just remind my colleague that he was on his way to Bethlehem because Mary and Joseph were tax compliant. They were going for the census because they believed in helping other people.

Statistics tell us very clearly that evangelical Protestants and Catholics are among the people who care about climate change the least. Could the member change my mind? Could he tell me that he believes in climate change, and that he believes we ought to act to lower our emissions and to fight for our planet because it is the only one that God ever created for us?

• (1725)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question. I do wish him and his family a very merry Christmas, and a happy and blessed new year.

Obviously, I believe all of us are entrusted and are called upon to be good stewards of the land and the earth. I have young children. I have one in grade 7, and a couple in college and university. I want to hand on to my children a better, cleaner and greener planet than what I found. However, I do not think the answer is found in virtue signals or in useless taxes that punish our own people and that do nothing to improve the environment.

We have had the carbon tax in this country now for over a decade and a half in some jurisdictions. I asked the environment commissioner of Canada if we had a metric that could tell us how much carbon has been reduced in Canada as a result of the implementation of the carbon tax. Do members know what he told me? He said that we have no such metric.

The landmark signature piece of legislation, the carbon tax that has punished us into poverty, has done nothing to affect the climate

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and has done everything to diminish the pocketbooks of Canadians. I think we need a better approach.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I enjoy my time on the fisheries committee with the member, and I do want to first say that I am incredibly sorry for the loss of his brother.

I was looking at my surroundings as the member was speaking, thinking that I was in a gospel church. In fact, I am not. I am still in the House of Commons, so I am going to ask a question that is very important to my role as a member of Parliament.

I will bring this back to what the member was talking about. He was talking about Mary from the Bible. I was reflecting on the fact that I think what Mary would like more than a manger would be affordable housing, child care and access to health care, or GST off all home heating. These are all examples of things all of us need. The member talked about making sure that we support one another, particularly at this time of year, which I agree with.

Why are the Conservatives voting against all these essential supports that Canadians across the country need and deserve?

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. I always enjoy our time on the fisheries committee as well, and it is always a pleasure to work with her.

What Canadians are saying more than anything is that they are seeing a piecemeal approach with gimmicks, tax tricks, and all kinds of fun and cute stuff to pretend that we are doing something. What I hear, over and over again, from folks back home is that they want us to provide them with some relief and to somehow get them a carbon tax election so that they can get rid of that stupid carbon tax, so they can afford more things and can live their lives with less government intrusion. It would do them more favours. It would relieve more pressure, and it would let them raise their families and live their lives without the big hand of bigger government on their backs.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech.

I want to ask him a question because he did touch on carbon taxation and the effect it is having on our citizens and on our economy.

A short time ago, the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development gave a quote when he reported on one of his audits. He said, "The recent decreases to projected 2030 emissions were not due to climate actions taken by governments but were instead because of revisions to the data or methods used in modelling."

What does my colleague think about that kind of deceit being displayed by the Liberal government in order to pretend it is actually having an effect on the environment?

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Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague for Calgary Centre is really and truly a bright mind in the House; he understands finances, financial structures and how they work, and taxation more than most. He is exactly right: So much of this is virtue signalling without any real results that are tangible for Canadians.

The carbon tax has cost every sector, because every time someone is taxed, for example when the farmer who grows our food is taxed, the trucker who transports our food is taxed and the grocer who puts the food on the shelf is taxed, that affects every Canadian who has to buy the food. It is a multiplying effect that has no genuine benefit to the environment. The whole world is starting to pivot and realize. People are not buying into the schematics anymore; they want practical, tangible results.

The best thing we can do for Planet Earth is to get more Canadian energy on the planet, because we have the best regulations and the best workers, and we produce the best products in the world. We have a good-news story to tell and we need to be telling it. The more Canadian energy we get on the market, the better the planet is going to be.

• (1730)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member used the term “gimmicks”. Let me remind my colleague that in 2021, the Conservatives brought forward the idea of having a GST holiday, just like what has been passed in the House and implemented. They also brought forward the concept of removing the GST on home heating. What did they do, though, when the NDP brought forward a motion to do that? They voted against it.

The Conservatives bring forward ideas, but if they are not the ones putting forward the motion, they vote against it. One thing we do know is that when the Harper government was in power, the last time Conservatives governed, they gave a 7% tax cut for big corporations that cost Canadian taxpayers over \$70 billion. They gave a 1% tax break to small business. We know where their priorities are.

Are the Conservatives going to make promises and then continue to break them? Is that the plan, or are they going to put forward and share something today that they actually want to support and work with other parties on? In nine years, I cannot think of a thing they have gotten done. Instead, we have been working on dental care and pharmacare. I will let my colleague present something here that maybe we can work together on.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Speaker, I always enjoy conversations with my colleague. We had a brief stint on the fisheries committee together. What is glaringly and absolutely obvious is that, every time, the New Democrats go back and talk about what happened under Harper; however, it is nine years later, and they and their party have been propping up a government that has produced no results on the environment and has cost Canadians exorbitantly more.

I call it a gimmick because I got a call from a small business owner just last night who was saying how frustrated he is right now because the GST break is going to be for only a month and a half, it is only on certain items while other items are exempt, and it is not applicable across the board. It is leading to more frustration, more consternation, and no relief on a broad basis for Canadians who are

desperate for relief. The best way they can get that is to have a carbon tax election so they get to choose.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has lost the point. It was a Conservative idea, albeit for a month as opposed to two months, and it is a GST break at a time that I believe is an appropriate time to do it. Conservatives actually campaigned on it; it was in their Conservative election platform. The leader of the Conservative Party at the time tweeted about it, saying it was a good thing. Now we were able to vote in favour of it, yet they decided to vote against it.

I think it is legitimate to ask why the Conservatives have had a change of heart.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is truly a workhorse in the House. He is here and puts in more hours than anyone. A close second, maybe, if he is not first, would be the member for Lakeland, who is here almost as much as he is. They are workhorses.

With respect to the question, what Canadians are clear about is that they do not want, at this time of economic crisis, what little relief is being provided for six to eight weeks. It is not even going to scratch the surface of the needs of Canadians. What Canadians are crying for is a permanent, full-time axe of the carbon tax for everyone everywhere. What better way is there to get it than a carbon tax election? Let us have one.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac for bringing his words of wisdom into this place. I want to talk to our lobby desk assistant and ask that they please never make me follow the member for Tobique—Mactaquac again. I do not know how I am going to top that. Every time I go to midnight mass now I will be thinking about the speech he just gave. To all the pastors out there who do not have a sermon for midnight mass, I would suggest they just take a clip provided by the House of Commons, which they can then provide their congregation. They will be more enlightened than they were before.

As well, I want to wish a very merry Christmas to all of my constituents, back in central Alberta, of Red Deer—Lacombe. I know they are awaiting my Christmas card and the calendar that often comes with it. I promise them those things will somehow, in some way, someday, get there. In the meantime, I will continue to communicate with them the best way I can.

On to the point at hand, which is the continuation of the debate on the government's mishandling of the green slush fund for Sustainable Development Technology Canada, another institution that has now been, basically, tarnished and, as a matter of fact, disbanded. It is another victim of absolutely abysmal leadership. Never in my time here has one person, the Prime Minister, been such a collection of bad ideas, bad judgment and bad leadership. Never has Canada, I think, had such a pall cast over it and never has the citizenship been this frustrated.

I now rise a third time to address the chamber in this matter relating to the green slush fund. Why? Because the government has refused, and continues to refuse, to turn over documents relating to the corruption at SDTC, as ordered by the House on June 10. With this issue dragging on for months now, it is clear the government has entrenched itself. It clearly has something it wants to hide. There is no majority in this House that is going to let the government off the hook. It is not just the Conservatives. For the time being, I am sure there is a price that somebody can be purchased for. I will save my comments for that time when that day comes.

For now, we are at an impasse. If I do not rise on my feet again before this House adjourns for Christmas, when I return, I will have eclipsed the 19th anniversary of my election to the chamber, and I have never seen anything like this. As a matter of fact, to my knowledge, this is the longest privilege debate in our nation's history. Wayne Gretzky set all kinds of great records. The kind of records this guy is setting will certainly have him remembered for all of the wrong reasons in the history books to come.

