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Friday, November 25, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, November 25, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1005)
[English]

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK ACT

The House resumed from November 24 consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up consideration of the motion, the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga had 10 minutes remaining for questions and comments after his remarks. We will go to that now.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Peace River—Westlock.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could my hon. colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga re-engage the House on the topic and go over some of the highlights of his speech from yesterday?

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to think that my entire speech was a highlight. I will try to keep my remarks short.

Last term when the Conservatives were in government, we had the honour and the privilege of establishing Rouge National Urban Park. I had the privilege of serving as the chair of the environment committee during that time and heard many witnesses give their presentations and voice their concerns. The groups that spoke most clearly to these issues were the environmental groups that clearly wanted to preserve the Rouge National Urban Park while at the same time combining sustainable farming activities.

The one big issue we are facing with respect to this legislation brought forward by the Liberals is that they want to add the term “ecological integrity” to the definition of this urban national park. It is impossible to have the term “ecological integrity” included in the definition of an urban park. Residences are located right next to this park, farms are in the park, and power lines go through the park.

Ecological integrity would demand that the park rangers and so on let nature take its course. For example, if a forest fire were to break out in the urban park, they would need to let that fire burn. If a flood occurred as a result of beavers damming up a stream or river, they would need to let that flood occur. Those kinds of activities and experiences in a park so close to its urban neighbours would be disastrous for the park.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could our hon. colleague refresh the House on the history of this legislation, as it was before the House previously and debated then?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, as I began my remarks yesterday, I referred to the fact that the Liberal Party in a previous Parliament was against adopting the legislation on Rouge National Park primarily because the Ontario Liberal government was unwilling to transfer land to the park. In fact, the provincial Liberal government demanded \$100 million to append a section of the park to the Rouge National Urban Park. According to the provincial government, this was not its main concern but the fact we had not included ecological integrity in the definition of the park. It seems clear that that was simply a political cover so it would not be embarrassed about not including this section of the park in the boundaries we defined.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, given that I hail from British Columbia, this issue is a bit far and away for me to really comment on it. However, I am shocked to hear there are political issues affecting what should be a straightforward process in working with provincial governments.

Could the member share some insight about what should be avoided when working together with other jurisdictions in this great country to restore or conserve more parkland?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I do not claim to be an expert on national parks, but we did hear from Alan Latourelle, who was the CEO of Parks Canada for 13 years. Mr. Latourelle was very clear that, yes, for the majority of national parks the term “ecological integrity” is included, but we are not faced with the same set of circumstances in them. We are not faced with urban neighbours or highways and power lines going through those parks.

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What is really disappointing to me is to think that here we have the opportunity. The Conservative government took advantage of the opportunity and implemented the Rouge National Urban Park right next door to the GTA. Children might not otherwise ever get the chance to visit a national park. They are basically at the end of the transit line and could visit the park. They could feel and touch and learn.

To think that we would have farmers in the park using sustainable agriculture to provide produce, fresh fruits and vegetables, which in some cases children and families could go there together to pick, what a fantastic opportunity for urban dwellers it would be to be exposed to a rural landscape.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech. He always has such interesting and relevant things to say.

A number of his colleagues expressed concerns about Bill C-18. I can understand why many of them would be reluctant to support it, but they often seem to end their speeches with remarks on the amendments needed to make this bill more acceptable, and we seem to be running out of time.

Would the member like to take this opportunity to tell us which amendments would make this bill acceptable to him?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his work on the environment committee.

At the end of my remarks yesterday, I clearly identified the amendment I would like to see in Bill C-18. It is very simple. It is to remove the concept of ecological integrity from the bill. Our farmers who work in the park and use sustainable agricultural practices are not using till. Their impact on the environment is minimal. In fact, they are a benefit to our urban dwellers. We can think of the ecological goods and services our farmers are producing, including the oxygen from the cover crops they plant and the clean water from the wetlands that are preserved, and all of those things.

As I said in my comments yesterday, our farmers are some of the best environmentalists in the country. This is a way to recognize them, acknowledge the work they do on our behalf, and give urban dwellers in the GTA the opportunity to see a national park right on their doorstep without their having to drive for hours and hours or fly out west.

•(1010)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I am not as familiar with this bill as I would like to be. Our schedules are fairly hectic and busy. Our hon. colleague, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga just talked about the term “ecological integrity”. Could he go into a little more detail about that term and its implications? If the term is left in the bill and not changed, what would that mean overall, not just for Rouge National Urban Park but potentially also Banff National Park, or Jasper, which is adjacent to my riding and, potentially, parks from coast to coast to coast in Canada? There might be serious implications for those parks.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, as I commented yesterday, the whole term “ecological integrity” includes this supporting

processes concept. That concept means that we leave alone the engines that make the ecosystems work, like fire and flooding. If we let fires burn and flooding go unchecked in an urban area, which have the potential to wreak havoc in residential areas and create incredible risks for our urban neighbours, it is clear that we cannot have this term “ecological integrity”.

I want to be clear. All of us in this room, I am sure, are eager to work as closely as we can to that target of ecological integrity. However, if we simply put those words in the bill, with ecological integrity's current definition, they would just be nice-sounding words. They would have no impact, as they have no meaning. We will work toward ecological integrity, but to have that wording as a definition in an actual bill this Parliament passes would be disingenuous.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-18, which will enhance and protect the Rouge National Urban Park, the first of its kind in our great country.

All across Canada, our national parks play an important role in preserving and protecting an abundance of wildlife, native plants, and heritage areas. Whether it is the valleys, mountains, and glaciers of Banff National Park, or the world's highest tides at Fundy National Park, these national treasures offer the most breathtaking outlooks I have ever seen. Anyone who has spent time in our national parks, taking in the perfection of a still lake, breathing in the luscious green of summer, or feeling the calm of snow-covered evergreens in winter can bear witness to the beauty that is found in our national natural landscapes.

The Rouge Park, a small portion of which is located in my riding of Scarborough North, is indeed a national treasure, home to rare Carolinian forests and over 1,700 species of plants, birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. This park is a keeper of human history, including some of the oldest aboriginal sites, villages, and travel routes known in our country. That is why I stand today in support of Bill C-18, which will ensure the protection of this important ecosystem and provide guidance on how the park will be managed. This bill will rightfully extend the area of the Rouge Park so that, once it is fully established, it will be one of the world's largest and most protected parks within an urban setting.

Most importantly, this bill would ensure that the park is managed in a way that achieves ecological integrity so that native plants, wildlife, waterways, and ecological processes remain fully intact. Our government has made environmental protection one of its most important priorities. The enlargement and protection of the Rouge Park is certainly a positive step to improving our environmental stewardship.

In 2009, as the local school board trustee, I started a tree-planting program as part of the Rouge Park's restoration project for students across our riding. Working with the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre and the Rouge Valley Naturalists, this annual tree planting project allowed our children, many of whom live in inner-city communities, to experience the beauty of nature and how they can protect it.

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The location of the Rouge Park makes it accessible to many Canadian families who may not otherwise have the chance to experience such nature. It is within an hour's travel time for seven million Canadians who live in the region. Many areas of the park are also accessible to wheelchairs, strollers, and mobility aids.

The Rouge Park is a treasure trove of natural parklands, waterways, marshlands, nature trails, and farmland. Its forest and wetlands have sustained groups of nomadic hunters, Iroquois farmers, and early European settlers. A national historic site within the park is named Bead Hill, an archeological site with the remains of a 17th century Seneca village. As well, the Rouge Park is the site of some of the best farmland in the country. Generations of farmers are known to have farmed this rare and fertile land since 1799.

When I think about the expansion and preservation of the Rouge Park, I think about future generations of children and youth. Exposure to a natural environment can have a positive influence on people's moods and general outlook. Spending time in a natural setting can reduce stress and anxiety and can improve a young person's capacity to learn. When people have the opportunity to experience the richness of our natural ecosystems, they will develop a lifelong respect for the health of our planet. That is why this bill is so incredibly important. It will ensure that the protection of nature, culture, and agriculture happens today and continues into the future. With all of its natural wonders, the Rouge Park is a part of our home and our backyard, a legacy that will live on for many generations to come.

• (1015)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to some of the speeches this morning, including by my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga.

One of the things I would like to talk to my colleague about is this term “ecological integrity”, because to me it is outrageous that the Liberals would bring this forward. We are talking about lands the Ontario government has mismanaged for years, to a point where there is actually a dump in these parklands. It has 400-series highways, pipelines, and electrical infrastructure. If we are looking at the term “ecological integrity”, all of those things would have to be taken out of the park. As an Ontario MP just down the street from the Rouge, my problem is that the Ontario government wants the federal government to pay for the cleanup of its mismanagement.

Therefore, my question for my colleague is this. Where does he think the money will come from, or will he stand in this House today, be very firm, and say that the federal government will not accept the lands from the Ontario government until it has cleaned them up to the level the federal government desires?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, I cannot think of any greater challenge that our generation of youth and children have to face than the protection of our planet. The reason why we have ecological integrity is exactly that, because we have to make sure that this land is preserved. We have to make sure that the ecology of this land is kept intact for many generations to come.

That is why I urge all colleagues in this House to support the bill so that we can make sure that our Rouge Park continues to be a place of hope for many generations for the years to come.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's remarks.

Naturally, I agree with him on the broad principles, because how can one not? I too care deeply about this issue. However, in a debate like the one we are having this morning, we have to take things a little farther.

The Environment Canada framework is very specific. According to *How Much Habitat is Enough?*, parks must have 30% forest cover and 10% wetlands to ensure the integrity of the ecosystem. In the Rouge Park, forest cover is at 13% and wetlands at 2%.

What will the government do to achieve the Environment Canada objectives?

• (1020)

[*English*]

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, this park is indeed a unique project. Once fully established, this park will be the largest and best protected urban area in the country. It will be 79 square kilometres big, 19 times larger than Stanley Park in Vancouver, 22 times larger than Central Park in New York, and indeed, 50 times larger than Toronto's High Park.

Ensuring the ecological integrity will be a tremendous task, but I have great confidence that we will work very hard together to ensure that this happens so that our future generations can continue to enjoy this beautiful ecological area.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that we are concerned about our next generation and the protection of our environment and the opportunity to put forward this park as it was previously suggested by our government.

What concerns me is what the member opposite said in regard to our next generation, how important it is that we do this for their future. At the same time, we also have to be aware that their future is greatly affected by the amount of money we spend right now that we do not have, that they in turn will be responsible for in the future.

When I hear the vision for this park and where the government opposite is going with it, I would ask the Liberals this. Has the government done some research to determine what it will cost us to do this? I did not get a clear answer from the member on the expectations of the provincial Liberal government to do what it should have done in the first place, since it is so environmentally focused, to take care of the needs in that park before it becomes the responsibility of the present government, which has huge debts looming before us for that next generation.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with the member opposite. It is so important for our next generation, for our children and youth to have this as a legacy that we leave behind.

I am confident that our government will continue to work closely with our provincial and territorial counterparts across the country on various conversations, and that includes conversations around the Rouge Urban National Park with the Province of Ontario, and indeed, all the stakeholders.

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We want to work together with everyone to make sure we do this right and that we preserve these wetlands, this ecological treasure trove for generations to come.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that was a very passionate speech and eloquently put. The member is obviously a big supporter of that, and I thank the member for that.

I am from Sault Ste. Marie. In my area, we have a number of provincial and national parks that are utilized extensively. As the member mentioned in his speech, he was a school board trustee, as I was, and our schools used to do many things in those parks.

Could the member describe a little about the advantage of Rouge Park for children, for schools, as well as perhaps the health benefits of having the trees and the fauna in the area?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely important. I have witnessed first-hand the joy of our children and youth when they go hands-on to plant that tree as part of a restoration project for this important Rouge Park. I have seen them learning, and talking about it in the classroom with their teachers before they go out to understand the importance of greenery in our national landscape, and how carbon emissions can be reduced when we plant more trees.

It is certainly important for children to experience nature and to get out there for an educational hike, which is provided for them with the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre and the Rouge Valley Naturalists. It is an incredible learning experience that indeed all Canadian children should have the benefit of.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague for his initiative in planting trees. I, too, have had the privilege of planting well over 1,700 trees on my property, and I think it is one example that every Canadian could follow. We could each do our little part. We do not have to have government do everything.

As we listened to the witnesses on Bill C-40, the predecessor of the bill before us, it was clear from farmers and experts, and from the CEO of Parks Canada, Alan Latourelle, who clearly said in testimony that we cannot include the concept of ecological integrity in the bill.

Is my colleague suggesting that we cannot trust our Parks Canada experts and officials when they make a very clear, unequivocal recommendation to the committee, or is he simply acknowledging that this is paying back the political loan to the Ontario Liberals?

• (1025)

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, the amendments that are being proposed to the Rouge National Urban Park Act will in fact provide a greater sense of certainty for the farmers who are in the area.

Indeed, one-year leases will be replaced with leases of up to 30 years. These leases will ensure the long-term stability for the park farmers, many of whom, as I mentioned earlier in my speech, are families who have been farming in the area since 1799. This certainly is important for the agricultural sector. It is important as a local food source for people who live in the region.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member, in his speech, addressed the fact that this has been a place of commerce for a long time. He mentioned that there were indigenous trading routes that travelled through this area.

I am not very familiar with the area, but as far as I know, currently there are a number of trading routes through the area, a major highway, a pipeline, a power line, and that kind of thing.

I am wondering, when we use the words “ecological integrity”, does that mean we must pull those routes out of this area?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Mr. Speaker, we are making changes here that will indeed be very helpful; for example, establishing the Garden River Indian Reserve. There is a parcel of land, 37 square kilometres, that will be withdrawn from the Wood Buffalo National Park. Our government is honouring this important commitment to the Little Red River Cree Nation.

This type of legislation is important, because it respects the commitments that the government has made to not only preserve ecological integrity, but to ensure that our aboriginal people are respected.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss Bill C-18, on the Rouge National Urban Park Act. This has been put forward by the Liberal government as a strategic move to provide political cover for the opposition by the Ontario Liberal government to the previous Conservative government's establishment of the national park. Most notably, I oppose the Liberal government's inclusion of “ecological integrity” as the first priority of the park management.

The park is most exciting for my riding of Markham—Unionville, since it provides the opportunity for GTA residents to engage with nature, local horticulture, and agriculture.

Conservatives support the enlargement of the park through the inclusion of additional lands. We are extremely proud of our former government's commitment of \$143.7 million over 10 years to create a Rouge National Urban Park, a unique space where nature exists alongside the ever-growing urbanization of Toronto and the GTA.

To make it work, Ontario [Liberal government] originally agreed to transfer Rouge Park to [the federal government], which would operate the site as a national park of 5,665 hectares. That is more than 14 times the size of Vancouver's Stanley Park.

This seemed like a done deal until late 2014, when Brad Duguid, the then Ontario minister of economic development, employment, and infrastructure, began playing political games. In September 2014, he wrote to the Conservative government “to complain that the legislation that creates the federal park, did not include adequate environmental protections.”

...after Bill C-40 passed through the Senate without the amendments Ontario [Liberals] wanted, Mr. Duguid wrote a second letter...saying the province [would] no longer transfer its land to the federal government.

Bill C-40 clearly stated that the federal government needs to “take into consideration the protection of its natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and the health of those ecosystems.” The Ontario Liberals claimed “take into consideration” was not strong enough.

But let's remember this is an urban park. It is not set in the wilds of Canada; it contains private residences and businesses, and is criss-crossed by highways, roads, railway lines, transmission lines, and utility pipes, all in a concentrated area.

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As well, if the rules were too rigid, [the federal government] would not be able to return any of the land to the province if it needed it for new infrastructure—a specific request from the Ontario government when the two parties signed a memorandum of agreement on the project in 2013.

Contrary to Ontario's [Liberals] rigid position, [the previous Conservative government] made reasonable compromises [in creating this national park]. It... protects the flora and fauna and any endangered species. It prohibits hunting, dumping, mining, logging and other unparklike activities—some of which, such as logging, are still allowed in Ontario provincial parks. There would be full-time Parks Canada wardens to enforce the rules.

Moreover, the [previous Conservative government had] committed \$143.7-million to the project over 10 years, far more than the province ever promised for Rouge Park.

Given the difficulties of establishing a national park in the heart of the GTA, the previous Conservative government was praised for striking a right balance. The Ontario Liberal government never acknowledged this. It was more interested in playing political games prior to the 2015 federal election.

● (1030)

Mr. Duguid said, “There’s a federal election this year. I expect that following that, whether this government’s re-elected or there’s a new government elected, there may well be a change of heart by then.” At the time, *The Globe and Mail* stated that the Conservative government's position was coherent and that the Ontario Liberals were playing games, jeopardizing the historic project in the process.

I am opposed to the amendment, which would make “ecological integrity” the first priority of park management in Bill C-18. This is a purely political move by the Liberal government to provide political cover for the Ontario Liberal opposition to the previous Conservative government's establishment of the Rouge National Urban Park.

Putting the words “ecological integrity” into Bill C-18 does nothing regarding the management of the park, for two reasons.

First, ecological protection is already a clear priority. The plan for the Rouge National Urban Park already meets or exceeds all 30 of the urban protected area guidelines set out by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

An independent City of Toronto staff report reported as follows:

The [Rouge National Urban Park management plan] goes beyond existing plans by committing to the implementation of: actions and targets for species-at-risk; elements of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resource's 2011 draft Fisheries Management Plan for the Rouge River; natural resource monitoring and reporting; and management practices on park farmland that will benefit the environment.

Many experts also oppose the designation “ecological integrity”, including the former chair of The Rouge Park Alliance, the chair of the Waterfront Regeneration Trust, the Altona Forest community stewardship committee, and the Toronto Zoo.

Secondly, Parks Canada, which is to manage the park and is devoted to the protection of national treasures such as the Rouge National Urban Park, opposes Bill C-18, since it is unrealistic to adopt a mandate of making ecological integrity the top concern of park management. A true environmentalist's definition of ecological integrity would mean leaving forest fires to burn, floods to run their course, and wildlife survival, all without human intervention.

The problem is that the park, being an urban park, is by definition inherently connected to human presence. Within the borders of the

park, there are highways, power lines, a pipeline, working farmland, and a former landfill site. The park sits beside residential neighbourhoods and is very much integrated into the ever-growing and increasingly populated GTA.

Additionally, stating that the top priority of the park management is to preserve ecological integrity could mean an opening for interference with, or complete removal of, farmers from the Rouge National Urban Park. Currently, parts of the park are occupied by farmers, some of whom have tilled that land since the 1800s.

All of this means that since it is not possible, in practice, to make ecological integrity the primary guiding principle of park management due to the park's urban nature, then the designation of ecological integrity would only be empty words.

I will cut it short. In conclusion, I will fully support this national urban park, but not the ecological integrity amendment to Bill C-18.

● (1035)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to questions and comments, I will inform hon. members that we have passed the five-hour mark in debate on this particular motion. All interventions from this point on will be the normal 10-minute speech, followed by five minutes for questions and comments.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for an excellent, well-articulated speech, that actually talks about the challenges and the political games being played by the federal Liberal government. He brings up something called ecological integrity. I have listened to some Liberal members make speeches, and the environment minister should be ashamed of herself. These speeches are obviously written by her office, and she is not explaining to her own colleagues what ecological integrity means.

When we look at the Rouge, there is a huge watershed. If we are looking at ecological integrity, that should be maintained. Over the years, buildings and infrastructure have been built in this watershed. What that would mean is that if we want to maintain ecological integrity and there is a fire, they would have to allow the fire to go through this watershed, and the buildings and infrastructure that are there already.

