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(HANSARD)

Thursday, April 13, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, April 13, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed from April 11 consideration of the motion, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up debate on the question, the hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup had 13 and a half minutes remaining.

The hon. member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to resume debate on the question of privilege raised by my colleagues, in whose favour you ruled, concerning the privileges that the House gives to MPs and that are sometimes put to the test. When we raise a breach of privilege, that gives us a chance to review the facts.

Raising this question of privilege put an end to an extremely important debate on the fundamental changes that the government wants to make. It sneakily proposed the changes at a Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs meeting by tabling a paper about reforms to the way Parliament and the House of Commons work.

Although some of the changes are objectionable, I believe that we would be receptive to some of the other proposed changes. The reason we are getting in the way of the government's plans a bit is that we want to protect our privileges in the House.

It is important to recognize that society is changing. We are not against the notion of possibly changing the rules of the House of Commons. The problem has nothing to do with the points we might study or how the House might evolve, but rather how this was presented to us.

The vast majority, if not all, of the changes that the House has undergone since its creation, that is, over the past 150 years of the Constitution, have been adopted unanimously by all parliamentar-

ians. This time, the Liberal government wants to unilaterally impose new procedures, supposedly in order to move things forward and make the House more efficient.

These lofty theories play well in the media, but the reality is that all parliamentarians deserve to be treated with a minimum of respect. It is completely unacceptable for a majority government to want to impose on all parliamentarians a new way of doing things in the House, without giving them the opportunity to vote for or against those changes. It is crucial that parliamentarians be unanimous regarding the discussion that the Liberals want to have, and Canadians need to understand that.

The reason is quite simple. There is one party in the House that has just one representative and another party, the Bloc Québécois, that has 10 members and is not a recognized party. However, every one of us was elected by Canadians and we should all be able to represent Canadians in a system where every parliamentarian has a say. We are our constituents' representatives and, as such, should have a say in these changes.

When we look at the paper as a whole we see some very interesting things. I repeat that we are not against potential changes. What we want is to have the discussion that the Liberals claim to be offering us. The problem is that they are not offering a discussion.

As I mentioned on Tuesday, I am an entrepreneur. If I had the type of discussion that the Liberals want to have with parliamentarians with my clients, my partners, my associates, or my suppliers I would have gone out of business a long time ago. That would be inevitable.

• (1010)

To earn respect, you must show respect. As they say, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. This is not happening at present. It seems that we are going to fight to the end. We cannot accept that. The beauty of it is that all opposition MPs feel the same way. We unanimously agree that we cannot accept the current arrogant and undisciplined way of doing things. In the past, the House of Commons has always been disciplined and, above all, respectful of all these elements.

Privilege

I am going to end on that note even though my time has not elapsed. I will give my peers the opportunity to speak. I believe that we are extremely lucky to be who we are. There are 338 people in the House and we represent 35 million Canadians. We are very fortunate. We certainly have privileges, but we also have responsibilities, and one of them is to ensure that we properly represent our constituents. To that end, we must have the respect of all parliamentarians in the House, and especially the government's respect.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to reinforce that all members, I believe, recognize the importance of unfettered access to the House. I have had the opportunity in the past to sit on the PROC committee when we have dealt with this issue. We would hope that an issue of this serious nature would not be politicized.

It has been a little while since I was on one of the green buses, but yesterday I was on a green bus. There was a discussion I overheard in regard to whether a member of Parliament should be able to get off the bus at any point, whether it is halfway down the Hill or a quarter of the way down the Hill.

Does the member think a member of Parliament should have the ability to get off the bus at any point he or she desires?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, if my colleague's main priority this morning is to find out where people can get off the bus on Parliament Hill, and that certainly seems to be the case from his question, it just shows his disrespect for the matter before the House today.

I honestly do not know what to say. People can get off the bus wherever they want. There are designated bus stops. That is a completely ridiculous question. I do not understand why he is asking me about buses because that is not what we are talking about this morning. We are talking about the fundamental changes that the Liberals want to impose on the House of Commons.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I wanted to ask him a question regarding the ruling the Speaker delivered a few days ago on the question of privilege raised by his colleague. The Speaker indicated that the fact that the government cut short the debate on access to Parliament was unprecedented. As my colleague explained, this is typical of the Liberals' attitude toward making this Parliament work or not work, whatever the case may be.

I would like him to comment on the Liberals' tactics. We are talking about our parliamentary privilege and changes to the Standing Orders of the House, but this is all part of the litany of problems that we are facing with this government. I would like to hear his thoughts on the fact that the Liberals acted in an unprecedented manner by cutting short the debate on the fundamental issue of access to Parliament Hill by the members for Milton and for Beauce.