For those who are watching, here is a quick refresher on the scandal. Sustainable Development Technology Canada, or SDTC, was an organization that gave taxpayer-funded grants to companies with solutions to improve Canada's environmental record. As I mentioned in a question earlier, this is something there was general consensus about. SDTC was started up, I believe, in the early 2000s by the then Liberal government, Jean Chrétien and his government. This program survived the former Conservative government. We saw the value in Sustainable Development Technology Canada, despite all of the accusations, which are baseless, that somehow Conservatives do not care about the environment, which is simply not true at all; we are just realistic and practical about the environment, which is what differentiates us from everybody else.

The program was maintained all through the tenure of former prime minister Stephen Harper, until the current Prime Minister and the people he chose to appoint to oversee these things. It was his decision. The Prime Minister decides who is in cabinet. He decides who is going to lead in those portfolios. He is the one who judges their character, their virtues and their competencies and he is the one who is ultimately responsible for this fiasco.

• (1735)

The Auditor General found that SDTC doled out nearly \$400 million of a \$500-million program to contracts that went in some way, shape or form to the benefit of the very board members whom the minister, under the watch of the Prime Minister, had appointed to the board of SDTC, board members who were clearly Liberal appointments. In awarding these contracts, the board members were found to have breached the ethics rules around contracts not once, not twice, not 10 times, not 50 times, not 100 times and not 150 times, but 186 times. In addition, they funded 10 illegitimate projects to the tune of \$58 million. These are projects that could not demonstrate an environmental benefit or that they would help with the development of green technology at all.

Now, not only do we have 186 conflicts of interest, but we are actually doling out money for which the purpose was not even indicative in any of the contracts that were awarded. The scandal was

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so bad that the government abolished SDTC and rolled the fund into Natural Resources Canada, or NRC.

There is a word that comes to mind when we hear of a scandal of this size and of this magnitude. It has been said before, and it will be said again. It is a commonplace word, said virtually every time there is a Liberal government in this country, and that word is "corruption". It is corrupt. The word "corruption" comes from the Latin word *corruptus*, a past participle of the Latin word *corrumpere*. The prefix *cor-* means "altogether", and *rumpere* means "to break". In old Greek, the word is synonymous with decomposing, putrid and spoiled.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, it is too bad the hecklers were not listening.

Corruption and decay go hand in hand. As such, when we say that everything feels broken, we say it because we mean it. The country is in decay, and the government's rotten influence is running rampant, spoiling every single thing it touches, including even those programs and services for which there is consensus in all corners of the House. The consensus regarding immigration is another great example of something that this Prime Minister has now destroyed.

My colleague, the member for South Shore—St. Margarets, said in one of his speeches that this is corruption like we have never seen in Canada. I believe that he is correct in his assessment of the situation, with one exception: There is probably one other prime minister who could rival the current profligate spending and graft, and that is the Prime Minister's father. It seems like every time we have a prime minister with that last name, the country ends up on edge. This Liberal rot extends far beyond the SDTC. It now touches every facet of Canadian society and its institutions.

Members can take the natural health product industry, for instance, and I will tie that in. The government took a world-leading regulatory regime, implemented by the previous Harper government, and ripped it up as if it meant nothing. It did not bother to consult with the industry, either. That would have obviously been beneath it. Instead of continuing with the existing framework, the government, led by the inept Minister of Health, decided to move natural health products into the same regime as therapeutic drugs, contrary to previous parliamentary studies and general consensus that vitamins and supplements are not the same things as doctor-prescribed medications. These changes would devastate the natural health product industry. The IADSA, the International Alliance of Dietary Food Supplement Associations, had this to say about the changes that are being proposed by the current government here in Canada:

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We are writing today to express our concerns about the regulatory changes being proposed in Canada, which, if implemented, could impact not only the competitive position of the dietary supplement industry within your country but also Canada's position as a global reference point in this area.

Up to now, Canada has been a world leader in the regulation of dietary supplements. We fear that the proposed changes to Canada's regulatory framework for natural health products risk creating an environment that could stifle the industry and limit Canadians' access to high-quality supplements.

● (1740)

IADSA has always promoted the Canadian model as a global reference point for governments across the world who are creating or redeveloping their regulatory systems. This Canadian model is recognized as providing consumers access to products which are safe and beneficial while fostering innovation and supporting investment in the sector.

Those are probably the most glowing words we could hear from an international organization, touting the regime created by the Harper administration for natural health products as being the gold standard against which every other country is measured. Now it is writing to our committee and to members of Parliament saying that if we pursue the current agenda of the Liberal government, with the support of the NDP, through Bill C-47 and the self-care framework that the regulatory framework entails, we will actually destroy the gold standard, the gold star, the institution that the rest of the world should be modelling itself after and designing itself after.

As a response to the illogical and unwarranted attack on the natural health product industry, I did introduce my private member's bill, Bill C-368, to bring the industry back to the old regulatory regime, yet the government is not done with its attacks. Let me explain to the people at home why an election is so important.

In early spring, the government plans to implement its cost recovery framework through the gazetting process. Bill C-368 may have passed second reading in this place and it may have passed the committee stage, but it is yet to be debated at third reading in the House and passed. It would then have to go to the Senate to go through that same set of steps and processes all over again, all before the next election.

Given that the timeline is probably getting to be fairly unlikely, the government is still free, then, and still has the old legislation it passed in Bill C-47 and Bill C-69, to pursue the regulatory environment to implement the self-care framework. This is a self-funding model that is behind the changes to begin with.

It is a tax grab on the industry to get the people in the small and medium-sized mom-and-pop shops, which are small businesses that create, innovate and develop all the supplements, such as vitamins, protein powders and things of this nature, under the same cost recovery framework that companies like Pfizer or Purdue Pharma would have to actually be under. Nobody in the industry has this kind of money. It is a death sentence for the natural health product industry.

Every day that the government has care and control of the Governor in Council, the ability to pass regulatory changes, it is still allowed, notwithstanding Bill C-368, to pursue this framework. The Minister of Health has said very clearly that he is hell-bent on destroying this institution as well. The government will implement the self-care framework.

For the Canadians who are watching, this is very important. There are two parties so far in the House that have voted non-confidence in the government so we could have an election. An election would kill the ability of the government to pursue the regulatory change to the natural health product industry. It would not be able to gazette anything during an election. At the outcome of the next election, hopefully there is a government that will cease destroying the natural health product industry in Canada.

This is why it is very important that the one party that continues to support the government be held accountable. It is continuing to support the government, even though it may have supported my bill in some bizarre manners. I might add that a member on the health committee actually tried to move a wrecking motion to destroy the bill at committee. Luckily he was granted a time out, heard from tens of thousands of Canadians and changed his ways, and we managed to salvage Bill C-368 at committee.

However, every day that the New Democratic Party continues to prop up the government brings us one day closer to a gazetting process for the self-care framework, which will put the cost recovery model burden on the natural health product industry. That is what will destroy the innovation and growth and destroy the gold standard model that the IADSA says is the best one in the world. That is what is at stake.

We need an election, not just because of all of the other corruption but also because of all the bad ideas. I said that earlier in my speech. Never has there been such a collection of bad ideas, bad judgment and bad leadership in one human being as there is in the current Prime Minister.

● (1745)

I use this example because it is a microcosm of what is wrong with the government. The Liberals cannot work collaboratively anymore. They have no friends left. No one is defending them. I cannot imagine why they are staying the course, because nothing is getting passed in this place. It is only to pursue the regulatory power and authority that they still have that they are clutching on to government. Who is the enabler? It is the New Democratic Party.

One can only conclude that that is the true agenda, even though others might not say so publicly. There is no doubt in my mind that that is what is going on. For those who are watching, what is at risk for the natural health product industry if we do not have an election sooner rather than later is that another gold standard institution will be ruined by the incompetence of the government.

To get back to SDTC, the crux of the matter is document production. Without documents, how are we to hold the government accountable for anything? We in the Conservative Party have asked for documents numerous times, and not just in this particular example. We have asked for them constantly, in every committee.

I happen to be a member of the procedure and House affairs committee at this time. We have asked for document productions many times. We were denied access to documents that members of the media had access to during the foreign interference scandal, for example. Members of the media can see documents that I as an elected member of Parliament have never been able to see, because the Liberal government, propped up by the NDP, whether it is in the House or at committee, always denies Parliament getting access to unredacted documents. It does not matter what the issue is.