My question for my colleague is this. This is a big undertaking, and the Ontario Liberals have mismanaged it for years. Who should pay to bring that park up to the level of ecological integrity? Should it be the federal government and Canadian taxpayers, or should it be the Ontario government that has mismanaged this file for so many years?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Speaker, these are all the political games being played by the Ontario Liberals.

Government Orders

If we want to look into the overall situation, we should be thanking these people. Some may remember the names of David Crombie, and also Pauline Browne and Jim Flaherty. By the way, they were all Conservatives. They were the people who made the difference. This is where we are at this moment. If there is a chance, the Rouge National Urban Park information centre should be named after Jim Flaherty or Pauline Browne. They are the people who made this happen.

● (1040)

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. friend, again, about ecological integrity. The Rouge National Urban Park Act of 2015, Bill C-10, “Management of the Park”, section 6, states:

The Minister must, in the management of the Park, take into consideration the protection of its natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems.

That was sensible legislation. It states that the minister must maintain that park. However, to put ecological integrity into it threatens the railroad, Highway 401, the 407, the pipelines, the airways, and farming. Any group, such as CPAWS, or some group that could form—it could be called friends of Rouge Park—is going to fight the government and ask that these things be changed. I would like the member's comment on this.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Speaker, this is a political head game by the Liberals. They are empty words. It would not work. We have the parklands, the railway lines, the highways, and every single thing.

A number of my family members live just three minutes from the park. It is a residential area. Would this mean that we would have to let a fire burn for months, for weeks, or whatever? Do we let floods go through it? We have 1,700 different species of plants in there, birds, fish, mammals, insects, reptiles, and many other things. There is 10,000 years of human history. The whole thing is good, except for the amendment in Bill C-18. It does not make sense.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-18, the legislation dealing with the Rouge National Urban Park.

One of my favourite pastimes is to spend time in a national park. I live near Jasper National Park, Banff National Park, and Wood Buffalo National Park. I tend to spend a significant amount of my spare time there, not necessarily in the parks themselves but in the wilderness. I have hiked up and down Maligne Canyon in Jasper National Park. I have been to the Miette Hot Springs and the Athabasca Falls. I have gone skiing in the park, and camped there several times as well.

I find it is always great to get out in nature, feel the wind in my hair, and stand on top of a mountain and see for miles. It is an exhilarating and freeing experience. I hope that all Canadians can get outdoors and experience the freeness of this country. It is a humbling experience.

As I said, nature is a very large place, especially the Rocky Mountains. I would recommend it to anyone. When I stand on top of one of those mountains, I can see the entire mountain range. I feel incredibly humbled and very small at that point.

It is a value that I hope to pass on to my children. I spend a lot of time with my children in the outdoors. There is no better teacher than nature to explain how things work. When I walk around with my four-year-old daughter and we see the new flowers, I always ask her how they got there. She tells me that they are just there. I explain to her that the flower started from a seed that came from the flower before it. It managed to make it through the winter, and when it rained in the spring, the seed germinated and came up through the ground. Being out in nature offers us incredible educational opportunities. When I ask her how deer showed up in the park, she tells me they are just there. I tell her there is a mommy deer and a daddy deer, and a baby deer, which has some spots on it.

I cannot say enough about getting out in our national parks and appreciating nature. Canadians do not do enough of that.

I am encouraged and excited when I hear my fellow colleagues who live near Rouge Park taking about this big national park in the middle of a very urban area. I hope that many people will take advantage of the freedom of spending time with nature in this new national park.

We keep stumbling over the term “ecological integrity”. To me, ecological integrity means pristine nature, somewhat in keeping with Jasper or Banff, or some of the areas just north of where I live. It means it is untouched by human hands. When I find that waterfall and feel like I am the first person to ever see it, it is an incredible feeling.

A lot of northern B.C. is not a national park or anything like that, but—

An. hon. member: It is beautiful.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: It is beautiful, Mr. Speaker, and it has ecological integrity. It is not even a national park, but it has ecological integrity.

My sister lives in northern B.C., in the riding of Skeena—Bulkley Valley. I have hiked through the Telkwa Pass. I remember coming to a 400-foot waterfall, and when I stood at the bottom of it, I felt like I was the very first person who had ever been there. That was probably not so, but I certainly felt like I was.

An. hon. member: You were the first person there.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is saying that for sure I was the first person there. That, for me, is ecological integrity.

When the government says that it is going to impose ecological integrity on an area that is populated, that is civilized, that has been industrialized for hundreds of years, that does not even come close to meeting the definition of ecological integrity. It does not diminish the beauty of the place. It does not diminish the experience one can have in that place. My definition of ecological integrity would not cover this park.

Government Orders

•(1045)

If we impose ecological integrity, it would mean that when we find that new creek bank, when we find that little swimming hole on the side of the creek, we will walk up to it and say, “I am the first person to have ever been here”. I doubt very much that in Rouge National Urban Park that would be the case. I have not been there, but just from the debate we have had here today, I strongly feel that it would not be the case.

I would not like to see it be ecological. Our highways, power lines, pipelines, and railways are things that make us able to live our lives. Every one of us cares deeply about the environment and about passing this country on to our children in better shape than we received it. Also, none of us wants to give up living in the house we live in, driving the car we drive, or eating the food we eat that we can just go to the grocery store and buy. The very fact that I can buy strawberries in the middle of February is a testament to humanity's ability to overcome obstacles. I would not say that we should be going backward on a lot of these things.

To say that we should pull out the 401 highway or the 407 highway, both of which I have driven on, so I must have gone through this park at some point, or that we would want to divert traffic around that area or reduce highways in general I think would be regressive rather than progressive. I struggle immensely with the term “ecological integrity” when it is placed on a place that does not have ecological integrity, in my opinion.

The only real way I think we can protect ecological integrity is to restore it, but in this particular case, it seems unfeasible or even unwise to insist that we restore ecological integrity.

The member across the way referenced in his speech old travel routes. I asked him if the current travel routes, the current commerce routes, were something to be valued in this area. He said that we had indigenous trails that had gone through this area. It was before we had these kinds of things. Currently, we have commerce routes that run through it. Does he value those things? I do not think a new highway would fit within the term “ecological integrity”, but I am very pleased that it is there.

We are sucking and blowing with this legislation. We are saying that we want an ecological reserve, but then in northern Alberta, in Wood Buffalo National Park, he said that to maintain ecological integrity, we have to remove part of the land mass so that it can be developed as a reserve. In the one case, we will insist on ecological integrity in a very urban area that is already quite developed and has a lot of infrastructure and the like, but in another area that has ecological integrity, we are going to remove part of the park so that we can maintain the ecological integrity of the park but also allow our first nations to have a reserve in the area, and perhaps infringe upon that ecological integrity. Right within this piece of legislation there appears to be a sucking and blowing at the same time. If we are to insist in one area that we have ecological integrity and insist in another area that if we allow development or allow the building of infrastructure we would reduce the ecological integrity and must therefore pull it out of the park, to me that seems like we are sucking and blowing.

I would say that in northern Alberta we should pull that out of the national park and make it a reserve. I know that the people of the Little Red River Cree Nation, who are my constituents, have been working on this for a long time and really appreciate this gesture. However, I would say, given the statement we are making in northern Alberta, that we should probably make the same statement in Ontario and say that ecological integrity is not critical to the building of this new park.

I am thankful for the time I have been given today, and I look forward to some questions.

•(1050)

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been hearing consistently since yesterday from the members opposite that they oppose the concept of ecological integrity, which is already in the Parks Canada Act, applying to this file.

I hear the members opposite say that there is a highway and power lines in the park, seeming to imply that these are incompatible with a park governed by ecological integrity.

I am hoping that the hon. member could provide some clarification. Is he really suggesting that the highways and the power lines would be wrecked by this legislation?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely my question. I do not believe that Parks Canada is governed by the term “ecological integrity”. I know that it uses that term to assess its parks. Typically there is an ecological integrity assessment, but it is not something it aspires to do in all cases. This would be one of the first parks, as far as I know, that would have that term as part of its mandate to restore ecological integrity.

As I outlined in my speech just a minute ago, I said that my idea of ecological integrity is that when I find a waterfall, I feel like I am the first person who has ever been there. That is ecological integrity.

For a park to have ecological integrity, I would insist that there would not be a pipeline, a road, or a power line going through it. That is why I do not think we should put ecological integrity in this piece of legislation.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech. I listened with great interest to what he was saying about the urban park.

My riding does not have an urban park managed by Parks Canada, but we are very proud of Saint-Bernard Island. The City of Châteauguay purchased the island five years ago from a religious order that had been there for 200 years. Those nuns were truly forward-thinking; they had an organic farm with very environmentally friendly practices.

The nuns are of course quite elderly now, and as you might imagine, when the island was put up for sale, certain developers were very keen to purchase it to build condos on it.

However, the City of Châteauguay seized the opportunity, purchased it, and developed its own urban park. This will help strike a balance between giving people access to the park, which hosts events like the Écomarché de l'île, an attraction that draws 10,000 people, and ensuring the ecological integrity of the park.

Statements by Members

Does the member think that some degree of balance is possible? [English]

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, that is a very encouraging story I heard from my colleague. I am a member of the Alberta Fish & Game Association, which buys up huge swathes of land in rural Alberta to encourage conservation and to encourage keeping the land wild so that we can pass on the tradition of hunting and fishing to our children. I think that is exactly what we need to do.

The bill would mandate that an area become ecologically pure. That does not make sense to me. She referenced that there is agriculture in that park. There are probably old buildings and things like that. People are probably working hard to maintain those things, which I would say is a good thing. Let us continue to do that.

These things are a process. These things are moving in a direction. We should not put a hard line on it.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Is the House ready for the question? The question is on the main motion.

[English]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried on division.
(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, between defending people and defending banks, the Liberals' choice is clear. Between protecting workers, low-income earners, and average consumers, or protecting the huge dividends of Canada's financial elite, the Liberals did not hesitate. They sided with those who could line the party's coffers.

Bill C-29 allows banks to get around the Consumer Protection Act. What a nice Christmas present for the fat cats on Bay Street. There goes any chance of a class action suit ever being filed by small investors who are being ripped off with feeble interest rates on their savings and exorbitant interest rates on their loans. This is setting us back 50 years.

This government did not learn a thing from the financial crisis. Congratulations. Off come the masks. Nothing has changed. This government is the government of banks and oil companies, not of real people.

CIVIX CANADA

Mr. Ramesh Sangha (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, recently, I visited Central Peel Secondary School and the École élémentaire Carrefour des jeunes French school in my riding.

The highlight of my visit was meeting and congratulating newly elected grade five student, Prime Minister Madame Amielle. I invited the prime minister, her cabinet, and school staff to visit Parliament.

It was even more gratifying to have Isaac Tshiamala, my volunteer and former student of the school with me. It was quite a heartfelt and unique experience to interact with the students. This reminded me of my student days.

I must congratulate Civix Canada for organizing these visits, the staff of both the schools, and students for their kind hospitalities. We all know silver and gold may vanish away, but a sound education will never decay.

* * *

• (1100)

HEALTH

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a crisis in our country. Canada and the U.S. are the world's heaviest opioid users, with the rate of overdoses and deaths increasing dramatically.

In the past 10 months in British Columbia alone we have had 623 deaths. Of those, 322 have been related to fentanyl. In my home community of Kamloops there have been 33 deaths this year alone. It is devastating families and has taken far too many lives.

I would like to congratulate the Minister of Health on the opioid conference held in Ottawa last week. I was encouraged with the recent announcement that the RCMP had reached an agreement with China to try to halt the trans-Pacific flow of fentanyl into Canada.

I also hope that all members of the House will support the private member's bill, Bill C-307, at least at second reading, around tamper resistance, to see if it would be positive, and also call for the immediate ban on pill presses as an important next step in this fight.

* * *

ENCOUNTERS WITH CANADA

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate North Surrey Secondary School in my riding of Fleetwood—Port Kells for its participation in the Encounters With Canada program.

For the last 34 years, Encounters With Canada has given over 105,000 young people from across the country a unique opportunity to meet, share ideas, talk about careers, and get a closer look at our national institutions.

I have been particularly pleased to delve into Canada's law and justice system with Patrick Sheepwash, a grade 11 student from North Surrey Secondary School. It is totally gratifying to see bright, young people so engaged in what makes our country work.

Statements by Members

I would encourage all members to look for every opportunity to join with their schools and groups like Encounters With Canada to ensure we are mentoring the strong leadership our future needs.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on any given night in Canada, more than 350 women and children fleeing violence are turned away from help, because domestic violence shelters are underfunded and bursting at the seams.

Imagine the strength it takes to flee abuse. Imagine the heartbreak of shelter operators having to tell women there is a six-month waiting list for counselling. That is unacceptable.

Violence against women costs \$12 billion a year. One in four women will be victims in their lifetime. Disabled and Indigenous women and girls face a much higher level of violence than anyone else in Canada.

Today, on the United Nations international day to end violence against women, we give our deepest thanks to shelter operators like Haven Society in Nanaimo. We condemn violence in every form.

We will press the Liberal government to turn its feminist words into real action, and recommit that Canada's goal must be the eradication of violence against women. We will not stop until that is done.

* * *

SALVATION ARMY

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is the last weekend in November. What does that mean? Christmas is upon us.

This weekend, it will be sheer madness at all stores for shoppers. However, outside of the madness of the shopping weekend, outside of every store is one of the greatest Christmas traditions: the red kettle of the Salvation Army.

Mary Downey of the Salvation Army in Newfoundland and Labrador said:

The loonies, toonies, you drop into The Salvation Army kettle will be used to provide more than 1,800 families/individuals throughout Newfoundland and Labrador with a Christmas Hamper, more than 3,800 children/youth with a gift or two..

Each Christmas season, I spend hours accompanying the red kettle, volunteering my time. Therefore, I challenge every member of Parliament and every minister in the House to volunteer their time accompanying a Salvation Army kettle. They will meet great constituents and they will raise money for a great cause to help the impoverished.

I wish everyone a merry Christmas. Please give hope today.

[*Translation*]

LAVAL UNIVERSITY'S ROUGE ET OR

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise once again in the House to brag about my alma mater, Laval University.

Tomorrow, the Rouge et Or football team will be playing in its 10th Vanier Cup, a trophy it has won eight times. Born out of a dream to give francophone players the opportunity to play football while studying in French, the program had a modest beginning in 1995, but is now a national household name.

Thanks to the vision of businessmen in the Quebec City area such as Jacques Tanguay, and the coaching provided by Glen Constantin and his team of trainers, the dream became a reality.

An entire region and a province admire these student athletes, whose motto is “strength, work and pride”, in their quest for success on the field and in the classroom.

I commend Rouge et Or and wish them good luck. Go Laval, go.

* * *

● (1105)

LA MAURICIE NATIONAL PARK

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we approach 2017, I would like to shine the spotlight on my beautiful region and La Mauricie National Park, which are two of Canada's true jewels.

La Mauricie National Park covers an area the size of Montreal Island and is one of three national parks that are open year-round. Throughout 2017, admission to all of Canada's national parks is free for all visitors. Therefore, that is the ideal year for people and families from across the country to discover La Mauricie National Park, a true natural wonder, as well as the beautiful Mauricie region, through which flows the majestic 564-kilometre Saint-Maurice River.

I would also like to mention the warm welcome you will receive from the people of Mauricie and the excellent work of Tourisme Mauricie, which showcases many outstanding tourism attractions at tourismemauricie.com.

I invite all Canadians to visit Mauricie during Canada's 150th anniversary.

Welcome to Mauricie.

* * *

[*English*]

ROTARY YOUTH PARLIAMENT

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, later today, the 29th annual Rotary Youth Parliament will be called to order at the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

The Rotary Youth Parliament sees high school students from across the province take on the role of members of the legislative assembly, debating their own bills and resolutions in the chamber.

Statements by Members

This year, 36 students will participate, forming a full cabinet and an opposition.

Bills on the order paper today include the bridge and ferry toll rebate act and the cap and trade system act.

Tomorrow, after adjournment proceedings, the top youth parliamentarian will receive the Frank Zakem Memorial Award, which was established in honour of one of the giants of our community and the driving force behind the establishment of this wonderful learning experience.

Frank would be so proud of his legacy.

I look forward to sitting in the public gallery tomorrow morning at the legislative assembly to pick up a few pointers and meet some of tomorrow's legislators.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals constantly pit Canadians against each other, forcing a carbon tax on provinces, whether it is wanted or not, and hiking costs for everyone, but mostly for rural and northern Canadians and the poor.

Only 1% of infrastructure funds will go to rural towns. The minister even admitted that his new bank will only work in cities. The Liberals have spent hundreds of thousands on limo rides for a minister, moving expenses for staff, and private PR for their Liberal friends, but nothing for unemployed energy workers, or anyone else, across Canada.

Young Canadians cannot afford their first homes because of strict new mortgage rules, but the Prime Minister is planning to spend tens of millions of dollars expanding 24 Sussex.

The Liberals pit elites against everyday Canadians, urban against rural, provinces and territories against each other and against them. They play divisive identity politics, all this for crass partisan gain.

Canadians from all regions and backgrounds want to be treated with the fairness they deserve.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LA-NATIVITÉ-DE-LA-SAINTE-VIERGE CHURCH

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday I attended the special ceremony marking the 175th anniversary of La-Nativité-de-la-Sainte-Vierge church alongside many residents, regional officials, and a chief from Kahnawake.

The mayor of La Prairie, Donat Serres, turned on the lights that now illuminate the steeple of this magnificent church, a legacy project involving much hard work.

This initiative proudly highlights the architecture of this heritage building and showcases an inviting, comforting symbol in the region, a landmark that is a beacon for Vieux La Prairie.

Throughout 2017, La-Nativité-de-la-Sainte-Vierge parish will be celebrating its 350th anniversary, as will the town of La Prairie.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite all my colleagues to come and celebrate with us and to discover the wonderful attractions of the beautiful riding of La Prairie.

Enjoy the celebrations.

* * *

● (1110)

[*English*]

HOUSING

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to improving access to affordable housing for Canadians. Last week, I announced the signing of a two-year investment in affordable housing agreement with the Hon. Scott Fielding, minister of families for the province of Manitoba. This agreement doubles current funding and makes new investments to support affordable housing for seniors and victims of family violence, and to repair existing social housing units.

Our government also made a commitment to consult Canadians on a national housing strategy. On November 22, National Housing Day, we released a report on “What we Heard” through the consultations.

A clear message has emerged. Canadians want better housing outcomes, especially for those in the greatest need. This is a priority for our government, and we will continue to make smart investments to grow the economy and help the middle class.

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HORATIO ALGER ASSOCIATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 19th century author, Horatio Alger, wrote over 100 novels about young people who overcame adversity through hard work. There are 389 relentlessly hard-working young Canadians who have done the same and have earned scholarships from the Horatio Alger Association.

These scholars are proof of the association's credo that in the free market system, anyone can achieve anything through hard work and dedication. Prem Watsa is proof of that. The Horatio Alger Association president came to Canada with \$8 in his pocket. Through hard work, he has built up a business with a book value of \$8 billion. Now he is giving back through scholarships to deserving young people.

On behalf of the House of Commons, I congratulate Mr. Watsa and the scholars for reminding us that in a free market system anything is possible for those who work hard and play by the rules.

* * *

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.

Oral Questions

While some complain, I love winter and being outdoors, exploring the inspiring landscapes of my riding of Long Range Mountains.

Canada is a winter wonderland, with stunning views and exciting adventures to be found, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador. The winter tourism industry is a major economic engine.