●(1015)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

What is interesting about my colleague's question is that he talked about the Liberals' behaviour lately, but this has been going on since well before the last week or two. The same thing happened last year with Motion No. 6, when they tried to literally stifle the opposition. In the end, thanks to the uprising we set off, the Liberals backed down. We will get them to back down on this one too, because it makes no sense. All they have to do is withdraw the motion so we can have a real conversation. That is not what we are having now. There is no conversation. The Liberals want to unilaterally impose a new way of doing business in the House of Commons without seeking agreement from all sides. That is completely at odds with how we have always done things in the House of Commons. We are confronting the Liberals' arrogance, and we will never let them force this on us.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we listened to some of the comments yesterday on the issue of relevancy. We have the member, in essence, not being relevant. What we are supposed to be talking about is privilege, and the bus was an integral part of the question of privilege that was being debated.

I ask the member why he chose to talk about something that is outside the actual privilege. What we are supposed to be talking about is unfettered access to the Parliament buildings. The member consistently made reference to rule changes and was trying to label them as a behaviour. That is not what we are technically supposed to be debating. If we want to debate the rule changes, there are other forums where we can have that discussion. I personally welcome that discussion.

I am wondering why the member refuses to talk about unfettered access. Why is so little time in his comments spent on unfettered access?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, every question of privilege raised in the House is important. These questions are important because as representatives of the constituents of our 338 ridings, we have responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to ensure that we have access to the House of Commons and to a whole host of services. The privileges afforded to all parliamentarians are fundamental. Respect for those privileges is just as fundamental. When the hon. member said that two of our colleagues were unable to access the House, that affects our privileges. Hon. members have to have access to the House of Commons either by foot, minibus, or car. This is an integral part of our daily life on Parliament Hill. We have to be able to access the House.

We want to study this question and have this study take priority in committee. That is where the government does not want to cooperate.

Privilege

Speaking of strained relations and an unwillingness to co-operate, we have another glaring example: the Liberals want to impose their way of doing things because they have a majority and they take themselves for God knows who. However, that is not how things work in Parliament, and this should not happen this way either.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing Liberal members say how important this issue is and how seriously we should take the issue of a member's access to the chamber being denied, yet last week, on Thursday, the government moved to cut off this debate entirely. It would not even allow members of Parliament to vote to refer this matter to committee.

How can the government be taken seriously in saying that this is a serious matter when it denied members of Parliament the right to vote to send it to committee?

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question.

His question offers a perfect example of the arrogance the Liberals are showing towards the House of Commons. It is pretty obvious that they really do not give a damn. They are just not interested. That is not how the House of Commons operates. I think it is important to understand that. Who would have thought that the NDP members here on this side of the House would become our friends? We are working together to ensure that those arrogant folks over there change their ways.

We recognize that we have different political visions, and we all agree on that. Beyond that, however, we do share a common vision regarding how the House should operate, and that vision must continue being a common vision. No one should question that, not the Liberals or anyone else in the House.

I was pleased to hear my NDP colleagues say that even the Conservatives never dared to go this far. That is quite a compliment, coming from the NDP. The Liberals have gone too far. No one party should ever undermine members' privileges or tell committees how they must operate. All parliamentarians must have their say on this.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure and a privilege to rise in the House to speak on behalf of the people of Chilliwack—Hope and to represent them in the House of Commons. That is what this debate really is about. It is about our ability, as members of Parliament, to represent our constituents here. When people see the title that rolls across the bottom of the television screen say “Privilege Motion”, I think they already believe members of Parliament are already privileged and probably wonder why we are fighting about our privileges.

The reason we are talking about privileges as members of Parliament is this. Essentially it infers that our constituents have privileges in this place. I represent 92,000 people. When I come here to vote in the House of Commons, I represent my electoral district to the best of my ability.

To bring people up to speed, two members of Parliament were denied their right to vote by being denied access to the precinct, by being denied access to this place for a vote on budget day. What does that mean? It means the constituents of the member for Milton and the member for Beauce were prevented from being heard through their MPs during that vote. That is a very serious violation.

At first, we thought all members of Parliament would take this matter seriously and we could deal with it in a serious way. However, it quickly became evident that the Liberal members, the Liberal government, had no intention of treating this as a serious matter. In the first day of debate, the member for Winnipeg Centre blamed the member of Parliament from Milton and the member of Parliament for Beauce for having poorly planned their day and not being able to enter this place for a vote.