In this particular case, it just happens to be the documents surrounding Sustainable Development Technology Canada. If Canadians are wondering why we are making such a big fuss about it, it is because this is the line in the sand. It has been crossed so many times. It was even crossed in the previous Parliament to the point that an election was called to prevent documents for the Winnipeg labs from being tabled in this place. We had someone summoned to the bar, which I do not think had happened for 113 years, who refused to bring documents when he was here. He was admonished by the Speaker of this place.

Also, the government, so self-righteous in its determination to keep things secret, actually took the previous Speaker to court. Everybody knows courts have always said that Parliament is supreme in the matters of its own governance, but that did not stop the government from pursuing that matter, so desperate it was to hide what it had done and to keep it from Canadians.

Here we are at an impasse. We are several months into it, and there is only one political party in this place that does not want to turn over the documents. It is that of the government. All the other parties to date are allowing this debate to continue until the government does what it is supposed to do and what the Speaker has asked it to do. As the Speaker has said, "The House has the undoubted right to order the production of any and all documents from any entity or individual it deems necessary to carry out its duties."

Some \$400 million of taxpayers' money was inappropriately spent, and 186 conflicts of interest were identified by the Auditor General. This is taxpayers' money. This is a government program. If this is not a textbook case of documents that Parliament should be able to see, then, frankly, I do not know what else would be.

I will wrap up my comments by saying this. A number of us in this place tonight have been here for a long time. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, if I am not on my feet again by the time I return, I will have eclipsed the 19th anniversary of my first election to this place. I have never seen a House of Commons in this much disarray, and I have never seen a government that has lost complete and utter control of the finances of the country and of law and order on the streets. It has lost control of itself and the ability to follow the rules of this place. Shame on them.

• (1750)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill: Bill C-78, an act respecting temporary cost of living relief (affordability).

Privilege

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment as amended and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member who just made his proclamation that I have been a parliamentarian, both in government and in opposition, at federal and provincial levels for over 30 years. Never before have I witnessed a political party, like the Conservative Party we see today, being borderline in contempt of Parliament, and this has now been going on for weeks going into months. In fact, the current leader of the Conservative Party gained his first-hand experience a number of years ago when his boss, Stephen Harper, was found in contempt of Parliament, and he has learned from that, because that is what we are seeing here: borderline contempt.

Fast-forward and we see the leader of the Conservative Party again being borderline in contempt of the need to get security clearance. Patrick Brown has said foreign interference is directly in the Conservative Party. Why does the member believe his leader does not have the courage to get a security clearance? Can he tell us what the leader of the Conservative Party is hiding?

• (1755)

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker. The leader of the Conservative Party was once a minister of the Crown in this place, in which case he would have had to get a security clearance. He was, obviously, capable of getting a security clearance.

The leader has been very clear in his remarks. Once he subscribes to the Prime Minister's plan for him, the Prime Minister would decide what information the Leader of the Opposition would see and what he would be able to talk about, which would be, effectively, muzzling the Leader of the Opposition. He is smart enough to know when a trap is being set by the Liberal Party and he is smart enough to stay out of it.

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to a comment the member made at the beginning of his speech. He was talking about this privilege debate, saying it is the longest in Canadian history and he has not seen anything like this in his almost 20 years in the chamber. I have not been here as long as the member has, but it is my understanding that, as my colleague was just mentioning, the only prime minister to have been found in contempt of Parliament was Prime Minister Stephen Harper. That was, of course, as the member was mentioning how long he has been here, a government he was part of.

The current Prime Minister would perhaps be held in contempt, but we will never know, because the Conservatives are filibustering their own motion. My question is this: Why are the Conservatives letting the Prime Minister off the hook instead of getting the answers we need?

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Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, there is some pretzel twisting we have to do to follow the logic of the question from the hon. colleague.

I will just let Canadians know how this works, basically. He was found in contempt by a vote of Parliament. It was a minority Parliament for Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, and I was a member of the Conservative Party. We had 124 members of Parliament. We do not have any natural allies here. We are the only political entity in the chamber that is actually on one side of the political spectrum. All the other political parties lean heavily to the other side of the spectrum, so they can make any motion, any fabrication they want and pass it, because they will have the numbers to do so any time the Conservatives are in a minority scenario.

To follow up on the rest of the member's question, I was here and it was a kangaroo court. I watched the whole thing. Was it parliamentary? Yes. Was it actually contempt? No, there was no contempt.

I appreciate the fact that the NDP has not folded up its tent and gone home yet on this. However, to answer the question that my colleague actually asked, I mean, at any point in time the NDP could change its tune and allow the government off the hook. If she wants to hold the Liberal Prime Minister to contempt, I suggest she try a unanimous consent motion and see what happens.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the speech and I would just follow up on the last question. I do find the Prime Minister in contempt of Parliament, several times, since I have been here five years and not 19 like my colleague.

If the NDP put forward a motion to find the Prime Minister in contempt, which NDP party does he think would show up, the one that actually is an opposition party or the one that is in the back pocket of the Prime Minister?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, whenever it comes to standing up and lecturing or trying to appear virtuous, the NDP always tries to appear to be doing what it says it is doing, but, every time the rubber hits the road, when it comes to the point of decision, when it really matters, which is when we vote, the NDP always votes the opposite of everything it says. We witnessed it this week. We actually put the words of the NDP leader himself in a motion. The NDP leader and his caucus voted against the very words he said, the very position he took. No one can ever believe anything the leader of the NDP ever says ever again.

• (1800)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member was knowingly misleading the House. He said that there was no contempt—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I know that we are all getting riled up but that is so far that it is almost over the edge. I am just going to ask the member to rethink that line and go at it again.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, there was contempt. The member knows that there was contempt. The contempt that was shown

by the Harper government is very clear to Canadians. The contempt of the Harper government was adjudicated here in the House. The member knows full well that there was contempt. He knows full well the long litany of Harper scandals, how deplorable the Harper government was to veterans and seniors, how bad that government was, how abysmally bad, and the scandals of billions of dollars, far beyond SDTC.

The NDP has gotten to the bottom of every one of the Liberal scandals. We were not able to get to the bottom of Conservative scandals because, each and every time, showing complete contempt for democratic processes, for any sort of transparency at all, the Harper government shut it down.

To clarify, because this member knows full well and he needs to come clean with Canadians, the Harper government was found in contempt by the Parliament and he has to admit it.

Will he admit the contempt charge that was adjudicated and resolved here on the floor of the House of Commons?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me that the member for New Westminster—Burnaby conflates issues the way that he does. The Harper government probably spent money in a way that the NDP did not agree with but it actually led to one of the most prosperous times in Canadian history. As a matter of fact, at the end of the Harper era in government, the Canadian household income was every bit as wealthy and on par with that of the United States of America. Now we actually—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

I had given the hon. member plenty of time to ask his question, so I am hoping that he would allow the hon. member to answer it.

The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, we would notice that I did not interrupt the member when he was asking his question, which was full of so many falsehoods, I could not even begin to name all of them, but I am not afforded the same courtesy back when I am answering the question. I will continue on.

The difference between the median household income of a Canadian versus that of an American has never been wider than it is now, and that only took nine years of a prime minister. I have never seen such a collection of bad ideas, bad judgment and bad leadership. It just amazes me that the New Democrats would support somebody with that many strikes against him.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let us be very clear. Stephen Harper's parliamentary secretary is the current leader of the Conservative Party. His was the only government in the Commonwealth to be held in contempt of Parliament. We can close our eyes all we want but that is the truth and the member knows it, whether he wants to admit it or not.

The question I have for him is in regard to the security clearance. The leaders of the Bloc, the NDP and the Green Party all have the security clearance, and they are not trapped. They are still able to talk. What is the real reason why the leader of the Conservative Party refuses to tell Canadians about his past?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I have already answered this question. In fact, the assertions the parliamentary secretary just made are simply not true, because the leader of the Bloc Québécois, when speaking to the media outside of this place, said that he cannot be as frank with people as he was before. I am paraphrasing in English, of course, but it is due to the fact that he has the security clearance and has had the security briefing, and now he is muzzled to a certain degree in what he is able to say.

This is just a red herring put into play by the parliamentary secretary. The Prime Minister can give and authorize a briefing to The Washington Post. If the Prime Minister wants the Leader of the Opposition to know something, he simply has to pick up the phone, call him and tell him what he wants him to know.