Whether strapping on skis and heading out to Margaret's trail at Plum Point, or swooshing down the OMJ at Marble Mountain, or snowmobiling the many miles of groomed trails along the majestic Lewis Hills, or lacing up skates in arenas like Stephenville Dome, the St. Anthony Polar Centre, the Port aux Basques Bruce complex or on any frozen pond, winter in Newfoundland is fantastic.

My favourite is stepping into my snowshoes and taking in the majesty of Gros Morne National Park.

[Translation]

On behalf of Canada's tourism industry, I welcome everyone at my favourite time of year and invite you to join with me in celebrating the beauty of Canada.

* * *

[English]

LIVING WAGE

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it will come as no surprise to the many Canadians living paycheque to paycheque that workers are not being paid what they need to support themselves and their families with confidence. They are not making a living wage.

Four Saskatoon-based employers, however, are leading the way by pledging to pay their employees at least \$16.68 per hour, the wage a two-earner family of four in Saskatoon needs to meet its basic needs.

The Better Good, Friedt Finishing, Shift Development, and the United Way of Saskatoon and Area have all committed to paying their employees a living wage. "We want to attract and retain quality staff and make it possible for them to live healthy lives and succeed in our community," Jennifer Friedt of Friedt Finishing said in a statement.

Congratulations to Living Wage YXE and these four great employers for illustrating how we can all be the change we wish to see in the world.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am always honoured to be an elected member of this chamber, and at times I am particularly proud of it. This surely was the case when we unanimously agreed that the ongoing situation facing the Yazidi people is in fact genocide.

Although the government has not come clean on the nature of the mission, I am grateful to our military for what it will do to defeat ISIS and for the aid commitments the government has made. Yet following testimony at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, I am troubled to hear that due to corruption, precious aid is

being skimmed off and that too little of it gets to those who need it the most.

We can help get aid to minorities in Iraq without it being skimmed. What is more, we can locate and rescue the over 3,000 Yazidi orphans and, surely, we can settle more than just 50 Yazidi sex slave survivors in Canada.

This is just a matter of political will. Right now, the Liberal government has an opportunity to demonstrate kindness and generosity to the Yazidi people in their hour of need. It's the Canadian thing to do. Indeed, it is the right thing to do.

* * *

● (1115)

[Translation]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every year in Canada and throughout the world, November 25 marks the beginning of the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. These 16 days remind Canadians of the terrible reality of violence and threats of violence that women and girls are exposed to every day.

[English]

This year's theme is "Actions Matter". It underscores the fact that every one of us has the power to say no to misogyny, to reject sexist language, to call out casual sexism, and to be respectful in all of our interactions with each other.

During the 16 days, we encourage all Canadians to think about ways we can stop gender-based violence in our homes, schools, communities.

[Translation]

It is through small acts that we can stop gender-based violence once and for all.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the disconnect between what the Prime Minister says and what he actually does is growing day by day. First he broke his word to cut taxes for small businesses. Then he broke his commitment to only having a small deficit. We know the deficit is absolutely ballooning. Now he is breaking his own promise to be open, accountable, and ethical.

The Prime Minister is very good at putting on a big show and saying all the right things, but then doing something completely different.

Why will the Prime Minister not keep his word?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition House leader knows that the government always keeps its word. In fact—

Oral Questions

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: They seem to find this funny, Mr. Speaker. What Canadians did not find funny was her government's inability to focus on economic growth, on cutting taxes for the middle class, on creating jobs in every region of the country. That is the word we gave to Canadians, and that is what governs our government's actions every single day.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fisheries minister had a hard time keeping a straight face in saying that. It is pretty obvious.

When it comes to fundraising for the government, following the law is simply not good enough. Let me read something: “the performance of your official duties and the arrangement of your private affairs should bear the closest public scrutiny. This is an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law”.

Who said that? It was the Liberal Prime Minister. Again I ask, why does the Prime Minister have such a hard time keeping his word? Why does he say one thing and do something completely different?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer said that Canada's election financing laws are among the most advanced, constraining, and transparent in the world.

What removes even the exaggerated suggestions of my friends on the other side of the aisle from pretending that a conflict of interest appears, what removes that doubt, is meticulous following of the rules always. Donations of over \$200 are disclosed transparently. That is something we are proud of on this side of the House, and those are rules that we always follow.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, we are not talking about Elections Canada rules. We have no problem with political parties doing fundraising according to Elections Canada rules. We are talking about the Prime Minister's own guidelines and the Prime Minister admitting that he was conducting government business at a Liberal fundraiser. Not only is this breaking his own ethical guidelines, this is coming very close to breaking other laws.

Again, when will the Liberals admit that they have broken their own guidelines, they are doing the wrong thing, the immoral thing, in doing what could possibly be seen as corrupt, by doing government business at Liberal fundraisers?

• (1120)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend's exaggerated preamble does not necessarily turn those assertions into facts.

What I can assure the House is that unlike the Conservative Party, we will not appoint people like Mike Duffy and Irving Gerstein and Pamela Wallin to the Senate to raise money on the taxpayers' dime for the Conservative Party. That is why, if we want to talk about immoral and inappropriate behaviour, they are on that side of the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government boasts about its lofty principles, but when it comes time to take action, it is a whole different story.

The Liberals follow the same approach when it comes to fundraising. They engage in what is called sector-specific financing, where ministers ask for money from people with whom they have a working relationship. For example, a lawyer will pay \$1,500 to meet with the Minister of Justice. That is not right, and it is unethical.

What will it take for the Liberal government to realize that this is inappropriate, another Gomery Commission?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite is well aware that Canada has some of the strictest political financing regulations in the world. The same rules apply to all parliamentarians, and our government is very committed to following them. We are perfectly aware that any contribution of more than \$200 is disclosed proactively. These are personal donations made by Canadians and Canadian citizens only, and that is what removes any suggestion of a conflict of interest or the appearance of conflict of interest, as my colleague inappropriately suggested was the case.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister of what his boss, the Prime Minister of Canada, has said, both in writing and out loud: “there should be no preferential access...because [of] financial contributions”. When the Liberal Party engages in sectoral financing, it goes against the Prime Minister's own ethics rules.

Is it any wonder, though, when the Prime Minister himself is the one leading these kinds of activities, that by sheer coincidence, just a few days later, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation receives a \$1-million donation? Well done.

Why is he not following the ethics rules?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the feigned indignation from my friend across the aisle does not make what he is saying a reality.

As he is well aware, that donation to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation, which is independent of the government, was discussed in January 2014, when the Conservatives were in power. He knows full well that he is grossly exaggerating the facts when he claims that this was somehow inappropriate.

[*English*]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, selling access to government ministers to secure cash for the Liberal Party is the definition of a breach of trust. For days now, the minister of fishy fundraisers has been telling us not to worry, that when ministers attend these exclusive \$1,500 events, government business is not discussed. Canadians are tired of this line and deserve better. Can the Liberals tell us, if not government business, what the heck they were talking about during these dinners. Hors d'oeuvres?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just because my colleague manufactures a series of outrages across the aisle does not change the facts. The facts are that Canada's electoral fundraising laws and regulations are among the most severe and restrictive in the world. Those are the words of Canada's Chief Electoral Officer.

We respect all of the fundraising rules at all times. That is what removes any suggestion, if in fact it is done sincerely, that there is a conflict of interest. I think my colleague on the other side of the House knows that very well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it would seem that the ministers answering our questions do not agree with the Prime Minister.

When they were asked about exclusive fundraising activities this week, they replied that the Liberals were continuing to work hard, and “to bring investors to Canada”.

The government cannot talk out of both sides of its mouth. Either it confirms that this does not pertain to government business, or it confirms that it is attracting investment. Which is it?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said repeatedly, this kind of fundraising activity is completely normal and all political parties do it. That is also what the Chief Electoral Officer himself has said.

My colleague knows very well that we have always followed all fundraising rules. These events are open to thousands of Canadians across the country. The same is true for all political parties.

* * *

• (1125)

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned the details of the plan for the future Maison de Radio-Canada.

In 2009, an agreement was reached between Radio-Canada and the City of Montreal. They agreed that 20% of the construction would include social and community housing on this site. However, the developer that is buying the current tower and some of the land is not a signatory to the agreement.

How is the minister responsible for social housing going to ensure that this agreement is upheld and when will the construction of this new social housing begin?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister has always said that Radio-Canada had a social and historic responsibility to Montreal and to its neighbourhood. Radio-Canada acknowledged that. She also hoped that the more modern and green new facilities would be able to meet our digital realities for years to come.

As the project unfolds, we hope that the crown corporation will engage in an open process with its neighbourhood, its employees,

and Canadians in general. We will follow the developments of this project with great interest.

* * *

[*English*]

SENIORS

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night I had a telephone town hall with the residents of my riding of Essex. In Essex there is a crisis, with one in 11 seniors living in poverty. Some of them are living on one meal a day and are having to choose between paying for their prescription drugs, hydro bills, or food. Our seniors worked hard to build the society we all enjoy today. Now our country owes them a debt of responsibility. The Liberal government needs to do more for our seniors. They deserve to be able to age with dignity. What is the government doing to lift seniors out of poverty?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the hard work of seniors who helped build our country. They deserve to retire in dignity.

It is why we restored the age of eligibility of OAS and GIS to 65 from 67, a very wrong-headed move by the previous government. We have raised the guaranteed income supplement for 900,000 low-income seniors, and invested over \$200 million in senior housing.

Make no mistake, our government is there for seniors, now and tomorrow.

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ETHICS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada 2020, a Liberal think tank associated with Liberal lobbyists and good friends of the Liberal Prime Minister, recently introduced a donor agreement to prevent accusations of cash for access for events it holds with Liberal ministers.

It is really sad that the Liberals' actions make such agreements necessary. In light of this revelation, why can the Prime Minister not see that even his friends are embarrassed by his fundraising techniques and fear for their own reputations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague across the aisle knows very well that at all times political parties are raising money. They do so according to Canadian law.

He knows very well that only Canadian citizens can contribute to these fundraising events. He also knows that all donations of over \$200 are proactively disclosed by the election authorities. He also knows, or should know, that the Liberal Party follows all of the election rules, and that is what removes even the suggestion of a conflict of interest.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for weeks now, we have demanded that the Liberals stop peddling cabinet access to their friends and lobbyists.

Oral Questions

Fresh off his trip to visit old family friends in Cuba, we learned that the Prime Minister was cozying up to Chinese Communist Party officials who attended a cash for access fundraiser in May. These same officials then made a large payment to the Trudeau Foundation.

Has this Prime Minister no shame? I know he admires dictatorships from Havana to Beijing, but this goes too far. Will he stop selling influence to foreign powers?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague can manufacture outrage as much as he wants.

He knows very well that only Canadian citizens can make donations to political parties in Canada. Those are rules that all political parties follow.

He knows that the Trudeau Foundation is an independent foundation. He knows that that particular donation to which he made reference began in January 2014. He knows that very well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what he is not saying is when the cheque was written.

This government is trying to defend the indefensible. It is hiding behind a law written for all parliamentarians to claim that it is obeying the law. We are all familiar with the saying that just because it is legal does not mean it is ethical.

The Minister of Justice invited lawyers to a cocktail party. If they are ambitious they will attend, because when she appoints judges she will think of the Liberal Party's friends.

Will this government respect the House and stop the intimidation with its political fundraising?

• (1130)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is proud of enhancing the transparency of judicial appointments.

My Conservative colleague claims that our judicial appointments are not made in an open and transparent manner. However, he knows very well that that is not true.

We changed the process in order to increase transparency and to make outstanding Canadians eligible for appointment. We are proud of that.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have my doubts about what my colleague just said.

I could go on with the long list of ministers who take donors hostage. Worse still is the fact that the Prime Minister himself is involved in this sketchy kind of fundraising, the very same Prime Minister who told his ministers not to get involved in this kind of thing.

They should really walk the talk. This is serious. This government has no ethics and could not care less about rules.

Will the Liberals stop holding these sketchy fundraising events?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague wants to talk about lack of ethics and sketchy fundraising activities, maybe

he should think about what his government did when it appointed people like Mike Duffy, Irving Gerstein, and Pamela Wallin to the Senate specifically to do fundraising for the Conservative Party at taxpayers' expense. That is something our government will never do.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in response to a question about the Liberals spending over \$23,000 on an external public relations consultant for Kathleen Wynne, for her trip to Israel, the foreign affairs minister said these services are available to anyone.

Seriously, anyone can get a free \$23,000 PR guy funded by the Liberals? No wonder they have no hope of balancing this budget.

Why will the minister not simply admit that Kathleen Wynne got the money because she is a Liberal?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a service that is available to any province of any political orientation, of course.

However, since my colleague is asking the question about what this trip gave to Canada: 44 commercial agreements; \$118 million; 200 jobs in Ontario. Other provinces have benefited from the same service. Is the member opposite suggesting we should not help our provinces access foreign commercial markets?

Israel has benefited from this visit. Is the member opposite suggesting we weaken ties with Israel?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the member is suggesting is that the federal government not pay Ontario's bills.

Yesterday, I asked the foreign affairs minister about the federal Liberals paying a private public relations firm \$23,000 for Kathleen Wynne's recent trip to Israel. He said, "The amount of money he speaks about is an amount of money that was available to anyone...."

What a ridiculous answer. That money is not available to anyone unless their circle of friends includes the Prime Minister, Gerald Butts, and Katie Telford.

Canadian taxpayers want to know why the federal Liberals paid for Kathleen Wynne's public relations bills.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess my colleague was sleeping when I just spoke, so I will repeat myself.

This is a service available to any province, and we do not look at the political affiliation of the province. That is ridiculous as a statement. He would be unable to substantiate it.

Oral Questions

Did he not hear me describe 44 commercial agreements; \$118 million; 200 jobs in Ontario; stronger links with Israel? If he has a problem with that, I want to know why.

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PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for two weeks now, the NDP has been asking the Liberals to fix their flawed CPP expansion bill, Bill C-26.

After refusing to address it last night, Liberal MPs once again prevented us from fixing it.

The Liberals also refused to answer why the dropout provisions were not included in the first place. Did the minister not realize the impact this would have on women and people living with disabilities?

If the Liberal government truly recognizes this problem, then why is it forcing through a flawed bill?

• (1135)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud to work in partnership with provinces to have a historic agreement to expand the Canada pension plan, which would improve retirement outcomes, including for women and those with disabilities, in our country. We are aware that more could be done with respect to the dropout provisions, and we have stated that very clearly to the member. However, in order to make changes to the plan, we need agreement from the provinces.

Our intent is to pass the bill, as is; however, the Minister of Finance will then raise the dropout provisions at the next provincial and territorial finance ministers' meeting in December, in the context of the triennial review of the Canada pension plan.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, real leadership would be fixing it now.

One hundred and thirty first nations, the Province of British Columbia, and the Union of BC Municipalities all said no to the northern gateway pipeline. A Federal Court overturned the Conservative approval and the Liberals made multiple promises to stop it. It sounds like an easy promise to keep, even for the Liberals.

However, they are waffling on other promises to protect our coasts.

Would the Liberals commit today to introduce legislation to permanently ban crude oil tankers on B.C.'s north coast, yes or no?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of the energy sector to our economy and to the livelihoods of Canadians. We have been clear that natural resources projects must go forward in an environmentally sustainable manner.

The government's final decision on each major resource project will be informed by facts and evidence, including public consultation and the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Each major resource project has to be judged on its own merits, in order to determine if it is in the overall Canadian best interests.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents and forestry workers deserve to know what their future will be now that the United States trade representative is planning to launch trade action against Canada. Albertans cannot afford another drastic hit. There is no time to waste, too many jobs are at stake.

Why will the minister not do her job, and ensure stability and predictability for forestry workers, or does she just not care about Albertans' livelihood?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member that it was the previous government, his party, that let the treaty expire and failed to reinstate negotiations with our American partners.

We are prepared for any eventuality on this file. We understand that there may be a complaint lodged in front of the department of commerce by the American industry. We will defend at every step of the way in front of tribunals our Canadian workers, our Canadian forestry industry. We have never lost. We are confident moving forward. In the meantime, we will continue to negotiate a good settlement for Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a load of blah, blah, blah.

Now we know why the Liberal government was never serious about renewing the softwood lumber agreement. How do we know? The opening salvo of a new trade war with the United States was fired today.

The Minister of International Trade had 387 days to defend Canada's forestry workers, but she failed. Now thousands of families in the regions are worried about being caught in the crossfire of this trade war.

The Prime Minister's seduction strategy is not working. When will the government start fighting for Canadians?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing. We are fighting for the interests of Canadian softwood lumber workers and producers.

That is exactly why we have not yet reached an agreement. The United States' offer was not acceptable. We are continuing to work for the industry and the workers. In the meantime, we will put up a fight in court. We have never lost, and we will continue to work toward an agreement that is good for the country.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about how vigorously the government is going to defend it. The Liberals budgeted a measly \$30 million. They just gave \$25 million to a foreign organization with direct and indirect links to Hamas, a jihadist terrorist group. How vigorously is the government going to defend Canadian jobs?

Softwood lumber war number five is mere hours away. This means mill closures and job losses for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

The minister has mismanaged this file from day one. When is the government going to stand up for hard-working forestry families from coast to coast to coast?

• (1140)

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the righteous indignation of the hon. member, we will take no lessons from a party that refused to even initiate negotiations. As the member for Lac-Saint-Jean admitted in a public statement to the press, the previous government did not even start renegotiations with the Americans.

From the beginning, we have been in contact with workers and the industry across the country. We understand their concerns. We know their positions and we are defending those positions vigorously in negotiations. We are going to defend our position vigorously in front of tribunals.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government put an end to the most costly and longest trade war with the U.S. in 2006. Not only did we do that, but we also renegotiated an extension and a grace period that the present Liberal government has not been able to do with its BFF. There are going to be job losses, mill closures, and it is going to impact small communities from coast to coast to coast.

It is not just the forestry workers. It is the small mom-and-pops. It is service industries all across Canada. When—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade.

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been standing up for Canadians from coast to coast to coast on this file since the get-go, which is more than we can say about the previous government.

Our strategy remains the right strategy. We are continuing to negotiate on behalf of Canadians. We are continuing to stay in contact with workers and the industry across the country. We are going to defend ourselves in front of trade tribunals, which the previous Liberal governments under prime ministers Chrétien and Martin did. We have never lost. We will continue to move forward in that direction.

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*[Translation]***CANADIAN COAST GUARD**

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the federal government's management of the icebreaker fleet is a

complete fiasco. What is more, rather than purchasing the *Aiviq* for a price taxpayers can afford, the Liberal government is dragging its feet.

If the St. Lawrence Seaway were shut down even for just a few days because of a lack of equipment to deal with winter weather conditions, it would be an economic disaster. As the member for the port city of Trois-Rivières, I know what I am talking about.

Why is the government refusing to buy the *Aiviq*?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, we announced an open and transparent consultation process with the marine industry specifically to ensure that there is no break in services.

Nine Coast Guard vessels are currently providing icebreaking services in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and they will be on the St. Lawrence River next year and for several years to come.

At some point, we will have to consider other options to ensure that there is no shortage of services. My colleague should not worry people by making such claims.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the minister that a confidential internal report by his own department called the situation critical.

Economic development in the St. Lawrence corridor depends on the seaway being open all winter long. In response to this critical situation, the government says that maybe someday it might think about possibly coming up with a long-term solution for a new fleet.

Is that the government's strategy? Instead of leaving the seaway up to chance, why is it not considering buying, or at least renting, the *Aiviq*?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that my colleague would suggest proceeding in a way that is not open and transparent.