The Speaker made it clear that there was an unacceptable delay on the buses due to motorcades, due to security, due to a media bus, but it did not really matter to the two members who were forced to miss the vote. For nine minutes, they were held up by security and were unable to proceed here. The member for Winnipeg Centre said that he planned his day better than that. Therefore, it was the fault of the members for having their privileges violated. That was what Liberal members said in the debate.

It reminds me of another question of privilege this fall in the same type of atmosphere in this place. Motion No. 6 was before the House. It was a motion in which the government was looking to strip the opposition of all our tools, all the means at our disposal to hold the government accountable and to do our jobs. I remember it well. At that time, I was sitting a little closer to the Speaker. The Prime Minister walked down the aisle, grabbed the Chief Opposition Whip, and bumped into another member. He created disorder in the House. What did we see from Liberal members? They blamed the Chief Opposition Whip and the member from the NDP for getting in the way of the Prime Minister. In any other workplace that would have been an assault. However, the opposition was blamed, just as the government is doing now.

When we were having a debate about privileges, when we were having a debate about whether members of Parliament could exercise their right to vote on behalf of their constituents, the Liberal members would not even allow members of Parliament to vote on whether that should be sent to the procedure and House affairs committee. That is the height of irony. Our rights to vote have been violated. When the rights of one member are violated, the rights of all of us are violated. That is why we take this seriously, but not seriously enough.

For the first time in the history of Parliament, the government took the step of ending the debate before a vote could be called on it. It did not allow the question of privilege to be decided on by the members of the House. It was an unprecedented attack on the members of Parliament, so much so that the member for Perth—Wellington had to raise a question of privilege on the fact that the question of privilege was not voted on, and he was successful in bringing that motion forward. I thank him for standing up for the rights of all members of Parliament, something the government is increasingly attacking.

Privilege

•(1025)

This motion of privilege calls for this matter to be studied at the procedure and House affairs committee. A further amendment to that motion says that this should take priority over all other matters currently before the procedure and House affairs committee, which is where MPs from all recognized parties talk about the rules of the House and violations of the rules and rights of members of Parliament.

Why have we had to take that step? Why has the official opposition proposed that this matter be referred to the procedure and House affairs committee and that it be given precedence? We have done that because it is clear that the procedure and House affairs committee of the House of Commons has been hijacked by the Prime Minister's Office.

Currently, the Prime Minister's Office is pulling the strings of the Liberal side of that committee. The Liberals have brought forward what we call a guillotine motion. There is this guillotine hanging over our heads, figuratively. The Liberals have said that they want to make some changes and that we should talk about it. They want to take away our right to debate at committee. They want to cut off debate in the House of Commons, pre-emptively. They want to invoke time allocation, which means they will cut off the debate before it even starts.

The Liberals are saying that they are going to eliminate our ability to discuss committee reports in the House of Commons. They are going to eliminate the ability of everyday members of Parliament to move procedural motions to do things like adjourn the debate or move "that a member be now heard". Any of the tools we have at our disposal as members of Parliament the Liberals are looking to take away. That is what is happening at the procedure and House affairs committee right now. The government has shown no willingness to withdraw that motion and work with the opposition to come up with solutions that will benefit all of us.

It was quite something that at the end of the so-called discussion paper, which is being jammed down the throats of opposition members, it says, "A key consideration in the reform of the Standing Orders is to ensure that the scheme operates equally effectively in a majority and minority context." There is no word about it working for the majority and the minority of members of Parliament, simply that it always works for the government. The changes must always work for the government, no matter what forum we find ourselves in, either a minority or a majority.

As the Speaker has said, it is unprecedented for the government to cut off a debate on privilege. It is also unprecedented for the government to try to jam down the throats of the opposition rule changes that will only benefit the government. We have seen what that looks like.

There is an easy solution to all of this, and that is to withdraw the guillotine motion that threatens the rights of opposition members. We have ideas on how to make this place work better. Many have already been implemented, and I have spoken on that before. However, for the bully to stand over us and say that we are about to get it and that we should talk about how it will be fed to us is not a way for the House to work well, and we will not accept it. We are

obligated on behalf of all members of Parliament to fight for the rights of members of Parliament.

I thought this was telling. A member of the Liberal Party, who is one of the few Liberal members of Parliament, realized he was not a member of the Liberal government if he was not in cabinet. If members do not sit in the cabinet, they are not a member of the Liberal government. They are members of Parliament who happen to be Liberal. If the members on that side realize that fact, they should be standing with us to defend the rights of all members of Parliament who are not members of the cabinet.