• (1805)

Mr. Jamil Jivani (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are still here waiting for the Liberal government to produce the documents and to turn them over to the RCMP. I know that many of my constituents and many Canadians across this country are puzzled as to why the Liberals continue to evade any accountability and responsibility in this situation.

I would like to recap why this is so important. An egregious abuse of taxpayers dollars occurred with the Sustainable Development Technology Canada fund, which was turned into a slush fund for elite Liberal insiders.

Mr. Adam van Koevorden: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I apologize for interrupting, but the RCMP has said repeatedly that it has all the documents it needs to conduct the investigation.

The Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order. It is a point of debate.

The hon. member for Durham.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, once again we see a Liberal MP trying to play word games and thinking he is smarter than everybody else in the room when he is far from it. This is a constant theme with the government. Its members play games and pretend that they know more than everybody else in our country, but the reality is that they do not.

Let us recap the abuse of taxpayer dollars that the Liberal MP for Milton would like to scoff at and gloss over.

For ineligible projects, there was \$58 million. For conflict of interest violations, there was \$334 million across 186 projects. Contribution agreements were ignored for \$58 million of taxpayer money. Added up, \$400 million of taxpayer money was wasted, and the Liberal government would like to avoid any accountability and transparency over it.

I think a lot of Canadians do not know a lot about SDTC, and there are some natural questions to ask about how an organization backed by so much money from the federal government crept away from its mission and core responsibility to the extent that it gave

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out hundreds of millions of dollars without any accountability and had its mistakes covered by the current Liberal government. I have done a lot of reading and a lot of research on SDTC, and I would like to share some of what I have learned, share some of the distractions and the way that SDTC understood its ethical responsibility to the Canadian people.

I read the SDTC code of ethics, document 12.05, and it shows a social activist agenda far outside the scope of what the Canadian public had entrusted the organization to do with taxpayer dollars. I would like to quote from that code of ethics:

SDTC recognizes that equity, diversity, and inclusion enable organizations to leverage the range of perspectives needed to address today's complex challenges. As a result, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is an important consideration for optimal operation of our organization, as well as for Funded Companies.

This is what SDTC thought the ethical management of Canadian taxpayer dollars looked like. It had completely embraced a social activist agenda that had nothing to do with why SDTC was funded, why it was incorporated and what it was entrusted to do on behalf of the Canadian public.

In fact, when we look at SDTC's most recent corporate plan, we find it being very clear of its social activist agenda: "Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are foundational to our culture." Once again, it reiterates the social activist agenda that it put at the centre of the organization's operations, far outside the scope of what it was asked to do.

It goes much deeper than that, because SDTC was an advocate for and a supporter of one of the Liberal government's most far-reaching social activist projects, the 50-30 challenge. Many Canadians might not know what that is, so I would like to explain it. The 50-30 challenge is about a micromanagement of the race and gender representation of boards of directors and senior managers at companies across the country in a wide range of industries. If we look at the businesses that have been drawn to this, we find that many, though not all, are in industries that are currently doing a massive disservice to the consumers of our country, such as the cellphone companies overcharging people on monthly bills and the banks charging Canadians over-the-top banking fees.

The 50-30 challenge seems to be a light to the moth for companies making efforts to virtue signal and look like they are compassionate and nice and care about people, but at the end of the day, they show very little regard for the Canadian consumer or the Canadian taxpayer. SDTC fits into this group of businesses beautifully. It is a great fit for SDTC, because it was a hustle to create a certain kind of perception and image of what it was doing. However, we know now, because of whistle-blowers and other documents that have been released, what exactly it was doing, which was engaging in corruption and making sure that its Liberal elite insider buddies were given cash.

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• (1810)

What else was SDTC up to? These are important questions for Canadians to know the answers to, because I think we need to understand how an organization turns into the scandal it has become.

There is another acronym that SDTC was very interested in, and obsessed with, in fact, which is ESG, or environmental, social and governance. It embraces an entire framework of understanding as to what an organization's ethical responsibilities are to the public. Through that, we understand exactly the kinds of distractions and priorities that SDTC decided to occupy itself with, while making a series of decisions that led to the mismanagement of public funds.

For those who are unfamiliar with ESG, it is a form of stakeholder capitalism. It is a form of capitalism that asserts that the responsibility of big businesses and well-funded organizations is to engage in social activism outside of the scope of the actual business purpose.

Just to remind people, what was SDTC's business purpose? Why did it exist? Why was it funded? Why was it incorporated? I will provide its own description from its website, which states, "(SDTC) helps Canadian companies develop and deploy sustainable technologies by delivering critical funding support at every stage of their journey".

We know very clearly, based on the numbers, that SDTC dramatically failed to achieve its business purpose. We know that because \$58 million of taxpayer money went to ineligible projects that did not meet the purpose of SDTC. We know it failed its business purpose because 186 projects, accounting for \$334 million, had conflict of interest violations that went unaddressed by the organization. We know that contribution agreements were ignored in the amount of \$58 million of SDTC money.

Therefore, instead of being focused on its actual business purpose, which was the reason it received taxpayer money from hard-working Canadians, it was more concerned with ESG. We can find references to ESG in lots of its documents.

In its 2022-2023 corporate plan, SDTC says, very clearly, "In keeping with our mission to enable environmental and economic prosperity for Canada, we struck a task force...to look at...(ESG)".

An SDTC press release from 2021 states, "the demand for #ESG investment products is accelerating the trend of Canada's best cleantech ideas". In fact, in that press release, it used a hashtag for ESG. It was very excited about it.

It goes on, talking about one of its most recent board appointments and explaining why it chose this member. This is the description in her bio, which states, "Her deep sectoral knowledge and expertise in...(ESG) performance and data driven approach uniquely complements exercising governance best practices and overseeing risks."

It would appear that building an organizational strategy around ESG led to putting people in positions of influence at SDTC, who in fact did not exercise governance best practices and in fact did not oversee risk.

We are here, in a position of scandal, because SDTC is very exemplary of a broad trend in our economy right now of organizations and powerful businesses, entrusted with either public dollars or the confidence of consumers, that decide they would rather engage in politics and social activism than do what they have been tasked with in our economy.

SDTC is a glaring example of that trend. Its obsession with ESG and with DEI betrays a real lack of attention to the reason it existed in the first place. All the staff time, the board time and the director time that went to its political agenda may very well, and I would argue that it probably did, contribute to it keeping its eye off the ball, leading to so many disastrous decisions, not only for its organization, but also for our country and for taxpayer dollars.

• (1815)

Now, I would like to continue on with some observations about the deeper problems with ESG. I think there are many organizations that have bought into this framework and have bought into a way of looking at doing business that is going to pose many of the same risks that SDTC provides us a case study of. The National Review's Andrew Stuttaford has written extensively about the ESG and stakeholder capitalism problem. He has argued that businesses should be focused on their economic objectives and that it is a threat to the democratic order for CEOs to pursue political objectives unconnected to their company's economic objectives, on any reasonable reading.

With SDTC, we have a very clear example of that. We have an organization that opted to creep away from its actual mission and instead try to influence, through public dollars and its investment in other companies, an entire social activist agenda requiring many other businesses, in order to be able to appeal for the cash that they were distributing, to have a willingness to comply with an ideological framework that had nothing to do with clean-tech innovation, nothing to do with being able to turn a profit and nothing to do with building the technology that many Canadians trusted, over a long period of time, SDTC to actually be interested in.

Additionally, I would like to share some points on the problem of ESG and stakeholder capitalism, big businesses and well-funded government organizations creeping into this area of social activism. I have some thoughts from a colleague, a Conservative member of Parliament, Tom Kmiec. I know I am not supposed to name him, but I do not know what riding he is from.

Mr. Speaker, maybe you could tell me. I cannot remember all the riding names.

The Deputy Speaker: The riding is Calgary Shepard.

The hon. member for Durham.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, in 2022, our colleague, the Conservative MP for Calgary Shepard, made some very important observations about how the Canadian government and elected officials could do more to move economic actors away from a political and social agenda and toward being focused on their economic objectives. I would like to share some of his thoughts, from the National Post. He argued that it should be:

considered a breach in the duty of care...to shareholders when directors and officers of a large distributing corporation...make activist statements, including in relation to public policy or social issues, that is not directly related to the business the corporation carries out and that could reasonably be expected to reduce the value of shares.