We announced consultations with the entire marine industry and all partners across the country who have suggestions about the possibility of acquiring vessels for the short term and ensuring that there is no break in services.

Instead of moving forward with a single suggestion, we think it is in the interest of all Canadians and taxpayers to have a more open process. That is what we are doing.

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POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mrs. Alexandra Mendès (Brossard—Saint-Lambert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it can be hard for parents to save for their children's post-secondary education. Day-to-day expenses, including everything from groceries to housing, always come first. However, saving for a child's education can have a huge impact on his or her future.

Oral Questions

●(1145)

[English]

Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour inform this House of the steps the government is taking to help parents save for their children's post-secondary education?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 20 to 26 is Education Savings Week, and Canadians are encouraged to save for a child's post-secondary education. That type of education opens doors for better jobs, and helps Canadians obtain in-demand skills and education. The government has two incentives: the Canada learning bond, and the Canada education savings grant. We encourage all Canadians to save for the future and ensure our children are successful.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we learned that the Minister of Democratic Institutions will, at the cost of millions, be mailing out 13 million postcards asking feel-good questions about electoral reform, but this week she said that Canada cannot have a referendum on the very same subject because “we have...seen how expensive [referenda] can be.”

The Chief Electoral Officer has testified that a simple change that is under the minister's own direct control could cut the costs of a referendum in half. Given the minister's day-old enthusiasm for frugality, why will she not just take the CEO's advice and stop pretending that cost is an insurmountable barrier to democracy?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for all of his hard work on this special committee that is focused on electoral reform. I am sure that the member opposite, who has been asking for a year that we reach out to as many Canadians as possible, will be fully supportive of the third pillar of our outreach. We will be reaching out to Canadians from all walks of life. We want to hear their values on their democratic institutions, and we are counting on every single member of this House to help ensure that their constituents have a say in this third pillar of our outreach.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the minister's consultations. We are dealing with a government that keeps saying that it is consulting with and listening to Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

If 70% of Canadians want a referendum before we change our electoral system, and if the committee has a report that indicates that a referendum is the right way to go, will the minister and the Prime Minister finally listen to Canadians and respect their wishes, or will they do as they please based on their own whims?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a while since I have heard from the hon. member, too.

We listened to Canadians when we proposed the special committee to go out and hear from Canadians. We listened to Canadians and the members of this House when they said to change the composition of the committee so that the majority would be with the opposition.

We will listen to Canadians in new and innovative ways. I am looking forward to receiving the committee's report on December 1. We will take that into consideration, along with the feedback we have received from Canadians, before we introduce legislation in this House.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Liberals ignore farmers, our Conservative government mandated that oil companies blend ethanol and biodiesel in our transportation fuels.

This has been good for jobs and the economy, good for the environment, and good for the farmers in my riding. The Ecofiscal Commission has recommended these farmers be left in the dust.

Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food confirm that the Liberals will not reduce the ethanol and biodiesel mandate?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud of our government's record on the environment and climate change. As we have said many times, our government is committed to a cleaner environment and a more innovative economy. Bioproducts, including biofuels, can help create new economic opportunities for farmers and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[English]

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government clearly does not want to confirm that it is going to continue having that mandate.

Farmers in my riding depend on the ethanol and biodiesel production for their livelihoods, but the Ecofiscal Commission wants to throw them under the bus. This will kill farms and jobs, give us a weaker economy, and a dirtier environment.

Why will the Liberals not stand up for farmers and our environment, and maintain the ethanol and biodiesel mandate?

Oral Questions

● (1150)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians voted for a more responsible government that will create a cleaner environment and a more innovative economy. Canadian farmers use responsible land management practices. The Government of Canada is working with its provincial and territorial counterparts to help farmers reduce greenhouse gas emissions, preserve soil and water resources, and adapt to climate change.

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*[English]***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week Cindy Blackstock, AFN, Chiefs of Ontario, and Nishnawbe Aski Nation all filed motions of non-compliance against the government, after already issuing two previous compliance orders.

When the Liberals supported our motion, indigenous families hoped things would change, but two days later the government was back in court fighting first nations children.

When will the government do what it promised and work with first nations peoples and not against them?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for raising this question.

We, too, were disappointed that the plaintiffs decided to file motions again. There had been a very good offer by the chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission for us to get the lawyers out of this, and be able to speak in a facilitated discussion to get going on the reforms that are really necessary.

I look forward to working with the member and with all first nations to get this kind of reform. That is the real discrimination, of way too many indigenous children in care and being looked after by non-indigenous families.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP can be counted on to defend the rights of the LGBTQ community here and abroad.

However, it is not so clear with our Prime Minister, who while in Liberia, refused to condemn the country's criminalization of homosexual activity. According to him, different countries have different paces of evolution in recognizing the rights of LGBTQ persons.

Let me remind the Prime Minister that human rights are universal, no matter where people live or who they love. Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs explain this missed opportunity?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the

hon. member for her constant work on this file on behalf of LGBTQ2 people in our country.

It is important that we work both at home and abroad to promote human rights across the world. It is important that in our statements that we advance human rights, that we are sensitive to where countries are in their own evolution, and that we always defend the rights. Over time, the long arc of history bends toward progress, and we are helping with that long arc.

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*[Translation]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the decision to purchase 18 interim Super Hornets does not make any sense. The commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, the Canadian commander of NORAD, and the chief of the defence staff have all confirmed that there is no capability gap.

What is more, we have now learned that 234 members of the Canadian Armed Forces and public servants have been muzzled for life. They are not allowed to talk about the aircraft procurement file. According to Alan Williams, former assistant deputy minister responsible for equipment, this is unprecedented. There is something fishy about this file. The government is hiding something.

How much will it cost to acquire the Super Hornets?

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the information being referenced by the hon. member is possibly some of the most commercially and security-sensitive information that the Government of Canada has.

Therefore, it is not unreasonable that the employees who work with that very sensitive information be required to sign non-disclosure agreements.

We are determined not to make the same mistakes that the previous government made.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 240 federal public servants have been forbidden to publicly discuss details of the Liberals politically motivated, sole-sourced Super Hornet purchase, a deal that will cost thousands of jobs and waste billions of taxpayers' dollars.

In fact, this gag order forbids them from discussing the project for the rest of their lives, a move condemned as heavy-handed by two former federal procurement chiefs.

Why are the Liberals muzzling public servants, and what are they trying to hide from Canadians?

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is possibly some of the most commercially and security-sensitive information in the files of the Government of Canada.

It is therefore not unreasonable that non-disclosure agreements be signed by those very people who are handling that information.

We are determined that this procurement will be handled in the right and proper way, and that the mistakes that were made in the past will not be repeated.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we speak, the Liberal government is making 235 members of the Canadian Armed Forces and public servants involved in replacing our CF-18 fighter jets sign lifetime non-disclosure agreements. That is a first.

I have no intention of wasting my question by asking the Liberals what they have to hide. It is clear that they are just going to repeat, as they just did, that they do not want to disclose the information because it is supposedly commercially sensitive and that they are following the appropriate procedures.

Instead, I would simply like to know whether public servants are being forced to sign these agreements because they did not agree with the government's decision.

[English]

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said in earlier responses, this is sensitive information. This is critical information. This is information that we simply do not want to have in the wrong hands.

Therefore, non-disclosure is a *sine qua non* for those who are handling that information. We have asked those who are handling that information to sign non-disclosure agreements, which extend past their employment with the crown, and—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Oakville.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. John Oliver (Oakville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Oakville is part of the network of auto manufacturers in this country. In fact, the Ford assembly plant in my riding employs approximately 4,500 workers.

They work hard to ensure that the vehicles and equipment assembled are consistent with Canadian safety standards.

Can the minister inform this House on his work with regard to safety of Canadian consumers?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Oakville for his question and for his leadership on our automotive caucus.

Obviously, consumer protection is important to us with respect to road safety.

[Translation]

That is why I introduced Bill S-2 in the Parliament of Canada. It will give us the tools we need and allow us to recall and repair any defects that are discovered in our automobiles and equipment.

This bill is before Parliament, and I hope that all parties will support it when it comes to the House.

Oral Questions

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is facing a crisis in the over-prescription of opioids and with illicit fentanyl and now a wave of street drugs 100 times stronger.

The health minister claims to be using every lever at her disposal, but the only action we have seen from the Liberals was an exclusive conference in Ottawa. The doors were closed to addiction doctors and any expert who may have had a different opinion than the Liberals.

If the minister takes the opioid crisis seriously, why is she not meeting with addiction doctors and those on the front line who work every single day with this tragic crisis?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising this issue. The matter of opioids in this country is a serious public health crisis, and we have taken action on this from day one.

I was very pleased early on in my mandate to make sure that naloxone was available to save hundreds, if not thousands, of lives by being available at a non-prescription status. I was also very happy to make sure we got intranasal naloxone into this country and to make sure we got approval for it.

I was very happy to take steps to schedule precursors for illicit fentanyl so that it would not be available. We have taken steps to make sure that supervised consumption sites are available as a harm-reduction measure.

We brought together hundreds of people, in a manner that has never been done before, including addiction specialists and all other stakeholders, to make sure that action is taken on this very serious matter.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Infrastructure.

For the last two years, Prince Edward Island has led this country in export growth and is expected to again this year. The premier has tagged Prince Edward Island “Canada's Food Island” for its food and fish exports, but we also export many other products, such as aerospace and other goods. Critical to our export needs in all of Atlantic Canada is quality infrastructure that leads us into those export markets.

My question to the minister is this. Under the new infrastructure fund, will those critical needs be met for Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Malpeque and all of the Atlantic caucus for their advocacy on infrastructure issues in their communities.

Oral Questions

After hearing their concerns, and the concerns of the province and the mayors, we made changes to allow 60% of P.E.I.'s roads to be eligible for funding compared to the 1% that were eligible under the previous government. These changes will help us grow the economy, connect to communities, and move goods to market.

* * *

● (1200)

HEALTH

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the environment minister announced that she will force the Ottawa Hospital to build at Tunney's, a location the hospital twice studied and rejected.

Reaction has been fast and furious. Former mayor Jim Durrell said it is "appalling...a terrible decision". Councillor Hubley said that traffic will be a huge problem. The *Ottawa Citizen's* Kelly Egan said, "The Ottawa Hospital should reject the Tunney's offer".

Why will the environment minister not get out of the way and let the hospital decide for itself where it will build?

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before coming up with this recommendation, the National Capital Commission did a comparative analysis of 12 potential federal sites using 21 criteria. The Tunney's Pasture site best meets the 21 criteria, and its pre-eminence is supported by the most recent data concerning the long-range plans for urban transportation, demographics, and federal land use in the National Capital Region.

There were 8,000 people consulted on this, which is 7,999 more than the last government consulted.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber trade war is reigniting and Quebec has reason to be concerned.

In a joint press release with Barack Obama in June, the Prime Minister did not say a word about exempting Quebec from any protectionist agreement. Worse yet, he is okay with a future agreement covering remanufacturers. That is even worse than the bad Conservative agreement that cost us 23,000 jobs in Quebec.

Instead of selling out all the sectors of our industry, will the Prime Minister stand up and defend Quebec's forestry industry?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his interest in this industry in Quebec.

From the beginning we have worked with Quebec's industry and its workers to understand their positions and to promote those positions. We are taking into account the distinctions between the industries in Quebec and those in the rest of the country. This is part of our negotiation strategy and we will continue to promote Quebec's interests before the tribunals during the negotiations until we have an agreement.

HOUSING

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is high time that the federal government got to work. The tax refund we have been waiting on so we can fund housing projects for the homeless in Montreal is two months overdue. Eleven projects that would create 235 new social housing units for the homeless are on hold because the federal government refuses to release the \$2 million it promised.

Will the minister guarantee that all projects will be carried out on time?

[English]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member, we are concerned about homelessness in our country, and that is why in budget 2016 we announced an additional \$112 million for the homelessness partnering strategy over two years. This was a 50% increase, the first increase since 1999.

Our social development minister recently met with provincial and territorial ministers, and homelessness will be a front and centre issue as we develop a national housing strategy.

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for \$1,500, one can get access to the Prime Minister to further their agenda. Better yet, donations can be made to the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

Are dairy and cheese producers going to have to attend a \$1,500 Liberal cocktail party?

Is that what anti-poverty groups, forestry sector representatives, and consumer advocacy groups are going to have to do as well?

Are all Quebecers going to have to pay \$1,500 to the Liberals in order to recover the \$50 billion in Quebec taxes to serve the interests of Quebec? Is that what has to happen?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government held consultations throughout Quebec on various subjects and various files, including softwood lumber.

I travelled to Amqui two weeks ago. I went to the Saguenay as did the minister. She consulted Quebec industry representatives. The Minister of Agriculture and his parliamentary secretary took similar action with respect to diafiltered milk.

Therefore, it is definitely not true that we are not consulting Quebecers. That is one of our responsibilities as government.

Routine Proceedings

•(1205)

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, [*Member spoke in an indigenous language*].

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard. In 1993, the Canadian government made a commitment to supplement the Nunavut agreement with more detailed legislation on Nunavut fisheries regulations. Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. submitted draft Nunavut fisheries regulations to the department in 2013 and presented them again in 2015.

Unfortunately, progress has been slow. Will the minister commit to working collaboratively with NTI to finally develop relevant Nunavut fisheries regulations?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank our colleague from Nunavut for the question. I share his view that the fisheries in Nunavut offer an important opportunity for economic development. Our government understands that a sustainable, scientifically based fishery is in the interest of the residents of Nunavut and the interest of Canada.

I am happy to tell him that we are proceeding along the lines of the partnership with NTI, as he just identified. We believe in co-management with our territorial partners. Senior officials met with NTI this week. They have scheduled another meeting for December 9. We are going to work with them to get the job done.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

SPECIFIC CLAIMS TRIBUNAL ACT

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the report on the review of the Specific Claims Tribunal Act.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, entitled “Supplementary Estimates (B) 2016-17: Votes 1b, 5b and 10b under Fisheries and Oceans”.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled “Supplementary Estimates (B) 2016-17: Vote 1b under Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada”.

[Translation]

PETITIONS

SYRIA

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House of Commons a petition calling for action to bring peace in Syria.

[English]

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present several petitions signed by Canadians from across Canada.

The petitioners are concerned about the accessibility of violent and degrading sexually explicit material online and the impact on public health, especially the impact on the well-being of women and girls. As such, these petitioners call upon the House of Commons to adopt Motion No. 47.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present today petitions signed by residents of my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

The petitioners are opposed to the establishment of new bulk commercial anchorages in a sensitive area of Gabriola Island, five anchorages up to 300 metres long. The petitioners cite concerns about herring habitat, the risk of oil spills, the impact on sport fisheries and tourism, and an overall concern that the anchorages are meant to facilitate the export of thermal coal from Wyoming to China and will have no benefit for people in the community. It is all downside for our coast. There is no upside.

The petitioners urge the Prime Minister to reject the proposal on the basis that it is inconsistent with his commitments on climate change and innovation.

•(1210)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present on behalf of a number of my constituents a petition on electoral reform.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to present a petition today signed by a number of members of the community of Saugeen Ojibway Nation asking the government for a forensic audit of the reserve. I have the appropriate number of signatures. The petition has been approved.

Government Orders

The petitioners call upon Parliament to address transparency and accountability of lease rents from band-leased land, service fees, finances, casino revenue, et cetera.

It is worth pointing out that the members who have signed this petition have grave concerns about the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs and the Liberal government cancelling the native accountability act, because it would satisfy many of their concerns.

* * *

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.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-243—EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the issue that was raised this week by the member for Kingston and the Islands regarding the private member's item, Bill C-243, and the reasons why, in his view, said bill would not require a royal recommendation.

In his intervention, my hon. colleague provided many arguments that dealt with the benefits, what constituted a new and distinct expenditure, and also the eligibility requirement.

On page 834, of the second edition of *House of Commons Procedures and Practices*, it states:

A royal recommendation fixes not only the allowable charge but also its objects, purposes, conditions and qualifications.

On page 183, of the 6th edition of *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms*, it states:

...an amendment infringes the financial initiative of the Crown not only if it increases the amount but also if it extends the objects and purposes, or relaxes the conditions and qualifications expressed in the communication by which the Crown has demanded or recommended a charge.

As with the case, when a bill proposes amendments to the Employment Insurance Act respecting the benefits provided under that act, the royal recommendation is attached not only to the charge but also to the terms and conditions of the benefits. The royal recommendation is attached to each term and condition of every benefit.

There is not a general appropriation that covers the specific objects and purposes of the benefits in the EI Act. A change to a benefit would result in a change to the terms and conditions of the provisions of the statute which governs the benefit. In other words, altering when a person is eligible to receive a benefit under the Employment Insurance Act, even if the change to the benefit would not increase the overall charge, would constitute an alteration to the terms and conditions of the benefit and thus would need to be

accompanied by a new royal recommendation. I submit this is the case with respect to Bill C-243.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his additional contributions on the matter.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1215)

[*English*]

CANADA BUSINESS CORPORATIONS ACT

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-25, An Act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Calgary Confederation.

I am pleased to stand to discuss Bill C-25, an act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act. The proposed amendments to the act cover a variety of objectives, but today I would like to focus on the proposal of the bill relating to the increased representation of women, as well as diversity, on corporate boards and in senior management.

Referring to the report that was completed by the Government of Canada advisory board, and provided to the minister of status of women in 2013, there was a new focus put forward to increase the representation of women on Canadian boards, with a national goal of 30% of women by 2019.

The report was titled “Good for Business: a Plan to Promote More Women on Canadian Boards”. In relation to the report, Michael Cooper, the COO from Dream Unlimited Corp., stated in *The Globe and Mail* in 2014:

Everything we do in this area we do with a mercenary attitude to enhance our own benefits and profitability, and I think that's what makes it sustainable...I wonder where the other leaders are that they don't know successful women.

It is important to note that while women now represent nearly half the Canadian workforce, they only hold 20.8% of board positions at Canadian stock index companies.

The program, “It Starts with One – Be Her Champion” was launched in 2014 by the minister of status of women. Leaders in all fields were encouraged to make a difference.

I remember that week quite well. As everyone knows, when we put forward bills and motions, the Government of Canada usually provides a little portfolio. My former boss, Joe Preston, came home to the riding and provided me with the information to do some work around the community. I told Joe that it was great he was doing this for me. I look at him as one of those guys, one of those champions for us.

Therefore, today I want to speak about how men and women together have done things like that. Joe, once he became a member of Parliament, hired a managing partner for his business. Marcy Pearce, from the St. Thomas area, has become one of the most successful Wendy's owners in Canadian history, and has only increased the productivity of the Wendy's corporation in St. Thomas. I know it is her extreme leadership and her great work ethic that has made that a dream for her.

I also look at myself. I had the opportunity of working as an executive assistant. I was always given a very long leash, and I was rarely pulled in for discussions. It is because of people believing in me and giving me that mentorship that today I am able to sit in the House of Commons.

Those are just some things I wanted to discuss because it is really about the grassroots level of what we can do.

Referring back to the report "Good for Business", there was a summary of recommendations. I will read these recommendations because they should be on the record. These are very important facts. The report was given to the minister of status of women back in 2013. The recommendations are:

The following summary of recommendations is influenced by best practices, from across Canada and internationally, and informed by the experience and expertise of the Advisory Council for Promoting Women on Boards members. Based on these factors, the Council is offering the following recommendations for the Government of Canada.

1. Aspire to 30% over five years (2014-2019) as a reasonable national goal to achieve gender balance, with the longer term goal being gender balance on boards.