•(1030)

The member for Malpeque, who has sat in opposition, who has sat in government, who has sat in cabinet, and who now sits outside of cabinet, said:

...this place is called the House of Commons for a reason. It is not the House of cabinet or the House of PMO. Protecting the rights of members in this place, whether it is the opposition members in terms of the stance they are taking, is also protecting the rights of the other members here who are not members of cabinet or the government. We talk about government as if this whole side is the government. The government is the executive branch. We do need to protect these rights.

Bravo to the member for Malpeque for knowing what his role is as a member of Parliament, for knowing that he is not a member of cabinet and therefore not a member of the government. There are a few members like him who have played on both sides of this aisle, who have gone from opposition to government, and back again. They understand that what we are seeing here is not only the unprecedented attack on the rights of members of Parliament to determine whether a breach of privilege has occurred, but on the rights of members of Parliament in the opposition to do their job. They know that Prime Minister Chrétien would never have attempted this kind of stunt. Prime Minister Martin would never have tried to silence the opposition. Prime Minister Harper never tried to manipulate the rules of the House to take away the tools of the opposition.

However, we now have a Prime Minister who has complete disregard for the rights of members of Parliament, and quite frankly for this place. We saw it when he was the leader of the third party and would show up just enough to get his questions in. This is not his priority. His priority is taking speaking fees of \$20,000 to \$25,000 a pop from charities and non-profit organizations to supplement his meagre \$170,000 income. This was not, and still is not, a priority for him. This is an inconvenience for the Prime Minister, who, as we have seen, treats it unlike any prime minister in Canadian history, with unprecedented attacks on the privileges of members of Parliament.

Privilege

Now the Liberals want to formalize it going forward. They want to make the House more predictable. Would it not be nice if the House were more predictable for the government? It is not the role of the opposition to make the House more predictable. As I have said previously, the Prime Minister and the government have now moved to the point where they get very upset when an opposition is actually presented to them because they prefer an audience. That is what they are trying to make all members of Parliament into, an audience for this grand play that is the Prime Minister's life in the House of Commons. When they take away the rights and privileges of members of Parliament, both through fighting against the rights of my colleagues from Milton and Beauce to be heard at the PROC committee, and by denying us the right to vote on that, to send it to committee, and to make it a priority, they show how seriously they take this matter, and they deny the rights of all members of Parliament to represent our constituents. We cannot stand for it.

This is the reason I call upon my colleagues in the Liberal Party. Even the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is not a member of the Liberal government. He is a Liberal MP who happens to be on the same side. He has been down at this end of the House. He has been in opposition. He has utilized the tools that were available to him as a member of Parliament, as an opposition member. For the Liberals to try to now take that away, they need to take the words of the member for Malpeque to heart.

I know there are a lot of new members of Parliament who were elected in 2015. However, we are just temporary residents in the House of Commons. These seats do not belong to us. They belong to Canadians. They belong to our constituents. As members of Parliament, we have a sacred duty to protect the rights of our constituents when we do our job.

● (1035)

When members of Parliament are denied the right to vote on whether that was a violation of privilege, we see the arrogance of the government, and it is unprecedented. I keep using that term because the Speaker used it himself on Thursday.

We talk about why we need to make this a priority. That is what the amendment of the member for Battle River—Crowfoot says, that we need to make this a priority at the procedure and House affairs committee. We need to do that because, while the Prime Minister's office directs traffic there, the House of Commons is actually the body that is supposed to advise the committees on what they should study. We do it all the time. When we refer bills to committee, they take precedence.

I would argue that there is no greater issue that the procedure and House affairs committee should study than whether we are able to do our jobs as members of Parliament. The government did not show good faith. It said that this should be studied at committee but it is not going to allow a vote that says that, and that we should take its word that the government will get to it eventually and move its own motion at committee, and that the House does not need to worry itself with this sort of thing. This is exactly what we need to worry ourselves with, because the government has shown that it does not care about the rights of the opposition, that they are very inconvenient, in fact.

I remember the member of Parliament who represents Vegreville standing up for her constituents in committee and questioning John McCallum, the then minister of immigration. She questioned him for the full length of his time there, with the member for Calgary Nose Hill helping her out. The government said it was really inconvenient to have a member of Parliament standing up for her constituents when it wants to shut down a case processing centre in her riding; it did not think she should be able to do that anymore in committee; and it was going to take away the right of that member to hold the minister and the government accountable. It said it was very inconvenient and it was going to strip that away.