He then went on to argue that corporations requiring the firm's board of directors to first consult with shareholders would "make corporations think twice before opining on something beyond their stated corporate purpose."

When I use a lot of that lingo and jargon, I understand that some of it is very dense corporate law stuff, but the reason it is important is that this is about deciding, when organizations are trusted in our society, whether they are large private sector businesses or well-funded non-profit organizations backed by the federal government, how much power the public is actually entrusting them to have.

When people with lots of money at their disposal decide to turn their organizations not just into economic actors but also into social activist agencies and political actors, they are representing the will and the interests of well-financed people, to the detriment of the masses of Canadians who work very hard to have their voices heard.

When SDTC was trusted with hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money and used it to advance a social activist agenda or a political agenda, it was acting against the will of the people, who did not trust them with that power in our society, just as we do not trust many other big corporations to do the same. Instead, what we have seen, over and over again, is a willingness of people with lots of capital at their disposal to become social activists.

SDTC is a cautionary tale. SDTC could not do everything it claimed. It is hard enough to grow a business, stay within a mandate and be responsible and accountable to the Canadian taxpayer, as the Liberal government well knows. If someone thinks they can do all of those things well and also be a social activist or engage in political activism on the side, they run the risk of being like SDTC: making poor decisions, destroying their organization and not serving the public in the process.

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I would like to finish with this. Earlier today, the HUMA committee heard from the Liberal government's DEI minister. What was very revealing about this, as I was preparing for my comments here today concerning SDTC, was just how much the superficiality that is represented by SDTC is really a reflection of a broad approach to governance from the Liberal government itself.

The Liberals are constantly focused on hollow, superficial and empty virtue signalling. They would love to be able to say whatever they can to make themselves look good and pat each other on the back. However, when it comes to making decisions that are responsible for the good of our country; to showing any kind of humility for the nine years they have been in power and for the various mistakes and scandals they have been part of; or to admitting that they have been wrong, that they have made many things in our country worse and that many of their policies have failed, they are completely obtuse.

Every day, we stand here to provide the Liberals with evidence, statistical, anecdotal, academic or from news reports or whatever other evidence we can put in front of them, to show just how much they have made life worse for many people in our country. However, they are completely obtuse. The Liberals would rather use a lot of jargon. They want to trot out DEI narratives and distill very serious problems in our country to things that make them sound and feel good, but the reality is that they are failing our country.

The problem with SDTC, and why I think Liberals are so dug in on not wanting to reveal the scandal, is that it is a bigger reflection of who they are and what they have done for the last nine years. It is a bigger reflection of how they have used power, how they view the people in our country and what responsibilities they feel, or more accurately do not feel, for the power that has been entrusted to their hands.

● (1820)

There is a very serious problem going on here. This is why, and we hear it all the time, when we are knocking on doors, when we are talking to people in the community and when I am with my constituents in Durham, people are desperate for change. They are not getting it from a government and a Prime Minister who promised them a new way of doing politics nine years ago and have failed desperately to deliver on that promise.

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SDTC is not just about the \$400 million, although that is very serious. It is not just about the corruption, although those documents should be produced. It is also about the mentality that the government has, the broken promises to an entire generation of Canadians, and its inability to learn anything from its mistakes, pivot and maybe make a better decision for the good of our country.

Again, I hope that these documents do get produced. I do hope that the purpose of Parliament, to hold government accountable and to get answers for the people of our country, is fulfilled. I appreciate having the chance to speak to SDTC, ESG, DEI and all the acronyms that need to change.

• (1825)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and to the Minister of Sport and Physical Activity, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a quote from the RCMP commissioner:

The RCMP can confirm having received all the documents from the Office of the House of Commons Law Clerk relating to...SDTC which were collected in August pursuant to an Order of the House of Commons.... The RCMP has concluded that the available reports do not identify any criminal offences or evidence of criminal wrongdoing at this time.

That was back in September, and since September, despite claiming that they care about the use or misuse of public funds, the Conservatives have filibustered in the House of Commons, shutting down the most important legislative assembly in Canada for their own trivial and partisan political nonsense.

More to the point, the member for Durham did not share his grave concerns about SDTC, he did not share any concerns about the misuse of public funds, which was not started by the Liberal government. It is not an agency of the Canadian government. It is a foundation that invests in climate action, which is the real reason that the Conservatives are here. They do not care about climate action. They do not care about the misuse of public funds. That is incontrovertible.

What the member has shown today is that he does not care about social activism and he hates climate action. He does not care about environmental, social or governance standards. It is clear why the Conservatives have been filibustering; it is for their ideological purposes, not for the misuse of public funds.

The Deputy Speaker: Let us try to keep our questions and comments as concise as possible.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, there was no question from the Liberal MP for Milton.

However, I do appreciate his comment because he portrayed exactly the point I have been making. He thinks that giving corporations and non-profits, backed by hundreds of millions of dollars, the ability to use that money for their own purpose without the accountability to step outside of their mission and try to influence our democratic process has anything to do with caring about climate change.

He is an elitist. He wants people with money and power to be able to abuse it and use it, and he can use whatever climate change mask over that elitism he would like, but that is the reality of his political philosophy. It is the reality of the Liberal government's

governance agenda. It is exactly why the Liberals continue to resist turning over all the documents to the RCMP.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's intervention was talking specifically to the issue.

However, I do have an indirect question. I know the member has been in the United States and visited J.D. Vance and others. I am vice-chair of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group, with members from the Senate and the House of Commons, all parties, where we lobby effectively in the U.S.

What I would like to know, and I have asked this question many times, is where the Conservative Party is with regard to the CBSA. There were cuts during Stephen Harper's era, 1,100 officers, sniffer dogs, and so forth. To get from that point to where we are now, we have offered the suggestions of increasing the training facilities, because we are short 2,000 to 3,000 workers, expanding their powers to the 1932 order in council that was done rescinding that, and then, lastly, making sure that we do not focus on the issues of the past like ArriveCAN and those types of measures, the lack of equipment and so forth, but actually put officers on the border to alleviate problems.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, I think border security is very important. If the member would like to know my views on specific policies, he is welcome to contact me.

This is a very good example of how the partisanship that goes on here gets masked for the Canadian public. I never heard a single word from this man in my entire life. If he was interested in my opinion on something, whether it was these specific policies or working with his parliamentary committee, he knows where to find me. We do not sit very far from each other, but this is gotcha stuff.

I am not a goof. I know these guys think that, because I have not been here for long, they are going to throw all kinds of stuff at me and I am going to stand here and be caught off guard and say something they want me to say. That is not how that works. I am not a goof. I am not a sucker. If the member wants a serious conversation, he knows where to find me. Let us go.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess we will bring it back to the debate that is going on here.

When the member goes knocking on the doors of his constituents, tells them that Conservatives have been standing up for taxpayers' dollars and about the \$334 million and the over 186 cases of conflict of interest, what is their reaction?

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, the frustration I hear from my constituents and from Canadians across the country is that the system is completely unresponsive to their own interests. There is a feeling that we have a certain political culture here in Ottawa, because the NDP have sold out to the Liberals, which has kept people in power who do not care what Canadians are going through, what they think or how they feel. Then they see numbers like this of taxpayer dollars getting abused, and they ask, “Where do I fit into all of this? Who is serving me?”

This is why we are pushing for accountability. It is because it matters to people. It matters to my constituents. It matters to Canadians across the country. We cannot abuse their money, as the Liberals have with the NDP's support, and get away with it. They have to answer for what they have done.

• (1830)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree people have to answer for what they have done or what they have not done. There is a need for accountability.

The issue that people are concerned about, in part, is the issue of foreign interference. There is murder, extortion and political interference. Even in the leadership of the Conservative Party, we are talking about interference. Conservatives have members in their own caucus facing foreign interference. These are serious allegations, yet the leader of the Conservative Party does not feel that he needs to get a security clearance.

Why does the member believe his leader should be exempt from having to get the security clearance when every other leader has done it?

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition has been asked this question and has answered it multiple times. If the member opposite would actually like to know what the Leader of the Opposition has to say, I am sure he can find that answer readily available.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have more of a comment. I have knocked on doors and reached out to my constituents on this issue. To be frank, there is no other issue I have received this much correspondence on in such a short period of time.