This initiative was started in 2014. The recommendations continue:

2. The Advisory Council encourages the Government of Canada to: Build on past progress and work towards greater gender balance in its own appointments; Monitor and report on gender diversity in Governor-in-Council (GIC) appointments; Simplify and promote the GIC process; Ensure greater participation in the recruitment of women to leadership positions and GIC appointments by working with Government agencies, including the leadership of Crown Corporations; and Promote networking and mentoring between public and private sector corporations.

3. Institute a "comply or explain" approach for moving publicly traded companies toward an identified goal within published annual reports, with an explanation of results or lack thereof.

4. Promote increased representation of women on boards by mobilizing and working with key stakeholders, including prominent Chairs, Financial Post (FP) 500 companies, national business associations, shareholder groups and advocacy organizations. It would be advantageous and critical to work towards:

Adopting a strong commitment, sound implementation strategies and reporting mechanisms, while maintaining flexible approaches;

● (1220)

Making gender balance on boards a priority to be advanced by board governance through policies, human resources, and board recruitment and nomination committees; and

On any of the boards I have joined or have been part of in the last 10 years, those are the steps we have seen within our own community, in the Elgin—Middlesex—London area. We recognize that the work and diversity of the group brings greater results. It is important to get different ideas and opinions from a diversity of women and men, young and old.

The recommendations continue to state:

Encouraging nomination and recruitment committees and executive search firms to ensure that equal numbers of qualified women and men candidates are presented for consideration for board vacancies.

Government Orders

5. Develop a coordinated pan-Canadian approach by working with provincial and territorial governments.

6. Support the adoption of short- and medium-term goals in the private and public sectors, recognizing that some sectors are further ahead than others.

7. Publicly traded companies should establish and publish, through annual financial statements, two- and five-year goals...

8. Publicly traded companies should report and explain annual results against their goals, reinforced as required by regulatory authorities...

9. Launch a national initiative led by the Government of Canada, to encourage the private sector to attain gender-balanced boards.

10. Develop a sustained and deliberate communications strategy to mobilize all relevant stakeholders

11. Encourage private companies to emulate publicly traded companies and undertake similar measures to increase representation of women on boards.

I know reading 11 points can be quite excruciating, but as I indicated, it is important we get that on record in the House of Commons. The report was done in 2013, and we were very proud to accept it from the advisory board. We saw action taken by our minister of status of women in 2014 with that initiative in mind.

Meanwhile there was an in-depth rational approach to these recommendations, specifically based on the progress of women not only in business and the labour force, but increased performance in levels of success and education and, more specific, in business and management programs.

Unfortunately, when we look at statistics from 2012, we will find some very surprising statistics. Therefore, some of these initiatives are important. We should put that at front of mind.

At one time, only 10.3% of women were on Canadian boards; 15.9% of Fortune 500 companies included zero on 40% of those boards; and 31% of federal GIC appointments.

We know from just sitting in the House of Commons the diversity of many of our female members and their incredible success. I am proud to sit in the House with a female engineer, an orthopaedic pediatric surgeon, a former associate dean from New Brunswick, a family physician, a provincial government whip, a college athletic director, lawyers, wonderful teachers, classically trained pianists, and many more. We have such diversity here, and we can show what great work we can do.

Turning to the need to update the ability of corporations to communicate by other methods, that is another very important thing. Here as members of Parliament, we can attest about electronic communications in our day-to-day operations, whether it is informing members of a vote, notice of meetings, or providing background information on bills. Electronic communication has become a way of life.

Government Orders

By providing corporations that ability to permit notice and access systems, we are providing them the same opportunities that we have as parliamentarians. We all know we cannot live without our BlackBerrys, our smart phones, and our iPads. This has become the way of busy individuals. By allowing the electronic communication, it will allow us, in a more active way, to communicate with our memberships, those corporations, and allow people to know what is going on. It is just a better way of communicating.

With over 270,000 federally incorporated corporations, this bill and the studies that have been completed over the past several years, these amendments are necessary. The modernization of Canada's federal corporate governance, as announced in budget 2015, is necessary. Key stakeholders are onside with Bill C-25, including the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance and the Canadian Board Diversity Council.

I thank the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development for introducing Bill C-25, something many parliamentarians will recognize from our previous government.

I support this bill and support the efforts in it to provide a Canadian federal framework that is up to date and will provide support for long-term investments and, overall, contribute to Canada's economic growth. The bill would provide the tools to ensure that Canada would be aligned internationally with the best practices, including the report for good business.

• (1225)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her comments and reminding us of some of the things we are working towards.

I want to draw her and House's attention to the Canadian Board Diversity Council, which stated, after reviewing where the “comply or explain” approach has been applied, that it really is not leading to meaningful disclosure or a consistent improved pace of change.

Are my colleague and her colleagues content with this snail's pace of change on board diversification when we only have these aspirational targets?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question.

When I looked at that approach, I had to recognize that there were certain boards and certain situations in which it was great to have balance, but that sometimes that balance was going to be a little heavy toward one gender or the other, including in organizations we are dealing with in our community. Sometimes the balance is not there, because the focus might be on a women's group, a man's group, or an athletic association.

When we are doing things like that, we do have to take into consideration the variety and the vast and broad nature of what boards do look like. Although I recognize that this kind of out-clause could be an issue, I am inspired by what I am seeing here within the House of Commons and our own communities. We have excellent women in our own communities doing great jobs. They are leaders on boards and in many manufacturing institutions.

I think we need to continue to inspire them. We need to continue to work to be their leaders and mentors.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Conservatives are going to vote in favour of sending Bill C-25 to committee.

I would like to know if they are also going to support Bill C-220, introduced by colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith, that seeks to improve gender diversity on corporate boards and among senior management.

A few years ago, in the last Parliament, my colleague Anne-Marie Day introduced a similar bill and the Conservatives voted against it. However, this time, they seem to want to vote in favour of this bill, which also seeks to increase the presence of women on corporate boards.

I would like to know what their position will be on my colleague's bill.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, there are two parts to that question.

First of all, when we look at the bill and corporations, we recognize that it is something our former government was already aiming for. It was announced in a variety of bills, whether the 2015 budget or just different things that our ministers had been working on.

Second, I will look at the private member's bill put forward by an NDP member. However, one thing I am always cautious of is quotas. If there is a quota in there, I will scrutinize it hard, because we have to think if that is the right thing to do and the right leadership we need on this. I have not looked at the bill, but when it comes to quotas, I do not support them. I support having the best qualified people, but also doing our best to have gender parity. I need to look at the full bill so I can understand it better.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Liberal government is just bringing forward legislation that the Conservatives drafted. I would take that as an indication from them that the Conservatives were on the right track with respect to the economy. Would the member agree?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, the member for Sarnia—Lambton and I are from the same area and know that in southwestern Ontario, the previous Government of Canada was right on track. We did a great job in those areas, especially during the global economic downturn.

As the member said, this bill was seen and studied by our previous government. Our status of women and industry ministers put forward information on things to do with regard to women. Our previous government did some great work on this. Unfortunately, we did not get to finish that work, but I do look forward to 2019.

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise today to contribute to this debate on Bill C-25.

Government Orders

This fall, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development introduced Bill C-25, an act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act.

I may be new to the House, but this legislation and the ideas contained within it are not. These ideas were brought forward years ago by the Conservatives. This is an opportunity for me to rise to speak to their efforts.

This bill's history goes back to a House of Commons committee-led statutory review in 2010 back when the Conservatives were in government.

After that, further consultation by our Conservative government took place in 2014 to further advance diversity and equality. Many consultations took place and stakeholders raised many constructive and complex suggestions on a number of corporate governance issues during these consultations. The previous government listened to Canadians on this issue and was making clear progress.

After the previous Conservative government finished its stakeholder consultations, in 2014 a proposal was made, and ultimately announced in the 2015 budget as a move to modernize Canada's corporate governance frameworks.

Not having been a member at that time, I found the following passage from page 140 of the previous Conservative government's 2015 economic action plan. It quite clearly shows that the Conservatives were addressing this issue long before the Liberals copied the work:

...the Government will propose amendments to the CBCA to promote gender diversity among public companies, using the widely recognized “comply or explain” model.... Amendments will also be proposed to modernize director election processes and communications...strengthen corporate transparency through an explicit ban on bearer instruments.... Amendments to related statutes governing cooperatives and not-for-profit corporations will also be introduced...

I will quickly point out that this was the last balanced budget Canada will likely see for some time, as we continue to watch the Liberals spend like drunken sailors, but I digress.

As I mentioned, Bill C-25 comes from the last Conservative budget in 2015.

It is quite clear to me that the current government, without its own ideas, is happy to recycle another Conservative policy. Be it health spending, environmental targets, or gender equality issues, we see the present government time and again recycling sensible positions taken by the previous Conservative government. In fact, the minister is making this a bit of a habit. Bill C-25 is the second piece of legislation tabled by the minister that comes straight from the previous Conservative government's 2015 budget. I only wish he had also emulated the fiscal responsibility of the previous government.

I know that many of my colleagues were part of the previous government before I was elected and I imagine that watching the Liberal government photocopy their work and pass it off as its own must elicit mixed emotions of pride and frustration. I know my Conservative colleagues worked hard to serve Canadians and provide the best policies possible.

Each time the Liberal government continues to do this type of thing, I am reminded of the expression, “imitation is the best form of flattery”. However, the Liberal government promised it could do better, and it has failed. Even so, I am glad to see it is implementing some of the visionary ideas of our past government, but it only serves to highlight the fact it has none of its own.

In any event, let us go back to Bill C-25.

If adopted, Bill C-25 would result in changes to the corporate governance regime for reporting issuers incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act. In everyday language, this would mean that the rules for companies to report to the public would be changed. Boards of directors that do not reflect the gender and cultural diversity that is Canada would have to explain why they do not.

● (1230)

With this proposed legislation, there are a number of amendments that cover several key corporate governance matters. They include those related to majority voting, individual voting, annual elections, notice and access, diversity related disclosure, and shareholder proposal filing deadlines.

The one I want to focus on is the proposed comply or explain model. Basically, corporate boards in Canada do not accurately reflect the demographics of the population they serve. While things continue to improve, the pace is much slower than most would like to see.

I am pleased to see that the Liberals are moving forward with the comply or explain model that the previous Conservative government had championed. Would I would like to see corporate boards of directors be more reflective of the Canadian population? Well, who would not?

There are benefits to both the companies and society as a whole. It has been shown that more diverse boards benefit all involved. We see better overall decision-making, better organizational structure, resulting in a better economy for Canadians.

I have sat on many boards, and the more diverse the make-up of the board, the better the ideas brought to the table. This leads to better problem solving, innovative solutions, and better communication of ideas. I would encourage any board to diversify and reflect its customer base. More importantly, diversify to reflect the target customer base.

I did want to mention that the Conservative Party has a proud history when it comes to diversity. It was the Conservative Party that had the first female Prime Minister. It was the Conservative Party that elected the first female MP to the House of Commons. It was the Conservative Party that elected the first Chinese, the first Muslim, the first black, the first Latino, the first Hindu, Pakistani, Japanese, and the first physically disabled MP, and the list goes on.

What I am most proud of with respect to our Conservative history is that it was based on merit, not any forced compliance system. All those who were advanced did it because they earned it and not because it was handed to them on a silver platter. This guiding principle of merit and fairness gave us a proud history. I think it shows that forced compliance does no favours to anyone.

Government Orders

Since the Ontario Securities Commission implemented the comply or explain model two years ago, the number of women on boards has steadily increased to 20%. Yes, this is still too low, but it is an improvement. It is worth noting also that across Canada in the larger companies, women make up an average of 34% of the boards. Again, that is an abysmal number, but it is improving.

Over the past three decades, the participation of women in the Canadian workforce has more than doubled to approximately 47%. Women now earn over half of all Canadian university degrees, and 34.5% of MBAs granted in 2011 were to women. In addition, women represented 47% of students in business and management programs at the master's level in 2010.

The level of progress among Canadian women in just a few decades is impressive. Women are achieving success at unprecedented levels in a variety of sectors, be it law, medicine, and other professions, yet the representation of women on those boards has not followed suit. If we give a woman a fair chance of opportunity, they are quite capable of making the most of it. We have seen it first hand, and I have seen it first hand.

I remember as a kid that practically all doctors were male. In fact, I recall people specifically mentioning that they had a woman doctor, as if it were some sort of novelty or unnatural anomaly.

Children today will grow up in a different world, an opposite world. Today, a full two-thirds of medical school graduates are women. Female doctors will be the norm in the future. Sixty per cent of university graduates are now women. Future boards will have no choice but to increase female participation if they have any hope of filling all the chairs around the table.

As a father of three daughters, this is promising and it is good news. However, women are not waiting for legislation to be passed so they can take their rightful place in society, and nor should they.

Take my family, for example. My late wife Heather was a very successful woman in her own right. She served on many boards and ran numerous large corporate projects in her lifetime. My daughters, much like their mother, are strong-minded, principled, determined leaders in their own right. They have made me proud. They have made us proud with their success, both professional and personal.

● (1235)

Without going into too much, it does bother me that women still encounter a wage gap in Canada today. There are excuses for this. However, excuses are not reasons.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to Bill C-25, and I look forward to any questions.

● (1240)

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has a lot of experience with boards. Maybe he could give a couple of examples where he could talk about diversity and what that brings to them, because he mentioned it in his speech. I would like to give him the opportunity to give us an example of where he had the experience of diversity with respect to people who were on boards and he saw how it enriched those boards.

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, I have served on numerous boards in my lifetime. One that comes to mind is the Alberta Alcohol

and Drug Abuse Commission. I served on that board for a number of years. It is a very diverse board. We had many women on the board, along with many cultural backgrounds as well. It was a very productive board. I was proud to serve on it.

Another one is the Calgary Stampede board. I served on that board for a number of years. People think of that as mainly a male-dominated board, with cowboys in cowboy hats and belt buckles, but we had a wide range of diversity there as well. There were a lot of women on that board and a lot of good people.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 2015 budget introduced the “comply or explain” provision, which is in this bill. It is meant to enhance the gender diversity on boards and in senior management.

Why, then, did the Conservatives vote against the NDP's Bill C-473 in 2014, which sought to achieve gender parity on the boards of crown corporations within six years?

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, I am a new member. I was elected on October 19 into my first term. I would say that Bill C-473 was before my time. Therefore, I do not have any idea what the reason for that was.

I look forward to progressing forward with this bill that we are discussing here today. Bill C-25 is at the table right now. Let us deal with that. I am happy to support that bill to its fullest.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for bringing his own personal and family experiences into his speech. I think it is important that we share that with Canadians.

Could the hon. member tell us what his views are on quotas and how they can hinder the advancement of women and the advancement of corporations that use them?

Mr. Len Webber: Mr. Speaker, I am not a fan at all of quotas. I think that people have to earn the right to serve on boards of directors. People have to earn their right in anything in society, in my mind. It is important that they have that opportunity available to them, but certainly not quotas. It is always what I have believed and what my daughters believe. I think it provides them with a feeling of accomplishment when they have made it onto boards of directors and have achieved wonderful things in life on their own without having quotas in place.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton.

I would like to thank my colleague from Haldimand—Norfolk for leading the official opposition and being our critic on the issue. She is doing a great job and we appreciate everything she has done.

Government Orders

Bill C-25 is an act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act. I would like to begin with a quote from my colleague from Haldimand—Norfolk who said, “...Modernizing the acts addressed in Bill C-25 is a welcome improvement to the federal corporate statute and a reflection of the need to enhance companies' corporate governance practices.” If the minister wants to continue putting forward legislation straight from Conservative budgets, then bring it on, that is more than welcome. This is the minister's second bill since taking office one year ago and just like his first bill, this one too comes straight from the Conservative 2015 budget.

Canadians, though, need more legislation that would provide positive results for Canadians.

According to the September 17 article published by The Huffington Post with data compiled from the Library of Parliament, the Prime Minister's first few months in office “were the least productive of any government in the House in more than two decades”. Parliament passed 10 bills during the member for Papineau's first nine months. By contrast, the previous government, after winning a majority in 2011, passed 18 pieces of legislation, including nine bills moved in its first 23 days. Former prime minister Jean Chrétien's first nine months in office resulted in 34 bills being given royal assent in 1994 and 38 bills after the 1997 election. Quoting my friend from Durham, “For a government that really talks about real change, and high ambition ... there hasn't been much change. They haven't done a heck of a lot.”

It gets worse. According to Statistics Canada, as of October 2016, last month, Canada's unemployment rate was 7%. We all agree in the House that is far too high.

The Liberal government is running multi-billion dollar deficits and has yet to create one net full-time job in over a year. Instead of debating other pieces of legislation that could help to get millions of Canadians back to work, we are debating here changes to the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act.

In 2014, our previous government consulted with stakeholders from all across Canada about the modernization of Canada's corporate governance framework. Many of the stakeholders that we met with during the consultation process raised a number of important and complex concerns that they had with the corporate governance structure. I am pleased to see that Liberal members opposite will use legislation that our previous government worked so hard to create. It is a shame though, and I continue to say this, that we have not seen other pieces of legislation to produce positive results for Canadians.

During my year and one month here I have had an opportunity to speak with many constituents and they have raised the same concern no matter where I go, the economy, but specifically jobs, jobs, jobs. This same concern can be found from coast to coast to coast and we as legislators need to take action.

There is a trend developing with the Liberal government. It wants to consult, consult, consult, debate, debate, discuss, discuss, discuss, but Canadians are still waiting for action. Canadians want to

get back to work. Canadians want legislation to get them paying their bills and building their families. They are waiting for tangible results. However, it seems that making that decision piece is a bit of an issue for the Liberals.

The government was elected on a promise of change and yet, for many Canadians, they are in a worse position now than they were a year ago. The government promised to help the middle class and it continues to argue that it is helping the middle class, but Canadians who are struggling know that is not true.

The government plans to implement a carbon tax and increase CPP contributions. It is running massive deficits while at the same time taking away tax credits that provided relief for families that need it. After promising just modest deficits during the election, the Liberal government is now running massive deficits with no sign of returning to balance.

● (1245)

Now, the budget has a structural problem. What does that mean going forward? It means program cuts in the future, tax hikes, and at the end of the day, the Liberals are leaving this debt for future generations to pay. Therefore, I do not really see this as helping the middle class.

Our previous government, in contrast, brought Canadians the lowest tax burden in 50 years, and I am proud of that record. We also managed to balance the budget and run a surplus. However, as I have mentioned, the government has burned through that surplus. It is running massive multi-billion dollar deficits, yet we have not seen the creation of one net new full-time job. This is burdening the middle class. This is burdening future generations. This is burdening the youth who will have to pay this bill.

I would like to touch on the background of the bill. I will read from the 2015 budget on page 140.

...the Government will propose amendments to the Canada Business Corporations Act to promote gender diversity among public companies, using the widely recognized “comply or explain” model...Amendments will also be proposed to modernize director election processes and communications with shareholders and to strengthen corporate transparency through an explicit ban on bearer instruments...Amendments to related statutes governing cooperatives and not-for-profit corporations will also be introduced...

For many in the previous Parliament, that quote will sound familiar. This is because, just like the last piece of legislation introduced by the minister, the bill comes straight from the Conservative budget. While I tend to disagree from time to time with members opposite, I must say that I agreed with the minister in his first speech when he said:

Technology also allows transactions to happen quickly across the global, and the global marketplace is more interconnected than ever before. A disruption or discovery in one part of the world can have profound consequences in another.

Government Orders

I appreciate the work that all sides in Parliament are doing. I appreciate the work of members opposite as they work to expand the connectivity of high-speed Internet to rural communities. Many in my area saw the previous government make investments in that. I think we all recognize that there are still gaps in high-speed Internet. Therefore, with the legislation before us, I continue to support improvements in that direction and I appreciate the commitment from the members opposite for continuing the work that we did in the previous Parliament.