This week, debates have taken place in the House on things like gender parity, gender equality, the House rules, and how we can make this place better, all brought forward by the opposition after bringing forward committee reports. That is very inconvenient for the government, so it wants to strip away that right. That is what is being talked about in PROC right now.

It is very inconvenient when members of Parliament are able to speak in the House for 10 minutes, so the government wants to reduce that to maybe five minutes. It is very inconvenient to have to listen to members of the opposition.

It actually says in the supposed discussion paper being discussed in PROC ahead of the issue right now that the ringing of the bells for votes is very inconvenient. It is saying the bells that call us here to do our jobs, to represent our constituents, to vote on matters that are before the House, are all a grand inconvenience. We represent millions of Canadians on this side of the House. In fact, those of us on this side of the House represent over 60% of Canadians, and the rules of the House are there to protect the minority. They are not there to make this place more predictable and convenient for the government. When members are denied the right to vote, we do not expect the government to take action against members of Parliament by cutting off their rights to debate or vote; we expect the rights of the minority to be protected. That is what the House rules do. That is what we are doing here when we talk about privilege.

The level of attack that the government has taken against the members of Parliament whose privileges were found to be violated in a prima facie case is unprecedented. We urge the government and Liberals members who are not in the government to vote in favour of these motions, to deal with this matter seriously, and to stop their unprecedented attack on members of the opposition.

● (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that whether it is this speaker or the previous speaker, they want to have a debate about the possibility of having rule changes brought into the House. The Prime Minister and the government, and in fact a number of members in the House, want to see Canada's Parliament modernized. This, in essence, is what it is all about. Hopefully, we will get to that discussion at the procedure and House affairs committee.

Privilege

However, today we are actually debating unfettered access to this precinct. That is the actual debate. I have had the opportunity to have this debate on several other occasions. Sometimes the vote occurs immediately. Other times, we might have a few members get involved. The members across the way try to give the impression that we are trying to prevent a vote from taking place. The member knows full well that, as with other questions of privilege, if people were to be somewhat relevant to the privilege, we could possibly even have a vote this morning. We do not see the government trying to prevent a vote.

Does the member believe that this question of privilege is any different from the others we had on unfettered access? Perhaps he could illustrate why it should take into consideration other changes that are not necessarily relevant to unfettered access to this building. It is an issue of relevancy, in good part.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, the facts do not bear out what the member just said. They specifically tried to deny a vote. They moved to return to orders of the day last Thursday. I was scheduled to speak last Thursday. The Liberals denied that right. They did not put the vote on that motion, they just tried to punt this off into the ether where it would never be discussed again. The member for Perth—Wellington had to rise on a question of privilege because they had violated the privilege debate.

Therefore, this is unprecedented. This is unlike any other debate, and it is the fault of the government for failing to take this seriously, for failing to address the motion, and for trying to punt it off into never-never land.

We are not going to let that happen. We will continue to stand up for the rights of members of Parliament not only to vote in this place but to do our jobs. It is a very relevant discussion, and they should stop trying to violate the privileges of members. Before, it was merely a matter of access and security, but now the Liberal Party has taken it on itself to defend it, somehow, and to try to prevent us from moving forward.

We should vote in favour of this motion. We should vote to send it to committee. We should vote to have it take precedence over all other matters, due to the seriousness of it.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as a new member of Parliament, like more than 150 of my colleagues across the aisle, I came here knowing that I had been sent by people who took the time to go and vote for me to come here to represent their best interests. What I see happening across on the Liberal bench is very disturbing to me, because I see that people are basically allowing themselves to be silenced. I do not know if they are being told to be silent, or if they are just choosing to remain silent. They are doing an extreme disservice not just to their colleagues in the House and to the very honour of being a member of the House but also to the constituents they came here to represent. That is an embarrassment. They need to take that seriously, and I do not believe they are.

As we heard yesterday from my colleague, the member for Papineau seems to have had a turnaround of his entire previous career here in the House. The things that he said in the House that he would do and he would make different, he has not chosen to do. I remember him coming in to the new member lunch that we had in the beautiful

new Wellington Building, telling us all how it was going to be different. Foolishly, I thought that was a positive thing, but the truth has become that it is a pattern of disdain and disrespect, and what he meant by “different” was that he would disrespect the members of the House in a way that has never been done by previous Conservative and Liberal governments.