I asked my constituents if they thought the government should comply with the will of Parliament and turn these documents over, and whether they thought, if any organization had received money illegitimately, it should return that money and potentially face criminal repercussions. Over 90% answered in the affirmative. I just wanted to put that on the record. This is something I am hearing all the time in my riding, and it is the biggest issue that I have received correspondence on at the local level.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Mr. Speaker, I often hear from people who are retired union members, many of whom worked at places like GM in my local area, who supported the NDP their entire lives. Now they see what the party has become, and they have completely given up on it because they know we are the only ones fighting for any kind of transparency and accountability with the Liberal government. The NDP sold them out for Maseratis and has decided to put the

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Liberal Party and the Prime Minister above the people who have supported it for a long time. It is something I hear all the time.

People want fighters. They want people who will come to Ottawa to fight for them, and that is what is missing from every party in the House except the Conservative Party.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise in the House as the elected representative for North Okanagan—Shuswap. It is a riding that will no longer exist after the next election, but one that I have been honoured to serve for the past nine-plus years and will continue to serve until the next federal election day, when I hope to be elected to represent the new riding of Kamloops—Shuswap—Central Rockies.

I have met with incredible people in every community across North Okanagan—Shuswap, all with a passion for their community or their cause and all dedicated to making our communities the best they can be. As we approach the end of the fall session here in Parliament, I wish to take a few moments to thank public service sector employees, health care workers, first responders, small businesses, not-for-profit volunteers and especially those supporting and running local food banks and support organizations for all they do for our communities. Their support is critical, especially in these winter months, when housing and heating costs are higher, when local produce is not as readily available and food banks see extra need, and when greyer days can add to mental health challenges. I thank them for all they do, whether it is big or small, to support our communities. Together we are stronger.

I would like to remind everyone that sometimes all it takes is a call just to ask if someone is okay. It can make a world of difference in someone else's day and in their life. I hope everyone has a joyous end to 2024 and a bright vision and future for 2025.

I will turn now to the debate at hand. It is important that Canadians understand the magnitude of the matter that is at the root of this debate. That matter is the green slush fund scandal at Sustainable Development Technology Canada. For Canadians watching at home, I will break down the green slush fund scandal into four points. One, through its ever-increasing taxation, the NDP-Liberal government has extracted money from Canadians. Two, the Auditor General found that Liberal appointees gave 400 million tax dollars to their own companies, involving 186 conflicts of interest. Three, representatives elected in the House by Canadians told the NDP-Liberal government to provide the unredacted documents to the police so they could investigate the scandal. Four, the NDP-Liberal government continues to refuse to release the documents.

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There we have it. The NDP-Liberal government took money from Canadians and gave the money to their buddies, and now they refuse to provide the documents of the scandal to the police because apparently the government has something to hide. The Speaker of this House, who operates like a referee in our proceedings, has even ruled that the NDP-Liberal cover-up violates the order made by the majority of MPs sent here by Canadians.

What does this latest scandal mean for Canadians? Rather than being focused on developing laws and policies supporting the lives of Canadians, the time of the House of Commons has been focused on trying to resolve the latest NDP-Liberal government scandal. I do not say this to diminish the importance of shining the light of truth to expose what lies beneath the government cover-up, because doing so in this matter is indeed essential.

Many Canadians will recall the Liberal sponsorship scandal and that two Auditor General reports and a public inquiry revealed that ad agency executives and Liberal Party officials had corruptly handled more than \$300 million, \$100 million of which was funnelled from the government to the Liberal Party. Nearly 20 years ago, the sponsorship scandal was exposed because Conservatives forced the matter and insisted on exposing the truth, and today, here we are again insisting on the truth being illuminated in the NDP-Liberal government green slush fund scandal.

● (1835)

For Canadians, the green slush fund scandal also means \$400 million was wasted or stolen at a time when many Canadians cannot afford to eat, heat or house themselves. It means \$400 million was wasted or stolen at a time when communities are struggling to deal with the housing crisis, the opioid epidemic and aging infrastructure that needs to be strengthened to withstand severe weather events and natural disasters.

Now, \$400 million is a big figure. When I speak with, and receive emails and calls from, the good people of North Okanagan—Shuswap, they are absolutely astonished by this massive amount of money that was misappropriated. They are astonished because there are so many ways that those funds could have been allocated to benefit citizens who earned these tax dollars in the first place.

The \$400 million could have gone a long way in supporting local governments to increase climate adaptation of infrastructure to protect our communities from the effects of flooding. The \$400 million could have helped prevent the destruction by natural disasters like the East Adams Lake and Bush Creek East wildfires that ravaged the North Shuswap in 2023. The \$400 million could have gone a long way in capitalizing wildfire training and equipment. Instead, 1,200 residents in the Shuswap had to face the fiery infernos of 2023 and contend with rebuilding 176 destroyed homes and restoring another 50 homes.

A lingering, lethal threat of wildfires is the persistent threat of landslides. The \$400 million could have supported assessments and actions to help the Shuswap with recovery in the short term and prevent more natural disasters in the long term, but the NDP-Liberal government chose to send \$400 million to its friends through the green slush fund scandal.

No community in Canada has evaded the ongoing opioid crisis that has claimed over 47,000 lives since the Prime Minister ascended to power with his misguided policies. Conservatives have consistently pleaded for common-sense policies and federal resources for addictions treatment, but the NDP-Liberal government in Ottawa and the NDP government in Victoria have ignored common sense and subjected our communities and vulnerable citizens to dangerous hard-drug experiments.

As the House of Commons, and as representatives of all Canadians, we must guard against becoming unaffected by the lives lost every single day in communities of all sizes across our nation. We must resolve to learn from the failures of the Prime Minister and Premier Eby. The \$400 million could have provided new addictions treatment capacities to save lives, but instead, these dollars were prioritized for the green slush fund, to be delivered to NDP-Liberal insiders.

There are also acute needs for increased mental health services in communities across Canada. These needs could have been served if the \$400 million provided through the green slush fund had been directed to supporting expansions of mental health services in Canada. The COVID-19 pandemic, government lockdowns and social divisions stoked by the NDP-Liberal government took a toll on Canadians. Inflation and never-ending tax hikes have made life in Canada more expensive than it has ever been. This has taken, and continues to take, a toll on Canadians. While the NDP-Liberal government pats itself on the back for saddling generations of Canadians with unprecedented levels of public debt, Canadians see their standard of living being eroded.

● (1840)

Home ownership is a mere fantasy for most young adults in Canada. All these NDP-Liberal government policy outcomes are undermining mental health across our country. Let us imagine the mental health services that could have been expanded by the infusion of the \$400 million that was sent to the NDP-Liberal insiders through the green slush fund. The ongoing NDP-Liberal government cover-up suggests the government is hiding the documents from the police for a reason. The government cannot explain why it blew \$400 million in yet another scandal rather than making a positive difference for mental health services. Shame on the NDP-Liberal government.

The NDP-Liberal government talks a big game when it comes to the housing crisis, but it chose the green slush fund scandal over homes for Canadians. In order to accelerate construction of new homes, we need more Canadians certified in the skilled trades. This reality is not a new concept; it has been known for years.

Let us imagine how many Canadians could have been trained and certified in a skilled trade with the support of \$400 million. We are talking about helping Canadians acquire the skill and certifications they need to help other Canadians. Who could oppose this common-sense approach? The NDP-Liberal government will talk the talk when it comes to building new homes, supporting workers and training for the trades, but the green slush fund scandal is proof positive that it will not walk the walk.

When given the choice between supporting skilled workers in Canada to build new homes and using the green slush fund scandal, it siphoned off \$400 million for its buddies. The NDP-Liberal government chose that. Four hundred million dollars could have supported the training and certification of thousands of skilled workers in Canada, but instead, it chose the scandal.

Across Canada, there are people holding professional credentials from other countries, but they cannot perform the professional work they are trained in because their credentials are not recognized in Canada. There is a lot of professional training and talent that goes to waste every single day in Canada, including in professions and sectors that are desperately needing trained personnel.