• (1250)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noted that this is legislation that the Conservatives brought forward. Could the member comment on the efforts of the Conservatives to reduce red tape in corporations?

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, of course, we support on this side anything we can do to help small businesses thrive and create an environment that breeds private sector growth and success. I think we all recognize that in order to invest in the priorities of any government, taxes have to come from somewhere, and in most cases, that is from small business, whether it be the taxes they pay or the taxes of their employees. They are the wealth creators of our communities.

The issue that we see coming forward from members opposite is of putting barriers in place that stop that growth, and stop that development of private sector business. When we put the people who have the “help wanted” sign in the window out of business or even out of competition, or they are not even starting up in the first place, we do not really have much success in our communities. A number of our communities are built on the success of small business, and we want to see that continue, because we do appreciate the importance and the role they play.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the excellent speech from my colleague. One of the things he talked about was the importance of jobs, jobs, jobs that he is hearing from his constituents. He also talked about red tape.

Maybe the member could respond a little more in the sense of what is really important for the people in his riding.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, of course, as the member mentioned, it is jobs, jobs, jobs.

A lot of my community is built on small business. We have manufacturing. We have tourism. We have agriculture. All of it needs the help of small business. All of it needs trade deals. All of it needs access to market. We also need to be able to start those businesses up and make them successful.

We want young people to go into agriculture and continue the farming operations. However, if it is not viable, chances are they are not going to do it. We need to give those farmers access to markets, to market their products.

We all know, and it is known around the world quite widely, that Canadian beef especially, or any product, is some of the best in the world. We need to continue to ensure that these products get to market and give farmers a fair return for their day's work.

We do appreciate the work they do, as well as the work of the small businesses. My riding has an enormous number of small

businesses, and they are struggling to get by. Here in Ontario, we have some of the highest energy prices in North America, and that is hindering the growth of the small business.

My advice to the government is to listen to the CFIB and take some of their suggestions forward to help small businesses grow and survive.

• (1255)

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's speech quite closely.

I would like to ask the member a question with regard to gender equality in the boardroom. I am curious to know about his history, what boards he has served on, and what type of structure the boards had with regard to gender. In particular, what about the board of directors in his own riding, his Conservative board? I would be curious to know about the structure of that.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Mr. Speaker, that was a long question, and I will be as brief as possible.

Of course, we want diversity as much as possible on any board, whether it be corporate, here in Parliament, or on the EDA. I am proud to say that I have a large number of women serving on my EDA. My vice-president is female. Most of my executive are female. I appreciate the contribution they make. They are strong, smart women.

We, all around this House, want to see contributions from all members of society, because we do appreciate their diverse and differing opinions on a wide range of topics.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development introduced Bill C-25, an act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act, the Canada Cooperatives Act, the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act, and the Competition Act. The proposed amendments by the Liberals to Bill C-25 stem from a House of Commons committee-led statutory review in 2010, which in turn led to a further consultation undertaken in 2014 by our previous Conservative government.

Stakeholders raised many important and complex points on a number of corporate governance issues during the consultations. After our previous Conservative government concluded the consultations in 2014, we made a proposal to modernize Canada's corporate governance framework in our 2015 budget. For those members in the House who are not aware, let me read an excerpt from page 140 of our previous Conservative government's economic action plan 2015:

the Government will propose amendments to the [CBCA] to promote gender diversity among public companies, using the widely recognized “comply or explain” model.... Amendments will also be proposed to modernize director election processes and communications...to strengthen corporate transparency through an explicit ban on bearer instruments.... Amendments to related statutes governing cooperatives and not-for-profit corporations will also be introduced....

Bill C-25 is the minister's second piece of legislation that he has tabled since being in office now for a year. Just like his first piece of legislation, Bill C-25 came straight from our previous Conservative government's 2015 budget.

Government Orders

I am pleased to see that the hard work our previous government did is continuing through the Liberals, in their need to produce some form of legislation while keeping up the facade that they are hard at work. I do not call this hard at work, and neither do Canadians. However, if the Liberals want to continue taking unpassed Conservative legislation and unfinished work and bringing it forward, they will see our support.

The legislation being brought to the House, overall does not speak well for the Liberal government's priorities. With hundreds of thousands of people out of work in this country, trade deals not signed, pipeline deals stalled, and terrorism on the rise, we have spent days talking about Bill C-18, a park in Toronto, and Bill C-16, about protection of rights that already existed provincially and in the Charter of Rights, and then nearly a week talking about changes to the CPP that will not benefit anyone for 40 years. Soon we will be spending our time discussing whether to make it legal to have anal sex between the ages of 16 and 18.

Seriously, these are the priorities of the present government in the face of serious economic and security circumstances? However, I digress.

If adopted, Bill C-25 would result in changes to the corporate governance regime for reporting issuers incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act. The CBCA is the incorporating statute for nearly 270,000 corporations. Although most of these are small or medium sized and are privately held, a large number of Canada's largest reporting issuers are also governed by the CBCA.

The proposed amendments cover several key corporate governance matters: majority voting, individual voting, annual elections, notice and access, diversity-related disclosure, and shareholder proposal filing deadlines. I am pleased to see that the Liberals moved forward with the "comply or explain" model that our previous government had proposed. It has been proven that more diverse boards lead to better overall decision-making, better boards, better organizations, and better economies.

Our Conservative Party has never been on the sidelines when it comes to diversity firsts in Canada. It was the Conservative Party that had the first female prime minister, elected the first female MP to the House of Commons, the first Chinese, Muslim, Black, Latino, Hindu, Pakistani, Japanese, and physically disabled MPs, and, of course, the first female engineer in the House of Commons. You knew I was going to say that, Mr. Speaker. Our Conservative Party believes in merit, not quotas, and I am pleased to see that we are not going to be missing out on talent.

Since the Ontario Securities Commission implemented the "comply or explain" model two years ago, the number of women on boards has steadily increased to 20%. However, looking at Canada as a whole, in larger companies, women make up an average of 34% on boards.

Implementing the widely used model is the first step to seeing these numbers increase. If enacted, that change would affect about 600 of the approximately 1,500 companies on the TSX.

• (1300)

As chair of the committee on status of women, I can say that our next study will be on improving the economic circumstances of

women in Canada. This legislation is aligned with what we would like to see as end results, more women in executive positions and on boards, more women in science, engineering, technology, and math jobs, and gender parity in the workforce.

Research into the effectiveness of teams shows that teams who work more harmoniously are 10% to 20% more productive. One of the findings is that adding more women to teams makes them more harmonious. I support all of these efforts to drive us in the right direction with respect to diversity and inclusion across our country.

When it comes to modernizing corporate governance and reducing red tape, our previous Conservative government made massive strides. We believed in fostering an environment in which businesses could grow and contribute to Canada's long-term prosperity. We recognized that businesses play a vital role in creating jobs and generating economic growth, and that strong business strategies are central to a company's success in creating and sustaining a competitive edge.

Changes proposed to the Competition Act will do just that. They will reduce business uncertainty, create a competitive marketplace, and prevent anti-competitive practices. These amendments will also reduce the administrative burden on businesses.

Our previous Conservative government set a precedent, the first of its kind in any country, when we introduced the one-for-one rule. It brought a new level of discipline to how governments foster a more predictable environment for business, through the reduction of red tape. We took a number of steps to reduce red tape for businesses. Since 2012, the red tape reduction action plan has been proven to be a successful system-wide control on the growth of regulatory red tape. Our previous government saved Canadian businesses over \$22 million in administrative burden, as well as 290,000 hours in time spent dealing with unnecessary regulatory burden.

Further enhancing the changes we had made while in government, Bill C-25 was to be our next step in modernizing corporate governance. More accountability and transparency are key for any organization or government. A high-performance board is accountable.

Government Orders

The right to vote is important for shareholders and fundamental to democracy. I am pleased to see that shareholder democracy and participation will better align with securities rules, and will require corporations under CBCA to hold annual elections, elect directors individually, and use a majority voting standard. This proposal will bring an end to the debate over those circumstances in which an under-supported director could remain on the board.

The proposed amendments in Bill C-25 will further implement many policies and practices that are already addressed under TSX rules and securities laws. Modernizing the acts addressed in Bill C-25 is a welcome improvement to the federal corporate statute, and a reflection of the need to enhance companies' corporate governance practices.

If the minister wants to continue putting forward legislation straight from the Conservative budgets, well, those are welcome too. Certainly, I would love to see some that would bring jobs to our country and address the tax burden that small businesses are facing, especially in light of the additional levels of carbon tax being put in place and the broken promise to reduce small businesses taxes. I would like to see the government move in a direction that will strengthen corporations and small businesses, and actually create jobs to address some of the issues we are facing in the nation.

Obviously, as the chair of the status of women committee, I applaud any moves to accelerate us in getting more women in businesses, on boards, and in senior positions. Certainly, I will be working with the whole committee to look at tangible ways that we can do that. I will bring those forward to the government, in the hope that it will implement that legislation, and those recommendations as well.

• (1305)

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Sarnia—Lambton was touting the one-for-one rule to reduce regulation. I wonder if she perceives a risk that civil servants might hang on to obsolete regulations so they have something to get rid of when they need to bring in a new regulation. In other words, is it not possible that this policy could have an unintended consequence of keeping obsolete regulations in place for longer?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, there is a risk any time we put anything in place that people will play games and try to do the wrong thing. However, I would encourage the government to look at efficiency. Engineers are all about efficiency. I would even stretch beyond the one-for-one rule and try to eliminate all the unnecessary red tape that is affecting small businesses and corporations today.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of Conservatives have stood up and made reference to the legislative workload. We can talk about Bill C-2, the middle-class tax cut; Bill C-26, a negotiated agreement where we have seen significant agreement across the country among different provinces and territories; and things like medical assistance in dying.

Right now we are debating Bill C-25, a bill for which the Conservative Party wants to assume the credit, saying that it is, in essence, a Conservative bill. If it is a Conservative bill and we are trying to move things along, why would the Conservatives not allow it to continue through the process?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, certainly we are very supportive of the bill, because it is a Conservative bill being brought forward.

The Liberals ran on a platform. They have broken most of their promises. I think Canadians had an expectation that they would actually introduce legislation along the lines of all the things they promised. That is what we were expecting.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Sarnia—Lambton has come a long way, like me, through male-dominated industries.

I am wondering, based on what she has learned in her own experience, based on her experience at Status of Women, and based on this legislation, what advice she would give to women who aspire to sit on corporate boards and become the chair and to corporations as they recruit for their boards of directors.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu: Mr. Speaker, certainly in my experience I have seen a lot. When I first started, there were only 13% in engineering who were women. I was always building a washroom every place I worked, because there were no women's washrooms in any place. I was usually the only woman in the room at any given time.

I have lived through a bunch of different things. Affirmative action came into place when I was with Dow Chemical in an office in the middle of Michigan. There was a U.S. quota system, which was actually disastrous, because women were not necessarily promoted on merit. That was not the way to do it. I went on to work in various ways in my position as director of engineering and construction at Suncor to try to encourage the hiring of women. We can really start to see the difference by making sure that we have targets when trying to get gender parity in terms of who we are hiring.

When it comes to getting women promoted through the ranks, I was promoted to the point that I was overseeing 254 plants globally at Dow, and I was reporting to the people who reported to the board. I was one of the few women at that level.

When choices are made about board appointments and executive appointments, people tend to pick those they know and those they are networking with, and women are not always in that network.

One of the initiatives Status of Women put together was keeping a list of prominent and excellent women for promotion to boards of executives so that when opportunities and openings became available, nobody could say that they could not find any good women, because there was always a great list. I think that is a super idea.

• (1310)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by indicating that I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Regina—Lewvan.

Government Orders

We just went through an American election that disparaged women's leadership. I would like to see Canada and all Canadian parliamentarians send a strong message about the important role of women in leadership.

Last week I was really proud when the New Democratic caucus arranged an all-women's question period lineup the first day after the U.S. election. We wanted to promote women in politics and make sure that we were showing that women who are elected take their voice and are given a voice and fight back against the sexist notions we heard throughout the U.S. election.

Women are still under-represented within our country's decision-making bodies in every area. We have a lot of work to do in that regard.

Talking today about board of director appointments, only 27% of members of boards of directors of crown corporations, agencies, and commissions across our country are women. Those are appointments the federal government has an exclusive responsibility to make, and it is not providing appointments to those boards of directors that actually reflect the diversity and gender makeup of our country.

New Democrats are proposing concrete action to ensure the equality of men and women in many areas, but in this case on crown corporation and federal commission boards. My private member's bill, Bill C-220, is an act to amend the Financial Administration Act with respect to balanced representation. It aims for gender parity in crown corporation and federal commission appointments within six years of its adoption.

This bill has been introduced by a number of New Democrat members of Parliament over the years, such as the member for London—Fanshawe, and most recently, former MP Anne-Marie Day. It was defeated by the Conservatives but supported by both the Liberals and New Democrats when it was debated and voted on in 2014.

When we have appointed women to crown agencies, we have had some great successes. Last night we were meeting with the board of directors of VIA Rail, which has gender parity on its board. Its chair is a woman who is a fantastic proponent of this very important public service. Very recently, in my own community in Nanaimo, Erralyn Thomas was appointed to a local government commission, the Nanaimo Economic Development Corporation. Erralyn Thomas is an elected Snuneymuxw First Nation councillor. I am very glad to see her take that leadership role in my community.

The Nanaimo Port Authority has a majority of female board members. I love telling the story of how this happened, because it is a bit outside the norm. We have the Laurentian Pilotage Authority, which I believe has zero women. That is another federal agency. However, the Nanaimo Port Authority has a majority of women.

I asked the, at the time, male chair of the board how this came to be. He said that the transport minister of the day, who sits in this House but now on the Conservative side, refused to approve any of the appointments being proposed by the Nanaimo Port Authority for its board of directors until it had some women in its pile of recommendations. It finally got the message. It proposed strong women in our community—engineers, accountants, community leaders—and I would argue that as a result of having appointed a

gender-balanced board, the Nanaimo Port Authority meshes much better with the community of Nanaimo. It has better community relations. It is actually prioritizing relations with area first nations in a way it has not before.

We do well when our federal boards and commissions actually reflect the diversity of our country. When we prioritize gender-balanced appointments, we find those good candidates who have not been appointed up to that point.

The problem with this approach is that it relies singularly on the good intentions of the responsible person of the day, in this case a former Conservative transport minister, who asked me not to name her, because she thought she would sound like a New Democrat. I think I just did.

• (1315)

The same goes for the Liberal appointment of a gender-balanced cabinet. I applaud that, but that was at one point in time. There is nothing that actually benefits women on the ground. There is nothing that sets in stone that appointments in the future, at any level, will actually be gender balanced.

A significant failing of this bill we are now debating is that it makes no reference to federal crown appointments.

I am going to try to convince this House that the federal government would be more effective telling co-ops, corporate boards, and the business community to appoint gender-balanced boards of directors if it actually got its own house in order first and did its own homework on the decisions being made right at home.

This was a Liberal government commitment. They are expected to do their part to fulfill the “government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, to help ensure gender parity”. That is in the mandate letter to the Minister of Status of Women. The Prime Minister asked for support for the Privy Council Office “as it develops monitoring and reporting processes to ensure that the government's senior appointments are merit-based and demonstrate gender parity”.

In a late show debate last week, the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women said that there are 4,000 Governor in Council and ministerial appointments to commissions, boards, crown corporations, agencies, and tribunals across the country coming up. However, although we were in a debate about gender equality, she said nothing about whether they actually were making those appointments in a gender-balanced way.

Government Orders

We asked the Library of Parliament. There were no stats at all on whether those appointments are being made in a gender-balanced way. I have asked the Minister of Status of Women in correspondence and have not had any answer.

We know this is a direction and a commitment of the government. We want to see it realized. It is badly needed. We have a number of crown agencies that have either no women or hardly any women.

There has been great reporting by *Metro News* on this recently here in Ottawa. They named, for example, the Bank of Canada, the Canadian Dairy Commission, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the National Capital Commission, and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority as having none or few women on their boards. That is an embarrassment in 2016, or actually in any year.

Bill C-25 purports to address issues of gender parity and shareholder democracy, but it does not get its own house in order first. It makes no reference to federal appointments. There is a Senate bill, Bill S-207, the boards of directors modernization act, which is actually much more in line with the New Democrat approach. It does propose a direction and legislation on crown appointments being gender balanced. We applaud the Senate for going further than the government is.

I will finish with some criticism of the Bill C-25 approach. The “comply or explain” model, which is being relied on in this legislation, has been described by the Canadian Board Diversity Council as “not leading to meaningful disclosure and a consistent improved pace of change”. It notes “a growing sentiment that quotas may be necessary to bring about the desired change”.

Canada continues to lag behind other countries when it comes to women in leadership positions. The Liberal government, we are sad to see, seems content to apply the same aspirational targets and models that have not worked that the Conservative government had. I am dismayed to see the similarity of an approach that did not work under the Conservative government. Why would it be any different under the Liberal government?

This is only the second time in 40 years that Canada has addressed the issue of corporate governance. This is not a bill, in my view, that represents #realchange. It falls short in many respects.

In closing, we will be better as a country, our governance will be better, if our decision-making bodies better reflect the diversity and strength of our country. We would very much like to see this bill amended to incorporate the elements of my private member's bill, Bill C-220, which would get at the requirement to have gender-balanced federal commission appointments. The government should take the power it has and make the appointments it has the sole responsibility for. This should be a priority. It would be a true action that would implement the government's feminist rhetoric.

• (1320)

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her work, not only on the Status of Women committee but also in her community and in Ottawa.

I would like to hear a few more comments from her on why it is so important we take every opportunity to walk the talk and get our

own house in order. Her bill looks at federal commissions, crown corporations and areas in which the federal government could implement important things like gender parity.

We have had the business case for the last 10 years that businesses with more women on their boards do better, and all that. It has not moved the needle enough. It has not had a lot of progress. Would my colleague like to make a few more comments on that?

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, the conversations we are having on getting women into the seats of Parliament are quite equivalent to the conversations we are having on getting women onto corporate and federal commission boards. Once they get there, they do really good work.

On the parliamentary side, once women get onto the ballot, voters tend to choose them maybe a bit more often than they do men. However, we have some systemic barriers in place that prevent women from getting the nomination for their political parties in the same way there are systemic barriers that reduce the likelihood of them being nominated for these senior board appointments. This is why we have stalled on progress.

The House of Commons has only 26% women. We now rank 62nd in the world on gender parity, which is embarrassing. As well, the rate of progress has stalled. The extrapolation is that it will take us 89 years to get gender parity in the House if we just go along with the status quo.

In the previous government, crown appointments were 36% female under the Conservative government. Again, that comes nowhere close to the 51% of the population. We have to recognize that there are networks that reinforce themselves. If we are part of the old boys' club, then we will get the nod.

It is accidental. I do not think it is an intentional oversight. However, we have the power and should show the leadership to make that change. We will make better decisions if our decision-making bodies better reflect our country.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is such an important piece of our culture in Canada. It speaks to who we are as Canadians. It is something that needs to be addressed in a way that will result in people being at those boards. It is not just words or something that will never be implemented. It has to result in action so we see more women being represented.

The member spoke about the “comply and explain” model. Could she speak to the model she feels would best achieve the results we are looking for when we are looking at gender parity on these boards?