Privilege means respect, and there is poison leaking out of the House in the treatment of—

•(1045)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion in the question from the member for Essex. It is clear that what the Liberals ran on and what they are delivering are two separate things. The latest example is the use of omnibus bills, which were specifically forbidden in their platform document.

We have a 300-page omnibus bill that deals with all kinds of things from increasing fees on people for passports, to increasing camping fees, to changing the role of the parliamentary budget officer. It contains all sorts of things and they used the exact same defence, quite frankly, that our Conservative government did: these are implementing matters that are in the budget. That was a great line when we said it, and they seem to have adopted it now.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Maybe it is true this time.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, the Liberals promised sunny ways, but it is all coming apart. Their true selves are being revealed. They are not taking the privileges of members of Parliament, members of the opposition, seriously. They were not going to heckle either, but we see they cannot help themselves.

They continue to break their promises and they should be held accountable for it.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as someone who has sat on the procedure and House affairs committee for over nine years while our party was in government, and as someone who dealt with procedural matters routinely day after day in my capacity as parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, I can offer a unique perspective to what is occurring in this debate and the real motivation behind the debate, and that is the government's willingness and desire to unilaterally change the Standing Orders of this place.

I would not argue that the government has the ability to unilaterally change the Standing Orders, but I would argue that it does not have the right to unilaterally change them. The government is fond of saying that it wants to modernize the Standing Orders, but the reality is that it is up to Parliament to modernize itself, not up to the government. Will my colleague please comment on those observations?

Will he please as well comment on the fact that if the Liberals vote against the motion before us on privilege, in effect what they are saying is that they are voting against the privileges of members of Parliament of this place, for their own narrow political interests?

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his work on these files over the last nine years.

Privilege

My colleague is absolutely right. I remember that when we were in government, that member was a key part of the review of the Standing Orders. The current parliamentary secretary to the government House leader was there, and he knows that the rule was that if not all parties could agree on the rule change, it was immediately dropped. There was consent to move forward with any changes. Under Stephen Harper's government, that was the benchmark. If we could not agree with the opposition, we would not make the change. Now that same member who benefited from that co-operation, from that unanimous consent approach, is trying to ram changes down the throats of the opposition, which would benefit the Liberal Party.

This is unprecedented, as the Speaker has indicated. It is an unprecedented attack on the privileges of members of Parliament. We will continue to fight for our constituents and the rights of the minority in this place.

● (1050)

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill, I will let her know that there are only about 10 minutes before we have to go to the period for statements by members and question period. I will interrupt her approximately halfway into the time that is available for her remarks.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a matter of great import that should concern every member in this place. As a recap, why are we here today debating this particular issue?

A few weeks ago, I believe it was on budget day, my colleagues from Milton and Beauce were held up at the parliamentary security gate, I believe it was for a period of nine minutes, and as such, were not able to vote.

My colleagues raised a question of privilege. What does that mean? For those who might not know what parliamentary privilege is, there are conventions that are afforded to members of Parliament that allow us to do our jobs here. The Compendium of House of Commons Procedure states:

The House of Commons and its Members enjoy certain constitutional rights and immunities that are collectively referred to as parliamentary privilege (or simply "privilege").

It gives a bit of history about this. The point that is relevant here today is that there is a privilege with respect to the freedom from obstruction, interference and intimidation. Under that section there is this paragraph:

Any physical barrier preventing Members' access to the parliamentary precinct or blocking their free movement within it may be treated by the House as a breach of privilege. Questions of privilege have been raised in connection with traffic barriers, security cordons, and even union picket lines. A

Rightly so, my colleagues raised a question of privilege. The Speaker ruled on that question of privilege and said essentially that privilege had been violated. A motion was moved to refer that issue of privilege to PROC, our procedure and House affairs committee. This is the way we resolve these issues. Here is where things got strange.

The government did something that was absolutely unprecedented. In fact, the Speaker of the House of Commons called it unprecedented, in that the government moved a motion to proceed to

orders of the day. What does that mean in regular language? It means that the government tried to shut down debate on a motion of privilege without a vote.

Then we had to raise another question of privilege. The Speaker ruled in our favour again, saying that no, the government should not be able to just override a question of privilege in the House of Commons.

Why is this important to somebody watching this today? It is important because the people watching us today pay our salaries to vote on issues of import to this country, to be in the House to debate and to raise issues on behalf of our constituents. This is why privilege exists. This is why matters of privilege take precedence in the House of Commons. This is a very serious matter.