Rather than developing creative ways of delivering hundreds of millions of dollars to insiders, why did the NDP-Liberal government not develop creative ways of unleashing this unused professional training? If foreign credentials and training have had parity with those in Canada, why are those credentials not recognized? If foreign credentials and training do not meet Canadian standards, why is the NDP-Liberal government not investing in a system for assessing and upgrading foreign credentials? Let us imagine all of the unrecognized professionals in Canada who could have been moved towards the profession of their training with the \$400 million doled out by the green slush fund.

Water and waste-water treatment systems are essential for sustaining our communities and ensuring our waters are protected from untreated sewage. In 2012, the Harper government implemented Canada's first-ever national standards for waste-water treatment: the waste-water system effluent regulations.

As part of the implementation of the regulations, compliance deadlines were set for waste-water systems that did not meet the new standards. The deadlines were set up to allow time for municipalities to plan and budget funds to complete the upgrades and bring their waste-water systems up to the new standards.

Today, 12 years after the Harper government implemented the waste-water treatment standards, communities large and small across Canada have yet to achieve the standards. Why?

• (1845)

First, the Liberal government, propped up by the NDP, pushed the compliance deadlines far down the road. This was done by the member for North Vancouver when he was the environment minister. Second, the government has failed to prioritize the support for upgrading waste-water treatment systems. The \$400 million the NDP-Liberal government allocated to its pals through the green slush fund could have assisted local governments in advancing their waste-water treatment systems closer to compliance. We all know that this is not what the NDP-Liberal government chose to do.

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In addition to representing North Okanagan—Shuswap, I am also honoured to serve as the official opposition's associate shadow minister for Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, recreational and west coast, and as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, FOPO.

My hon. colleagues at the FOPO committee, and each of the six fisheries ministers shuffled into the role by the Prime Minister, know I am a strong advocate for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, AIS, in Canada's waters. AIS pose acute threats to fish, wildlife and habitats, and acute threats to biodiversity. Over the past nine years, it has been concluded by FOPO members and witnesses that preventing the spread of AIS must be a priority because the cost of prevention is nothing compared to the permanent harms that AIS can inflict on ecologies, economies and communities.

Earlier this year, the government removed its funding from the B.C. government's invasive mussel defence program that inspects and treats watercraft, followed by cuts to AIS prevention and inspection stations along B.C.'s borders. I pressed the fisheries minister on this illogical and short-sighted funding cut, and she responded that zebra and quagga mussels are present across Canada. This statement was blatantly false and it was shocking; zebra and quagga mussels have not been located in Canada west of Manitoba, which is why we need to protect western waters through prevention.

Regardless, the minister cut funding to AIS prevention inspections in B.C. Just last week, it was reported that whirling disease, a parasite causing defects and death in salmonids, was detected in Kootenay Lake. I cannot help but wonder whether the spread of whirling disease in B.C. could have been prevented had the government prioritized AIS prevention. The \$400 million in the green slush fund could have helped protect B.C.'s water from the invasive species and parasites that decimate fish populations and habitats, but the NDP-Liberal government chose otherwise.

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As I close out my time today and as we approach the holiday season, I want to take a minute to thank some people. I want to thank the House administration staff who help ensure that we are able to do our job as parliamentarians. I thank the pages in the page program, who are an invaluable part of our daily activities here and conduct their role often in tandem with completing university courses here in Ottawa.

I thank the food service staff who prepare and serve our nutrition. I thank our office staff who spend long hours researching and preparing us for our daily activities. I especially thank our Parliamentary Protective Service personnel, who often stand on guard for us in the inclement weather we often see here in Ottawa.

Last, I thank our families, who give their unquestioning support and spend more time alone as we fulfill our duties here.

I wish everyone a merry Christmas, a blessed holiday season and health and happiness in the new year.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

• (1850)

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I first posed this question in question period on October 11, and surprisingly enough, I did not get a satisfactory response. By way of background, I was the only member of Parliament who obtained intervenor status in the National Energy Board hearings on the proposed Kinder Morgan pipeline. I think it is safe to say I am the only Canadian who read all of the so-called evidence submitted by Kinder Morgan. I am very familiar with this file, in other words.

I was shocked when we bought and then built the pipeline, at a waste of \$34 billion, but through this whole thing, the City of Burnaby was consistent in saying it must not expand. Regarding the Burnaby tank farm, which consists of tanks of diluted bitumen and other fossil-fuel products that are highly flammable, the Burnaby Fire Department was consistent in saying it did not have the capacity to put out a tank farm fire. It also pointed out that for Simon Fraser University and various communities at the top of the mountain, there is only one road out in the event of fire. There is a significant risk to life and limb. In other words, the community of Burnaby had been, maybe one would say, a thorn in the side of this project.

To my horror, of course, the Government of Canada, as I mentioned, bought the project and built the project, and now all Canadians, all of us in this room, share in one thing if nothing else: We own the Trans Mountain pipeline. We have wasted all this money on it, and now, as we discovered the same week I asked the question on October 11, with our tax dollars at work, we have bribed the City of Burnaby to stop criticizing the pipeline and not mention anymore the risk of fire that would threaten the communities of Burnaby, particularly Simon Fraser University on Burnaby Moun-

tain. What Trans Mountain did was offer \$21 million over 20 years, and along with that came a gag order on the people of Burnaby not to criticize the pipeline anymore. They are not allowed to say anything about the Kinder Morgan, now Trans Mountain, pipeline.

It is astonishing that we would, as a federal government, pour \$34 billion into violating indigenous rights and ignoring the various concerns for the environment about what would happen, or will happen because it is more of a certainty than a potential risk, if there were a spill of diluted bitumen, which behaves very differently in a marine environment than even the most horrible of crude oil spills, like *Exxon Valdez*. We also have the risk of a tank farm fire in Burnaby.

The answer I got from the Minister of Finance was certainly very generous and nice about my reputation as a climate activist, but it failed to answer the question: Did the government know about this? Did the federal cabinet understand that our Crown corporation, Trans Mountain, was prepared to put \$21 million into stopping the people of Burnaby from being protected and their fire department from speaking out about this?

For those who are watching this, I ask them to go to Google and google this: “Only one bear in a hundred bites, but they don’t come in order”. This is a very instructive video about the nature of tank farm fires around the world, produced by that old folk singer, my hero, Bob Bossin, who lives on Gabriola Island and knows whereof he speaks.

• (1855)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the question is no and no, but let me go on.

As the hon. member knows, Trans Mountain Corporation is governed by an independent board of directors and not directly by the government. The board has broad authority for corporate governance strategy and nominates several committees to oversee specific specialized areas. Trans Mountain Corporation operates as a commercial entity and has been clear that it is committed to meaningful engagement and effective relationships with communities all along the pipeline expansion corridor.

In October, TMC and the City of Burnaby shared a community contribution agreement that will benefit the residents of Burnaby through collaboration on an enhanced emergency response and safety plan. The details of this agreement include, as the hon. member said, Trans Mountain contributing \$20.1 million to the city. Burnaby’s mayor, Mike Hurley, said that he and any member of council are allowed to speak freely about this project and the contribution agreement itself. I know that those two parties worked closely to determine the details of this agreement.

Obviously, the government acquired the Trans Mountain Corporation and the Trans Mountain expansion project in 2018, because we knew it was a serious and necessary investment. The pipeline will continue to benefit our economy and Canadians, including those in communities like Burnaby, by providing good jobs, generating significant revenues each year and being an integral part of Canada's long-term energy infrastructure as Canada and the world transition to net zero.

To support this transition to net zero, since 2015, the federal government has committed over \$160 billion to build Canada's clean economy and reduce emissions, and has invested significant additional resources to protect the environment and conserve nature. As the expansion project generates cash flow, the federal government will continue to invest in creating good-paying jobs and accelerating the development and deployment of clean energy and clean technology. The project has also created, and is continuing to create, economic benefits for families and many indigenous communities through contracting, financial compensation, and employment and training.

That is all I will have to say about that. However, just to repeat myself, I could have finished that in 20 seconds. The answer to the hon. member's question is no and no.

• (1900)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is outrageous to imagine that so many millions of dollars can be spent bribing a municipality not to protect its citizens, and no one in cabinet knows about it. However, that is what happens when we have what is called a “non-budgetary transaction” in which, magically, former finance minister Bill Morneau, without approval from anyone, decided that we have this value of \$34 billion over here and we are going to convert it to a value of \$34 billion over here in a project that is of dubious value and creates fewer jobs than if somebody locally opened a White Spot restaurant.