• (1325)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of examples around the world of using the “comply and explain” model, which has not really moved us to parity the way we need to be. There is always an explanation, I guess. There is a lot of work on the record here on the evidence of why that has not worked. The fact that we are even having this debate suggests that it has not worked.

The bill that I have proposed, again, was debated many times in the House. I am completely carrying on the work of my former NDP colleagues. It provides a program that would gradually move, within a six-year period, toward gender-balanced appointments. It sets absolutely hard targets for each of those years so if the appointments to federal commissions are not gender balanced along the percentages proposed in the bill each of those years, then that is a failure of leadership and a failure of responsibility.

Therefore, the bureaucrats and recruiters who are identifying candidates for board appointments, if they are not proposing to their minister and senior supervisors candidates who fall in line with the bill, then they are not taking their responsibility. This is a legislative response that would move us as fast as we need to go to get to the final answer.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are nearing the end of the year. New Year's Day 2017 falls on a Sunday. The first paid day in 2017 is January 2. By around noon on January 3, Canada's top 100 CEOs will, on average, have made as much as the average full-time employee will earn over the entire year.

In 2013, and again in 2014, Canada's top 100 CEOs made an average of \$9 million each. In other words, the average of these top CEOs makes 184 times as much as the average Canadian worker. This inequality is not only large but it is also growing. Figures on the top 100 CEOs only go back to 2008 on a comparable basis. However, if we look at the top 50 CEOs, an even more elite group, in 1995 only about 20 years ago, they made only 85 times as much as the average worker.

Why should Parliament care if private corporations decide to pay their CEOs a lot of money? Because it is a lot of money that is not being used for other purposes. If we consider 100 CEOs each making an average of \$9 million, that is almost \$1 billion not being used to hire other employees, not being invested in machinery or equipment, not being devoted to necessary research and development.

Corporate Canada as a whole would be better off if companies could pay CEOs less, but individual corporate boards feel the need to keep up with other companies. This produces a circular logic to justify ever-increasing executive compensation. Even for the CEOs themselves, there is no real benefit to these pay increases. For one of the top 100 CEOs, another million dollars does not actually mean a higher material standard of living. It just means a change in the relative ranking.

Private Members' Business

Our economy would be stronger and even corporate Canada would be better off with government regulation to limit CEO compensation.

Bill C-25 includes some minor improvements to corporate governance, but what it is missing is mandatory and binding “say on pay” provisions as have been adopted in other advanced countries. Canadian companies can put executive compensation to a vote of shareholders but they are not bound to the results. Bill C-25 should require companies to have votes on CEO and executive compensation and be bound by the results.

• (1330)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan will have seven minutes remaining for his remarks when the House next returns to consideration of the bill.

It being 1:30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

WATER QUALITY

Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House: (a) the government should address the growing concerns of lead pipes and water quality in private residences across Canada by working with the provincial and territorial governments, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as Indigenous partners, to advocate and establish possible solutions to these issues; (b) the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities should undertake a study on “The Federal Government's role in lead pipe infrastructure in Canada”; and (c) the Committee should report to the House no later than December 1, 2017.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour today to speak to the House about my motion requesting the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to undertake a study on the federal government's role in addressing the growing concern of lead pipes and water quality across Canada.

First, I want to recognize my fellow colleagues who supported this motion and have contributed to ongoing discussions regarding lead in drinking water. I have had the pleasure of speaking with members of Parliament across party lines and heard their statements of support and encouragement. It is my hope that these conversations will be taken back to their ridings to spread awareness of the issue and that they speak with their municipalities about solutions.

Lead is often considered a problem of the past. However, the recent state of emergency in Flint, Michigan has brought the issue back into the limelight and reinforced the terrible truth about lead in the human body, that there is no acceptable safe level.

Private Members' Business

When Flint made the switch from Lake Huron to the Flint River as its direct water source, it did not address the different chemistry of the source water. It turned out to be highly corrosive in releasing the lead contained in old lead pipes into household tap water. As a result, the water began eroding the water mains. That first caused iron to leach into the water, which residents first noticed because of its cloudy orange colouration. Worst of all, half the homes in Flint still contain lead service lines, so lead was also leaching into the drinking water at highly elevated levels.

While Flint is an extreme case, the danger still exists in Canada. In fact, here are some Canadian news headlines from this year alone indicating our own issues with lead pipes and water quality.

On January 27, *CTV News* reported that tens of thousands of Canadians still get their drinking water from lead pipes. On January 31, the *National Post's* headline was "Think what's happening with Flint's water supply can't happen in Canada? Think again". On February 27, the CBC reported residents living in homes in northern B.C. might be at risk of drinking water with elevated levels of lead. On February 28, a first nations reserve in northwestern Ontario declared a state of emergency after receiving a "do not consume" water advisory from Health Canada officials. That water had higher than normal lead levels. On March 4, an Edmonton woman told *CBC News* that lead pipes were prevalent and that she was poisoned by her tap water. An estimated 3,500 homes in Edmonton still have lead service lines. On March 11 of this year, *CBC News* reported that the Village of Pemberton, B.C. had issued a warning to residents that their tap water might have high levels of lead. This news came after water testing from 20 homes found lead levels as high as six times the maximum under Canadian guidelines. On May 5, *CBC News* reported that more than three years after provincial regulators flagged high lead concentrations in Brandon, Manitoba's drinking water, city officials had yet to change their treatment process to reduce lead exposure for its residents. On May 20 of this year, *CBC News* reported that data released by the City of Toronto showed that 13% of households that submitted water samples in a voluntary lead testing program over a six-year might be exposed to dangerous levels of the element in their drinking water. On June 8, *CBC News* reported that Montreal's plan for removing lead lines was far behind schedule, with only 11% of buildings addressed at a halfway point on a 20-year project. On September 2, *CBC News* reported that 43% of drinking water fountains and taps in Surrey, B.C. schools needed flushing. The report showed that 4% of taps and drinking fountains in Surrey were not safe.

Experts agree there are well over 200,000 homes across Canada with lead service lines. The exact numbers are difficult to estimate, as many cities are unaware of the number of households containing lead service lines. Homes constructed before 1960 are more likely to contain lead pipes, and since most of our cities were well established before 1950, the potential is significant.

The Canadian guideline for the maximum allowable concentration of lead in drinking water is 0.010 milligrams per litre, or 10 parts per billion. However Health Canada, the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and other toxicity experts say that no amount of lead consumption is considered safe.

Health Canada's 2013 report "Final Human Health State of the Science Report on Lead" found that although the blood-lead levels of Canadians have declined over the past 30 years, severe health effects are occurring below the current Canadian maximum allowable concentration for consumption. The study indicates, "Additional measures to further reduce lead exposure among Canadians are warranted".

● (1335)

Even small amounts of lead can have negative impacts on the brain, kidneys, and bones, with an increased risk of developing kidney disease, anemia, and osteoporosis. In adults, lead exposure can also result in high blood pressure and hypertension.

However, children under the age of six, especially newborn babies, incur the highest risks, as scientific research shows lead exposure measurably lowers IQ scores and is linked to behavioural issues such as delinquency and criminality. Newborn babies are particularly at risk due to the effects of lead consumption on brain development. If lead is present in a family's home, the lead intake in drinking water accounts for 10% to 20% of the infant's intake of lead, and in the case of infants feeding on formula, the lead intake rises approximately 40% to 60%.

In most cases, parents are likely unaware lead consumption and its effects are even occurring. Blood-lead concentrations, even below current Health Canada maximum acceptable concentrations, can diminish the volume of the developing brain. Bruce Lanphear, toxicity expert and professor at Simon Fraser University, has stated the two major types of behavioural problems linked to a damaged prefrontal cortex are anti-social behaviour, which can lead to criminal activity, and attention deficit disorder.

Various provincial acts set testing standards to measure chemicals in drinking water. In Ontario, the maximum allowable concentration for lead is the same as the Canadian standard at 10 milligrams per litre. Ontario's legislation also makes it mandatory for older day care centres and schools to be tested, but unfortunately, testing legislation is not the same in every province. In May 2016, British Columbia instated annual water quality testing for schools across the province when elevated levels of lead were recently found in four schools in Prince Rupert.

Private Members' Business

Toxicity experts such as Bruce Lanphear argue Canada is still far behind the United States when it comes to tracking lead levels and legislating safe conditions. For instance, blood tests that determine lead levels in citizens are routine in the United States, but rarely used across Canada. It's worth repeating, no level is considered safe and the effects are irreversible.

Understanding this evidence, our country needs to improve its communications strategy to ensure its citizens and elected officials understand the dangers of lead exposure and are aware of the importance of solutions for eliminating lead lines and lead concentrations.

Toxicity experts recommend two solutions for reducing lead in drinking water. The first solution is to encourage home and building owners to get rid of their lead service lines. As an example of this, the City of Hamilton has a lead pipe service replacement program, which offers a low-interest loan to home and building owners for replacing their lead pipes. This started when I was a downtown city councillor, and requested that more tests be done in older, high-needs neighbourhoods.

The response I received was surprising. I was asked how much I wanted to spend because the more they test the more they would find. I replied that we should then test the blood of the children in those neighbourhoods. Over 700 children were tested, and 28% of them had higher than acceptable blood-lead levels.

The next step was to make it possible for residents to affordably remove the lead service lines on their property. A special low-interest loan program was started in 2010. That has given families of modest incomes the ability to get rid of their lead service lines. Hamilton had already begun a program to remove and replace lead pipes in 1993, which was prior to the loan program. As of October this year, we have replaced over 10,000 lead lines.

The second solution to reducing lead in drinking water is to treat the water to make it as corrosion-free as possible. In December 2015, Hamilton City Council decided to implement a corrosion control program, which reduces the potential for lead release into the drinking water and will be implemented in 2018. This involves adding a corrosion inhibitor called orthophosphate to the water supply, which creates a thin film layer on the inside of pipes to stop lead from leaching.

Unfortunately, many municipalities across Canada do not have a corrosion treatment program in place. In fact, according to the "Chief Drinking Water Inspector Annual Report 2014-2015", there were only 20 Ontario cities undergoing corrosion control strategies at that time.

• (1340)

Additionally, many cities do not have a city lead pipe replacement program with a low-interest loan to assist owners with the cost of replacing lead service lines on their property. The beauty of the loan investment by the city is that it is constantly being replenished as payments are made so that new applications are continually improved, with the potential that eventually all lines could be replaced.

My hoped-for outcome of this motion, if passed, is that the committee study will bring forward concrete recommendations as to

how the federal government can play a key role in guidance and advocacy for removing lead pipes and lead traces from drinking water. For instance, the committee could look at the federal government's role as an advisory body over eradication efforts for lead in drinking water.

From my research and discussions with experts, I believe eradicating lead from Canadian drinking water begins with a proactive approach to municipal lead service replacement programs. These programs could benefit from an inventory of lead service lines, annual replacement goals, and information briefings for residents.

Following pipe replacement initiatives, strengthening corrosion control treatments is another key factor for removing the presence of lead in our drinking water. These treatments should be reassessed regularly to determine if new scientific or environmental information warrants any changes or adjustments.

The committee could also review the possibility of the federal government's role in a public education mandate regarding lead toxicity. A public education mandate with specific outreach initiatives would be of great benefit, especially to neighbourhoods with older infrastructure and communities with young families.

I have engaged with water quality stakeholders, leading North American toxicity experts, and local residents, and have received very positive feedback on my motion.

My office is in the process of setting up additional meetings with key stakeholders, including first nations and indigenous organizations.

If Motion No. 69 goes to committee for study, members can hear directly from experts and stakeholders regarding lead pipes and water quality, and I will certainly pass along my recommendations for witnesses who can speak to these concerns.

Given the very positive conversations I have had with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities and his office, I would be open to a friendly amendment to the motion to move the committee study ahead of the federal government's required actions.

Before closing, I want to highlight, again, three very important points that I hope members will take away today.

First, no amount of lead is considered safe and therefore our Canadian, provincial, and territorial standards for maximum allowable concentrations of lead should perhaps be reconsidered.

Second, many municipalities may not have an up-to-date inventory of lead service lines and pipe locations, and some municipalities are not effectively providing all solutions for lead reduction.

Finally, we need to increase public awareness about the adverse health effects caused by lead consumption.

Private Members' Business

Lead pipes were well-recognized as a cause of lead poisoning by the late 1800s in the United States and by the 1920s, many cities and towns were already prohibiting or restricting their use. However, the lead industry aggressively combatted this trend through various advertising and lobbying campaigns, which meant that some communities were still allowing lead installations as late as the 1980s.

We can no longer take a reactive approach to combatting lead pipes and drinking water situations. The time has come for the federal government to work together with its provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous partners to create a unified cross-country solution to eradicate these issues.

I hope I can count on the support of all my colleagues.

• (1345)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague across the way for bringing awareness to this issue. I totally agree that lead pipes are an issue and that we need to eliminate lead.

I thought that pipe regulation was under provincial jurisdiction. Could he comment on that?

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, the question of jurisdiction is the biggest problem we have right now with regard to this issue.

Dr. Graham Gagnon is director for the Centre of Water Resources and Studies at Dalhousie University. He said, “Across Canada, we have very much a patchwork of interpretations on drinking water regulations. Interpretations on who the regulator should be, whether it’s the department of health, or the department of environment”. This is what I am trying to get at with my motion.

It is not really clear, especially when the lead pipes occur on private property, who is supposed to take them out. The municipal position right now, guided by provincial regulations, is that it is up to the owner.

My motion deals with how we can effectively, across Canada, deal with the situation the member just outlined.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I want to take us back to the 19th century and talk about the John Franklin expedition in the Arctic.

A few years ago, the bodies of three of his fellow sailors were found. Because they were found in the permafrost, autopsies could be carried out in order to determine the cause of death. It was determined that they had been sick, and to improve their health, they had been given the best food possible, which was canned meat. However, the cans were sealed with lead. The cause of death was lead poisoning caused by a thin line of lead in the cans.

Only a tiny amount of lead is needed to poison someone. In fact, people had been getting sick for centuries. The case I just mentioned occurred in the 19th century, but here we are still talking about it in the 21st.

Since I do think it is about time we joined the 21st century, I will gladly support my colleague’s motion, and quite simply, I also want to thank him.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that my colleague brought up the Franklin expedition, because not only were they eating meat and food out of the newfangled lead soldered tin cans, but they were also drinking desalinated water. Those ships had steam locomotives. I would like members to picture a 1830 steam locomotive aboard a ship with an attachment that would turn the propeller when the wind was not blowing. Those locomotives could not run on saltwater, so they had a very modern desalination system where the water was boiled and condensed, and nice clean water came through lead pipes. Some of those crewmen had as much as 200 times the allowable amount of lead in their bodies. Inuit oral history tells us how crazily they were acting. They were almost turning away offers of food, and cannibalism occurred. That points very strongly to what my colleague mentioned, the presence of lead in their bodies.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really applaud the member’s initiative on this important issue.

My question is a follow-up to the Conservative question.

Canada has a national government that should be playing a leadership role, because it impacts different provinces in different ways. The national government is in a position to ensure that there is some overall standard and, hopefully, to get other jurisdictions and stakeholders reading from the same page so we can resolve this issue.

Could my colleague comment on that?

Mr. Bob Bratina: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with my friend because, in my review of this problem, I saw some jurisdictions struggling with issues that had already been solved in other jurisdictions. I have an 84 page report entitled, “A Proposed Lead Corrosion Control Plan: A Review of Potential Health Impacts from the addition of phosphate Chemical Inhibitors in the Drinking Water Treatment Process”, by McMaster University, which lead to the city’s motion to put orthophosphate in the drinking water. I see other cities that have not even begun to pursue the problem of lead. It is almost as if there is a sense of denial.

It seems to me that the federal government is in the best position to review best practices, to be a clearinghouse for all of the information. It should be able to inform a city like Toronto, which just turned down a loan program that was working effectively in Hamilton, London, Guelph, and Ottawa.

Why are people still arguing about some answers that have already been provided?

• (1350)

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak on the merits of Motion No. 69.

Private Members' Business

For much of human history, we have used lead for its high density, low melting point, ductility, and relative inertness against oxygen corrosion. In the 20th century, lead has been commonly used in a variety of products. From paint to pipes, the uses seemed endless, but that was before we understood the unfortunate effects that lead has on a person's health.

Before the 1950s, lead was commonly used in the pipes that make up our drinking water systems due to the malleability of the metal, which made it easy to bend and shape, and its resistance to corrosion. It was at this point that most of the piping that brings water to homes was being constructed with lead-based pipes.

These vast and complicated systems of water distribution were efficient and economical. There was no issue until scientists became aware of the danger that this material can have on the everyday water use. However, even once the industry knew, it was still behind in limiting the use of these dangerous pipes.

The National Plumbing Code of Canada did not recognize lead as a harmful material until it was too late, allowing lead in home plumbing until 1975, and as a solder until 1986. This has allowed for hundreds of thousands of homes being built with water infrastructure that is dangerous to the residents.

The issue with replacing these lead pipes is not that we are unwilling, but that these pipes are mainly located beneath privately owned property. Thus, the responsibility to replace these pipes rests on the shoulders of the property owner and not the municipality. As a result, many of these pipes are lying unnoticed underground, contaminating the water supplies of countless Canadians. The cost to Canadians is enormous. Contractors who remove the piping charge thousands of dollars to do so, due to the large undertaking of these projects.

We are aware of the dangerous effects of having lead in our water supply. In children, lead exposure can cause anemia, behavioural problems, slow growth, and a lower IQ. In adults, it can lead to kidney failure, high blood pressure, and sterility in both men and women.

There is a reason we do not use lead in our pipes anymore. We are no strangers to the dangers of lead exposure. This is why lead has not been in use for this purpose since the 1970s, and why most old pipes have been replaced.

The problem we face with the removal of lead pipes is that while many municipalities are working to replace old plumbing with new and safer plumbing, in most cities, the responsibility to replace lead pipes under private property falls to the homeowner. This can cost as much as ten thousand dollars plus.

The majority of homes still getting water from these pipes are old homes, dating back to the 1950s and 1960s, in older cities, like Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Edmonton, and Vancouver, just to name a few. Often these homes have not had their pipes inspected in decades. Many people are not even aware of the type of piping that services their homes. Many of these homes are in low-income neighbourhoods, where the massive price tag is far beyond anything they can afford, leaving residents to live with the contaminated water.

Safe drinking water is a necessity for all Canadians. While many provinces have testing standards for drinking water, unfortunately, it is not uniform across all provinces and territories.

In Toronto, the provincial government took a temporary break from testing for lead and will not resume it until 2017. The City of Toronto has started treating its water with phosphate to prevent the corrosion of the lead pipes that causes contamination. However, because Ontario is not currently testing the waters for lead, we do not know if it is working.

In Montreal, despite the fact that the city has had a plan since 2006 to remove the 69,000 lead pipes throughout the city, only roughly 8,000 have been dealt with so far.

On top of this, more often than not, homeowners are not even aware of what they are drinking. Certain cities, like Calgary and Edmonton, send annual notices to homes serviced by lead pipes, reminding them of the danger and that they can get it fixed. It is a friendly notice that they have an issue which must be dealt with in a timely fashion.

Additionally, many places will help homeowners get their water tested for lead contamination. However, we need to make sure that this is happening all over the country, and that every Canadian who is currently being serviced by lead pipes is aware of their options to replace their water system or filter for their drinking water.

● (1355)

When Matt and Mandy Pisarek moved into an old home in Toronto's Beaches neighbourhood, the last thing they thought they would have to worry about was their drinking water. It was only by chance that they discovered that despite the fact that all the pipes on their street had been replaced in the late seventies, the plumbing under their house was still leaching dangerous levels of lead into their water. With Mandy pregnant, and both of them soon to be parents, they were concerned for their child's safety. They explored every option. Unfortunately the \$10,000 price tag was just too much for them, and Matt decided they would buy a filter to protect his wife and child from the dangers in their faucets.