I will be the first to admit that things can get very heated in the House of Commons. I get very heated in the House of Commons. I get passionate in the House of Commons, because there are issues on which I fundamentally disagree with other colleagues in this place. It is my job to do that. It is my job to either support the government or to hold the government to account on issues that are of interest to my constituents. I am not here to agree with everyone. I am here to do something that resembles work so that we can come up with the best public policy instruments for the people who pay our salaries to be here.

When we are impeded from doing our jobs, such as was the case with this matter of privilege, that ability, that fundamental component of why I am here is negated.

My colleague from Chilliwack—Hope raised some very good points that I want to expand upon this morning. First, it is the role of a member of Parliament. What does that mean? I was part of the executive at one point in my career. I was a cabinet minister. At that point in time, I was part of the government, but even when I was part of a government, I was also responsible to my constituents. If we are going to remove that role, there is a great commonality among all members in this place. If a member does not hold a cabinet position, the individual is a member of Parliament, and that individual's role as a member of Parliament is to hold the government to account.

● (1055)

Even if the member is a Liberal backbencher, the member's job is not to agree with the government all the time. The member's job is to represent his or her constituents and flesh out policy, flesh out bills that have been put forward in this place to try to ensure that constituents' voices and opinions are heard and what is in their best interest is reflected in the law of the land.

When we have matters of privilege that are breached in this place, it fundamentally prevents each and every one of us from taking on that specific, very important role, which is to hold the government to account.

One of my colleagues has proposed a subamendment to the motion that would allow this question of privilege to take precedence at PROC, the procedure and House affairs committee. Those who have been following along know what is happening at PROC right now. At the procedure and House affairs committee, the government is trying to ram down the throats of members, and therefore all Canadians, changes to the rules on how Parliament works.

Statements by Members

Why is the government doing this? I would put it forward to the House that it is because the government members see this place as an inconvenience to putting their agenda forward.

This place is what differentiates us as a country from dictatorships. This place is where we review legislation, where, yes, we are going to filibuster legislation, where, yes, we are going to vote for and against legislation, and where, yes, we are going to debate legislation. The privilege that I have to stand in this place, stand up for my constituents, and speak my mind on this is not an inconvenience. It is democracy.

When the government puts forward a “discussion paper” that talks about “modernizing Parliament”, what does it mean? The way I read this, it is code for making this place less inconvenient for the Prime Minister. My colleague the member for Chilliwack—Hope had a great line, which was that the Prime Minister wants an audience, not want an opposition. I can verify that fact.

If the Prime Minister wanted an opposition, if he truly wanted to use Parliament and the voices of Canadians to come up with legislation that is in the best interests of the entire country, he would not have put the discussion paper forward. Again, I do not even want to use that term. It is not a discussion paper; it is a fundamental change to Canadian democracy.

One of the things that is talked about in the paper that we are trying to filibuster at PROC, because we do not believe that Canadians should have this foisted on them, is the curtailing of debate. If these changes go through, my ability to stand here and speak on behalf of my constituents will be permanently curtailed. That is wrong.

If Parliament is inconvenient for the Prime Minister, then perhaps he should not be the Prime Minister of Canada.

I will resume speaking after question period.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill will have eleven and a half minutes remaining for her speech when the House next resumes debate on this question, and of course the usual 10 minutes for questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

We will now proceed to Statements by Members.

The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1100)

[*Translation*]

PATRIATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, April 17, 1982, is a black day in the history of Quebec. Thirty-five years ago, Ottawa patriated the Constitution. The then British consul, John Ford, deemed it to be a coup carried out to change the balance of power in the Confederation. The goal was to weaken Quebec by diminishing its

ability to make its own societal decisions, beginning with its ability to protect the French language.

Every one of Quebec's governments has refused to sign Trudeau's Constitution because they all came to the same conclusion: this Constitution was negotiated at the expense of Quebec and was bad for our nation.

I remember. The Bloc Québécois remembers. We expect nothing else from Canada but betrayals and attempts to weaken our ability to stand on our own. Thirty-five years later the patriation of the Constitution is a failure. The separatist movement is still alive and Quebec is still standing.

* * *

[*English*]

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Toronto Maple Leafs are back. We have a strong, young, and exciting team with a great future ahead.

We can feel the love for this team, but we can also wear it. Yes, it is an idea that started in a beer league dressing room on that fateful day when our Maple Leafs hired the best coach in hockey.

Jake Mednick and Tommy McCole, two childhood friends, teammates, and diehard Leafs fans from Beaches—East York with an entrepreneurial spirit, put Mike Babcock's stern face on a pair of socks and Babssocks was born.