We have before us a scandal and a shame, and I am sorry for the hon. parliamentary secretary that he has now associated himself with it. He is not to blame, but the Government of Canada has done something egregious in doing something that Kinder Morgan had already decided was not a profitable project, and this can be proven, but not in the 30 seconds I have left. However, Canadians, as a people, paid for it, and I am afraid we will have to pay for it again in environmental damage.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, as I said previously in my speech on those questions, there was a contribution agreement signed between the City of Burnaby and TMX. Those questions would be better asked of the City of Burnaby, but I would put my faith in the mayor. I would hope that he and council were assured that they can speak freely on this particular issue and that no gag orders were put on them.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is very simple. Will the government commit today to not raising the carbon tax over \$170 a tonne, yes or no?

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the smartest

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thing we have done in the last five years was to announce to the market that, yes, we would introduce a price on carbon at \$170 per tonne by 2030. That sends a market signal. We could have hidden this fact, but all businesses in Canada know that this is coming, and it is smart policy. The market will react to that.

However, what we are still waiting for is the plan on environmental policy from the leader of the official opposition. I still do not know what he wants to do with the environment.

Carbon pricing is an important tool to reduce carbon emissions in Canada. It is an important tool to reduce carbon emissions in California. It is an important tool to reduce emissions in the U.S. It is true that the federal government has not imposed a carbon pricing scheme in the U.S., but many states have, which is something the Conservatives are a little shy of telling their constituents when they talk about a carbon pricing model.

I would add that it has been many hundreds of days since the leader of the official opposition was elected to be a leader. We are still waiting to see his environmental plan. Not having an environmental plan to protect Canadians and grow our economy is not serious. I will leave it at that.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Mr. Speaker, the member did not answer my question. I will ask it again. Will the government commit today to not raising the carbon tax over \$170 a tonne, yes or no?

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, we have already announced what we have committed to. The hon. member knows. I am not going to be a member of Parliament in 2030. I am not sure if he is still going to be here. I am not going to predict what is going to happen in 2030. If the member thinks that he is still going to be here and that he can predict what future governments will do in 2030, our commitment was \$170 per tonne by 2030.

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question from November 8 was on the doublespeak on the government's oil and gas production cut. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Transport, at that point in time, responded by telling me that “[the] energy sector can increase its production while decreasing its emissions.”

I actually agree with that part, and I point to the decrease in carbon emissions per barrel demonstrated by Canada's oil and gas industry over the past two decades, through investments in technology and efficiencies. Canada's oil sands have decreased their CO₂ emissions by over 32% over the past two decades.

What does the governing party think success actually looks like in this respect? In the world, our democratic allies asked, and are still asking, for more Canadian oil and gas. The parliamentary secretary told me, at that point in time, that countries around the world are looking to Canada for less polluting energies. I agree again. That is because we are delivering.

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The parliamentary secretary then drifted into Liberal sound-bite fantasyland. He said, “Under the do-nothing approach of the previous Conservative government, Canada’s imports of foreign oil were two times higher. It failed to promote Canadian energy.”

Did the doubling of production that we have had in this country over the last two decades just turn on magically, overnight, when the Liberals were elected? That is just wrong. Did the reduction in emissions per barrel just happen recently? Again, the data directly contradicts that. He then offered me a briefing on climate change. I know the member’s depth on energy and climate change, and I guess I am a little surprised that the Liberal government had him read that statement. I recall that he had a tough time keeping a straight face. A golfer would say about the member for Niagara Centre that he is known to “fluff a putt”, but he will read whatever nonsense is put in front of him.

To the point, every credible organization has clearly stated that the cap would cost Canada around one million barrels per day of production, which would immediately be met with less environmentally responsible production from around the world, and 150,000 jobs would be lost. Billions of dollars of GDP would be lost, and there would be a sinking Canadian dollar, with higher deficits and Canadian poverty.

For the environmental result, let me refer to the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development’s words on the government’s results. Two months ago he said, “The recent decreases to projected 2030 emissions were not due to climate actions taken by governments but were instead because of revisions to the data or methods used in modelling.”

This is all make-believe. All these experts that the government has been paying hundreds of millions of dollars to have accomplished nothing at the end of the day. It is about shutting down or about making it more onerous to produce oil in Canada versus every other jurisdiction in the world. Every other jurisdiction is prospering, while Canada is under the boot of the Liberal government to try to produce the resources for the benefit of the whole world.

Our emissions are going down. Our production is going up. We need to make sure that we can do more to continue on that path to provide a better environmental result for the world and a better economic result for all Canadians. I ask this to the member across the way again.

How in the world can they say that this production cap has any thing to do with emissions?

• (1905)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to remind my hon. colleague that we are the only government to have built a pipeline to tidewater, something the previous Conservative governments and the oil and gas promoters on that side have never done. It is funny, because they laugh and scream, but they never were able to do it. We found the right formula. We understood that balance: the environment and the economy go hand in hand.

That is why the Government of Canada is putting a cap on greenhouse gas pollution from the oil and gas sector. That is a normal thing to do. Canada will be the first oil and gas producing country

to do so. Our government published proposed regulations in November.

If the opposition members had their way, they would just let the sector pollute for free. We do not agree on this side of the House. They can challenge us on a policy, but they are still light on policy. All they have is five slogans. Until they showcase a policy, we can have an informed debate on this particular issue, but they still have nothing on the other side.

The greenhouse gas pollution cap will ensure that the sector invests in the maximum technically achievable decarbonization in order to achieve significant emissions reductions by 2030 and to get on a pathway to net-zero emissions by 2050. This is good for consumers around the world. If we are able to get to net zero, Canada will be able to promote its oil and gas sector, because that is what consumers around the world are asking for. It is possible. Of course, if we use the technology of today it is not possible. However, we have full confidence that the people, and the sector, will be able to succeed in this challenge.

• (1910)

[Translation]

We have faith in the people and the industry to rise to this challenge. On this side of the House, we believe in technology, but we need to challenge the industry. That is why we have set this target.

[English]

Cap and trade is a proven market-based approach that has been used successfully around the world to reduce emissions. Quebec, California and Ontario at one point had a cap-and-trade system. Quebec and California still have a cap-and-trade system and their economies did not fall. They are doing very well.

Over time, the government gives out fewer allowances. To comply, facilities must reduce their emissions or buy allowances from other facilities that have reduced their emissions. I am explaining the cap-and-trade system, a mechanism that has been in place for a long time in Canada, especially in Quebec and Ontario, and California.

The government will continue to work closely with industry, provinces, territories, indigenous groups and other stakeholders to set a realistic, technically achievable goal for the sector. We want industries to use better technologies and improve efficiency. This will allow oil and gas producers to maintain or even grow production while lowering pollution.

On this side of the House, we believe a cap-and-trade system is the right system and we know the oil and gas sector in Alberta will continue to flourish.

Mr. Greg McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that my colleague across the way misunderstood my question, but we are talking about real metrics here, not hoped-for inventions that will come along in the next little while. This is six years down the road the Liberals are talking about with this cap, in 2030 versus 2024, and a million-barrel cut from what we are producing now, which is a significant part of the economy of Canada. Things pay the bills in this country and it is the oil and gas industry that is the biggest taxpayer across this country.

I am going to tell my colleague the response from people around the country to what is happening. His own Minister of Environment does not really seem to know much about the environment but is a well-placed mole for the NGOs that are in the environmental organization, making lots of money from what the government has put out. The minister actually said, “Look around the world, no other major oil and gas producer is doing what we’re doing.” Then a fund manager from Canada says, “Well, why is that?” It’s economic idiocy.”

Does my colleague across the way understand and potentially agree with that?

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Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, again, if we do not challenge any sector, then nothing will get done. I wonder if Freon would have disappeared in Canada when we had acid rain if Brian Mulroney had just sat on his hands and not worked with the U.S. administration to do something. They did something. They banned Freon. They put a price on CFCs because there was a rationale to do so.

Doing nothing means I have to tell my five-year-old son, “Sorry, son, I polluted your planet. I am going to hand over to you a tool that is barely half usable, but thank you so much and good luck with the rest.”

We have to do something for the environment and that is exactly what we are doing.

[Translation]

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

(The House adjourned at 7:13 p.m.)

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