This story is not unique. Thousands and thousands of Canadians do not know whether or not their water is safe to drink, and are exposing themselves to the unfortunate effects of their old plumbing.

This motion will help the federal government, provinces, territories, and municipalities to collaborate and come up with solutions that will ensure the best possible solution to the lead pipe problem. We need to recognize that there is a problem with the way this country looks at safe drinking water, and we need to fix it. The motion proposed by the member opposite from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is imperative to developing a national strategy for removing lead pipes from water supplies. We need to work with provinces and territories all across the country to make sure that all Canadians have safe drinking water in their homes.

Most municipalities have taken action to ensure they conform to the standards laid out in 2009 surrounding the removal and replacement of lead pipes, but there are still places where this issue has taken a back seat. Residents in these communities are being needlessly put at risk and they do not even know it.

Private Members' Business

Additionally, many experts argue that Canada is still far behind the United States when it comes to tracking lead levels and legislating safe specifications for drinking water. This is unacceptable. The U.S. is still dealing with the water crisis in Flint, and yet we still are struggling to keep up with them. We can do better; we must do better for all Canadians.

We need to be working to ensure that all Canadians are able to turn on their faucets without fearing for the health of their children and themselves. We know the risks of lead contamination, and we know that Canadian families deserve better than this. It is our responsibility to protect the people of this nation, not only from threats abroad but from the unassuming threats at home, or in this case, in and under their own homes.

With the Liberal government committing to spending so much on infrastructure, I hope that it will support this motion that seeks to improve infrastructure and protect public safety at the same time. The safety of all Canadians is something we can all agree on, and I hope that everyone will support this motion.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Motion No. 69, a motion brought forward by the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, which deals with a very important issue surrounding water quality.

Let me start by saying that the NDP supports this initiative, which is aimed at ensuring Canadians have access to high-quality drinking water at all times, regardless of where they live or their economic status.

It is also important to understand that this motion calls upon the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to undertake a study of the federal government's role in updating lead components in water systems. There is a growing concern about the contamination of drinking water in private residences and schools due to lead water pipes and connecting lines.

The NDP takes the health risk posed by lead contamination of drinking water very seriously. The recent crisis in Flint, Michigan, as well as some other similar examples in Canada, reminds us all that this is a very serious public health issue. We cannot wait before taking necessary action. The government must be proactive on this file. It really is high time the government undertake a dialogue with the municipalities, provinces, territories, and first nations to work toward developing a national strategy for ensuring that all Canadians have access to high-quality drinking water. I really do think that most people would agree with what I have said.

However, I need to point out that the efforts of my friend from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek may in fact be stopped in the end by his own government. With their plan to privatize our infrastructure, the Liberals may very well end up turning their backs on the most important needs of Canadians. Public health issues such as lead contamination will no doubt take a back seat and not be a priority for shareholders and the rich friends of the current government.

The government cannot refuse to take seriously the dangers of lead poisoning. Health Canada has established the maximum acceptable concentration of lead in drinking water at 10 parts per billion in order to protect the most vulnerable populations, babies and small children. However, recent scientific studies show that even

a minute quantity is toxic. The World Health Organization has concluded that there is no known level of lead exposure that is considered safe.

According to the experts at the Canadian Water Network, at least 200,000 Canadian households are at risk of being exposed to lead through their tap water. In large cities, even if most of the municipal water mains are no longer composed of lead, the water service lines to private properties may contain lead and still pose a risk to health. For example, in Montreal, the number of buildings with lead in their service lines is estimated to be higher than 60,000. In Toronto, there are estimated to be 35,000 such homes. Even in my own city of Hamilton there are approximately 20,000 homes. Furthermore, lead can also come from the solder in plumbing or valves such as brass faucets. Small quantities of lead can therefore dissolve into the drinking water that runs through them or that sits for a few hours or more.

While there are household water treatment devices available that are certified to remove lead from tap water, permanently reducing exposure to lead through drinking water involves eliminating the sources of lead that affect the water. Replacing lead pipes is the most effective method. When municipal water systems are connected to the old lead pipes of a private residence, cities do not assume the costs of the renovations because they are not on city property. The financial burden falls on the individual homeowners, and can be a heavy one, between \$2,000 and \$5,000 or even more depending on where the pipe is, such as underneath a driveway or concrete walkway.

The cities of Ottawa, Hamilton, and London have implemented action plans to change the pipes on the public portion under the street and sidewalk, and encourage residents to do the same on the private portion with the help of special loan programs.

There is also an additional danger to health when a new copper water pipe is connected to an old lead pipe as there is a chemical reaction between the two metals that increases the amount of lead particles that are released. Therefore, it is critical that private water lines be replaced at the same time as the municipal infrastructure.

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and I have both shared some hands-on experience with this issue during our time on the Hamilton City Council. The member had done great work bringing awareness of lead in Hamilton households, and proposing a solution to help homeowners replace lead pipes on private property by offering special loans for those needing financial help. Many residents in my riding took advantage of this program.

Private Members' Business

• (1400)

The NDP believes that the government must focus some assistance on the collection and analysis of statistical data related to the use of lead. Municipalities and first nation communities must, first of all, be in a position to assess the scope of the problem. Most municipalities do not have a register of their water pipes, and small communities do not have the resources to put one together.

Since 2007, the Government of Ontario has required day nurseries and schools to test their water quality. Such a requirement should be established for the entire country. Incentives to update infrastructure are critical. We would like the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to study the loan programs established in Ottawa, Hamilton, and London to provide homeowners with financial assistance to modernize the lead service lines on their properties. I believe these loans should be interest free.

We would also like the standing committee to study mechanisms for establishing a special program to modernize lead infrastructure in the context of the clean water and wastewater fund of phase 2 of the infrastructure plan.

The World Health Organization has concluded that there is no known level of lead exposure considered safe. We know that at least 200,000 Canadian households are at risk of being exposed to lead through their tap water. This is very dangerous, and also unacceptable. The government can and must do something about it.

I applaud my friend from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek for bringing this motion forward. I sincerely hope the fact the Liberals are withdrawing \$15 billion in promised infrastructure funding and putting it in a privatization bank will not prevent the necessary action set out in the motion and end up putting the health of thousands of Canadians at risk.

• (1405)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is to rise today to speak on the motion that has been brought forward by my friend, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. Perhaps I could start by giving him a well-earned compliment for this national initiative in the interests of all Canadians. Education on the whole issue of lead pipes and lead poisoning is something that is of great importance to our country.

Given the comments, I understand the member is open to amendments to it. Hopefully, we will be able to come up with a consensus and even see the motion passed with unanimous support. That is what I would like to see.

Access to clean water is crucial to the overall prosperity of our communities and for future generations of Canadians. Effective water and wastewater infrastructure provides clean, safe water for our children to drink and ensures that our communities remain healthy and strong.

By listening to our partners, we know that continued investment in upgrading the aging water and wastewater system in communities across the country is needed. This has been identified by a number of provinces, territories, and municipal stakeholders throughout our consultations.

Under most of Infrastructure Canada's current programs, drinking water infrastructure, including the replacement and upgrading of publicly owned drinking water transmission pipes, has been an eligible category of investment. This includes the replacement of lead pipes. In fact, since 2002, Infrastructure Canada has provided funding for more than 5,100 drinking water projects, with a total investment of nearly \$2.9 billion, through the federal gas tax fund and other contribution programs.

The Town of Osoyoos, British Columbia, will be using federal gas tax funds to hook up to the municipal water system. Once the project is completed, the annual boil water advisories that have become commonplace will be eliminated. While the Government of Canada's commitment to clean water has been consistent, it is important to understand our government's commitment to Canadian communities moving forward.

As announced in budget 2016, we are investing more than \$10 billion in the first phase of our long-term plan for public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure. Our creation of the clean water and wastewater fund shows that we believe it is important to invest in these infrastructure projects.

We know how important these projects are to our communities. Water in the town of Lanigan in Saskatchewan was affected by recent flooding. As a result, the people of Lanigan were lacking quality water to bathe their children, wash their clothes, and prepare their food. Thanks to financial support from the Government of Canada, the community will soon upgrade its water and wastewater treatment systems.

On November 1, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, provided the Government of Canada's fall economic statement, laying out the fiscal framework of our long-term infrastructure plan, which expands on our plan from budget 2016. The plan will focus on five key areas: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation, and rural and northern communities.

Strategic infrastructure investments in these areas are critical to our communities for several reasons. Communities thrive when they are known for a high quality of life. Clean water, clean air, efficient transit, and access to key services are all important parts of a high quality of life. Investments in these areas build the foundation of places where people want to live and work. It helps our communities stay healthy, attract and keep talent, and foster innovation.

Under this plan, we will commit nearly \$26.9 billion over 12 years to green infrastructure projects. This includes funding that will ensure access to safe water and building of greener communities where Canadians can watch their children play and grow.

Private Members' Business

● (1410)

These investments will support our overall objectives to create long-term economic growth, build inclusive, sustainable communities, and support a low-carbon green economy. Including the work already under way, our long-term infrastructure plan will invest more than \$180 billion in federal funding over 12 years. These investments will make a tangible difference for our communities.

Infrastructure investments to protect water quality will continue to be critical to the health and well-being of Canadians. That is why our government is already taking action to invest in community water and water systems.

We will continue to engage with the provincial and territorial governments, indigenous partners, and partners like the FCM to ensure that our long-term plan meets the real needs of communities across Canada.

We commend the work that is already under way in many Canadian municipalities across the country to support the removal of potentially dangerous lead pipes serving in public infrastructure and private and commercial properties.

Moving forward, the Government of Canada will continue to work in collaboration with all levels of government and our other partners to address the water safety concerns and ensure that Canadian families across our great country have access to clean water.

I indicated at the beginning of my speech that we were being asked to demonstrate that we had a role to play, a role of strong, national leadership on what was a very important issue.

My colleague and friend who brought forward this motion made reference to how important it was that we work with the different stakeholders, understanding there are different jurisdictional responsibilities. We understand and appreciate, whether it is provincial governments, municipal governments or indigenous people, that many different communities and stakeholders all have a role to play when it comes to this very important issue.

As a member of Parliament for Winnipeg North, many of the homes I represent were built 100 years ago, or 75 years ago. The threat is very real in a very serious way, and we should be looking for guidance. We are being asked to allow this issue to go to committee, to establish what sort of role we can play going forward. It is a responsible approach for all of us to give this motion serious consideration.

I have an amendment that I will be bringing forward momentarily, but I would encourage members to reflect on the motion. Hopefully my colleague will accept the amendment and we can move forward on it.

I move:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the words "opinion of the House" and substituting the following: (a) the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities should undertake a study on (i) the presence of lead in Canadian tap water, (ii) provincial, territorial and municipal efforts to date to replace lead water distribution lines, (iii) current federal efforts to support other levels of government in the provision of safe drinking water; (b) the committee should report to the House no later than December 1, 2017; and (c) following the tabling of the said report, the federal government should engage with stakeholders, such as

provincial and territorial governments, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as indigenous partners to discuss options for addressing lead drinking water service lines, including any potential role for the federal government.

● (1415)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent. Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek if he consents to this amendment being moved.

Mr. Bob Bratina: Yes, I do consent to the amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

With that, we will resume debate. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to discuss Motion No. 69 and look forward to reading the amendments put forward through the deputy House leader.

I truly hope my husband is listening, because this is a personal and public service announcement. After doing this research, I am thinking of my own house, which was built in the 1960s. Are there or are there not lead pipes in my own home? I will have to go home and check tonight.

The motion aims to address the growing concerns about water quality delivered via lead pipes to private residences throughout Canada.

I will start with the concerns about lead drinking water pipes and why Canadians should be concerned about them. I will discuss solutions that have been recommended and that some municipalities addressed.

According to the Canadian guidelines, the acceptable concentration of lead found in water is 0.01% milligrams per litre. What are the consequences and why should we as Canadians be concerned?

We know that lead is a toxic metal that can be harmful to human health, especially children, infants, and fetuses. This group is very vulnerable, as exposure to this metal can lead to physical and behavioural affects. It can damage the central and peripheral nervous system, and lead to learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells. For fetuses, consumption of lead by the mother accumulates and can be released to the fetus. It can cross the placental barrier, exposing the fetus to lead. This can cause reduced growth of the fetus and possibly premature birth. In adults, exposure to lead can cause increased blood pressure and hypertension, along with decreased kidney function and reproductive problems.

In Flint Michigan, just across the Canada-U.S. border, close to my own home, following a change in water supply, a high concentration of lead was found. Thousands of children were exposed to these toxic substances. This was a result of Flint's use of old pipes that were corroding due to the chemical changes in the source water. We Canadians can learn from this crisis.

Research has indicated that the brain can absorb lead, which results in negative effects on the frontal cortex, which in turn can have a negative impact on essential learning and memory, and attention and planning. The effects of lead can be permanent and can result in lifelong disabilities. In the U.S., lead is considered the number one health threat to children.

According to the World Health Organization, children absorb between four to five times as much lead as adults when ingested. There is no safe level of lead in blood concentration.

What is the issue?

Here in Canada, post-war, many homes were built and both municipalities and home owners used lead pipes. It is just in the past 36 years that lead pipes have stopped being used altogether. Although the federal government has no direct involvement, at the same time we must ensure that the water for Canadians is safe to drink.

Together with the provinces and territories, Health Canada has established the “Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality”, but we must remind ourselves that it is up to the jurisdictions to set their own guidelines and enforcement.

We understand that this is cost for municipalities and homeowners to replace these pipes that have corroded over time and allowed lead to leach. Measures taken in the past few decades have greatly reduced the exposure of lead in tap water. Through proper testing, the amount of lead in water can be determined. Sampling protocols have been recommended and steps to reduce population exposure have also been provided.

We understand that it can cost homeowners up to \$10,000 to replace these pipes from the municipal lines to their homes, as well as their own plumbing. We must recognize that the cost that is taken on by the municipalities is only for their own public pipelines and not for the pipeline that goes from that source into a home. This is something that homeowners will have to be aware of.

Across Canada, many municipalities have already taken action. In Halifax, a lead pipe replacement program was put in place. In Edmonton, water tests have been completed. In Montreal, the city implemented a 20-year plan to address the lead toxins in its drinking water.

Health Canada's “Guidance on Controlling Corrosion in Drinking Water Distribution Systems” is a great resource for all Canadians, whether personally or in government, to refer to. The document addresses the common issues of corrosion as well as corrosion control. The document indicates that the intent is to provide responsible authorities with guidance on assessing corrosion and implementing corrosion control for distribution systems and residential settings. It notes proper protocols and steps for monitoring. It also indicates that the role of the federal government “is primarily one of science and research, including the development of guidelines for drinking water and providing scientific and technical expertise to the provincial and territorial governments.”

• (1420)

We know that lead can leach into potable water through pipes, solders, and fittings.

Private Members' Business

There is guidance to prioritizing residential monitoring sites, as well as a detailed explanation of conditions that favour lead leaching in drinking water distribution, including treatment plants, distribution systems, plumbing systems, and even at our own taps. This information can be found in the document at healthycanadians.gc.ca.

Truly, what can we do?

Across Canada, many municipalities have provided testing and have worked with homeowners to replace their pipes because of health risks.

When we know that there is a solution, we should be taking action, but not necessarily at the federal level. We must recognize the inconsistency among municipalities of implementing the recommendations from the 2009 report “Guidance on Controlling Corrosion in Drinking Water Distribution Systems” and we must be sure not to duplicate our efforts. This is a familiar thing done by many different governments. We seem to constantly study and study and study, and it is the same thing. We know this is an issue, and we should be doing something about it.

Meanwhile, we can also explore the impact to communities that have lead pipes but have increased pH levels, like Vancouver. Vancouver is a bit different because it has alkalinity in its water so the corrosion does not exist. Maybe taking an opportunity to look at the pH levels and see how we can tweak them to make sure there is no corrosion is another option for the government to take.

As in the report tabled during the previous government, information already exists and we must face the challenges including methods of measuring lead, monitoring programs, and prioritizing residential monitoring sites. We must recognize the financial impact to homeowners and to the taxpayers of Canada, while keeping the health of Canadians at top of mind.

I have noted the potential health risks, especially to young children, infants, and fetuses, and the unnecessary results from lead poisoning, including a variety of permanent disabilities.

As a party, we favour the elimination of lead in drinking water; however, we must respect the jurisdiction of municipal governments. The health of Canadians must be our priority, but we must understand the unique situations across Canada, from coast to coast to coast.

As a government, the Liberals should be looking at opportunities to make sure that we can change and educate and make sure that we have opportunities when it comes to testing and any other sources.

As I indicated, the federal government is in charge of scientific expertise. This is an opportunity for the government to do that as well, and I hope it will.

Private Members' Business

• (1425)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great interest that I stand in the House of Commons today to speak to Motion No. 69, presented by the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

Let me start by saying, water is life.

Thousands of protesters are in Standing Rock, as we speak, to convey this important message. I would like to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with my constituents who are there now, and others who are heading there to join the peaceful protest. Their banner represents the very issue we are talking about today: protecting our water resource and ensuring access to clean water for communities.

In 2013, Bruce McKenzie walked from Stanley Mission, Saskatchewan, to Ottawa, to raise awareness about access to clean drinking water and protection of our water resources. He saw the importance of having clean drinking water in our communities, so he took time off work to walk across Canada to highlight this very concern.

In my community, and in communities across the country, we count on this resource for survival. It is a no-brainer. It is a resource that we use every day, to drink, to eat, and to clean. I also think about indigenous communities who use lakes and rivers to fish and to hunt. These are integral to their traditional practices and customs. Canadians need to be confident that their water is clean and safe for consumption. This should be the very least of their worries, and it is the government's responsibility to establish that assurance.

The motion calls on the government to address the growing concerns of lead pipes and water quality in private residences across Canada by working with provincial and territorial governments, with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as well as with indigenous partners, to advocate and establish passable solutions.

The motion would mandate the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to undertake a study on the federal government's role in lead pipe infrastructure in Canada, and to report back to the House next year with its findings. I support this mandate. This is a particularly important issue in my riding, where the quality of drinking water is too often compromised.

In northern Saskatchewan, we know all too well what it is to be under constant alert by water boiling advisories caused by storms, power failures, and even because of oil spills, as we witnessed last summer with the Husky spill in the North Saskatchewan River. Poor infrastructure is also an important component of persistent water boiling advisories. Outdated water infrastructure in municipalities and on first nations reserves does not often guarantee clean drinking water. We have seen, on many occasions, contaminated water reaching private residences that are connected to lead pipes. This is without mentioning the amount of chemicals that are used to clean the water. In most cases, a great amount of fluoride is used to treat the water, which could have serious repercussions on people's health.

I understand that we are speaking about lead in private pipes, but I feel it is important to highlight that lead is one component, among other challenges, that northerners face when it comes to access to drinking water. Distribution of water in households and in businesses should be seen as a package. As the FCM and the National Research Council Canada noted in their guide entitled "Water Quality in Distribution Systems", "The ability to measure, monitor, and control all aspects of your distribution system water quality is mandatory to ensure safe water, to assess the seriousness of a situation during an emergency and to prove due diligence."

Before I end my presentation, I just want to note that before I came here, I received a call informing me that half of northern Saskatchewan has a power failure, which means that when the power is restored, boil water advisories will have to be issued.

• (1430)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River will have six minutes remaining for her remarks when the House next takes up consideration of the motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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