A cartoon face on a pair of socks has never been so serious. Made by fans for fans, it is a great way to support our team and it is a great way to support CAMH.

Tonight, let us pull up our Babssocks and become a Babsbud. It is game day. Go Leafs go.

* * *

HALIBURTON—KAWARTHA LAKES—BROCK

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the melting of snow my riding has seen a flurry of activity.

Congratulations to Lindsay's own Strumbellas for winning a Juno for the song *Spirits* for single of the year.

In Haliburton, the Chamber of Commerce held its 11th annual Business and Community Achievement Awards Gala. Congratulations to all award nominees and recipients, such as The Pump Shop, Wintergreen, Haliburton Real Estate Team of Re/Max North Country, Highland Glass & Windows, Community Living, Harcourt Park Marina, and Bonnie View Inn.

In addition, the Haliburton County Snowmobile Association won the Warden's award. Entrepreneur of the Year was presented to Mike McFadden. Reverend Max Ward was named Highlander of the Year.

Finally, the staff and students of Brock Secondary School raised their own funds and travelled to France for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. They were one of the largest youth delegations from Canada. We are all very proud of them for ensuring they were at Vimy to commemorate this historic event.

*Statements by Members***VAISAKHI****Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Lib.):***[Member spoke in Punjabi as follows:]**Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.**[English]*

Mr. Speaker, today Sikhs all around the world are celebrating Vaisakhi. Guru Gobind Singh started a Khalsa Panth in 1699, with the simple philosophy of *naam japna*, meditation; *kirt karni*, hard work; *seva*, selfless service., and always remembering that we have a responsibility to make the world around us a better place. These are not just Sikh values; these are Canadian values.

This past Monday, we celebrated Vaisakhi on the Hill and we were proud to show how Sikhs have contributed to Canada for many years.

We prayed for the success of all Canadians and our great nation. Our daily prayer read:

*[Member spoke in Punjabi]**[English]*

To all his devotees, he does not let them see difficult times. That is his innate nature.

Happy Vaisakhi to all Sikhs around the world and happy Vaisakhi to everyone in the House.

* * *

*[Translation]***MARK WAINBERG**

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to mark the tragic passing on Tuesday of one of the greatest HIV/AIDS researchers in the world, Dr. Mark Wainberg.

Mark Wainberg was the director of research at the Lady Davis Institute at the Jewish General Hospital in Montreal, the director of the McGill University AIDS Centre, and a professor of medicine at McGill.

[English]

Dr. Wainberg was known the world over for his contribution to the identification of lamivudine, an antiviral drug, now one of the most widely used in the treatment of HIV.

In 2015, he was appointed to the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame.

[Translation]

His contribution to the treatment of HIV/AIDS saved millions of lives around the world. We will also remember him as a man of commitment and an advocate in the fight against HIV/AIDS. I would like to extend my sympathy to his family, friends, associates, and many admirers.

● (1105)

*[English]***BOYD FAMILY**

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the community of St. George in my riding of New Brunswick Southwest is in mourning today. Tuesday afternoon, we were shocked and saddened to learn of the tragic house fire that claimed the lives of four people: Esther Boyd and her three adult sons. St. George is a tight-knit community, and this loss is felt throughout my riding.

I would like to thank the first responders, including the firefighters from St. George, Blacks Harbour, St. Stephen, and St. Andrews. I thank Mayor Crystal Cook and fire chief Sean Morton for their leadership.

I and my family extend our deepest condolences to the family and all residents of St. George. Please join me in standing to recognize the Boyd family, the first responders, and the entire St. George community. They are in our thoughts and prayers.

* * *

ARMENIA

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as vice-chair of the Canada–Armenia Parliamentary Friendship Group to remember the Armenian genocide of 1915. As we reflect on this tragedy of human history, we are reminded of the importance of protecting and promoting freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, values that we as Canadians value dearly. This first genocide of the 20th century was recognized by our Senate in 2002, by our Parliament in 2004, and by our Conservative government in 2006.

The Armenian-Canadian community has contributed positively in many ways to Canada's culture, economy, and spiritual life. The acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide should motivate each of us to do everything in our power to ensure that such a terrible tragedy never happens again and to build bridges of mutual respect.

As the Armenian community celebrates Easter, I extend to its members and to all Canadians my wishes for a happy Easter, in the words of one of their esteemed leaders, in the name of our risen and victorious Lord.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to convey my best wishes to all those celebrating Vaisakhi today in Canada and around the world. Vaisakhi is one of the most important days in Sikhism, as it marks the inauguration of the Khalsa and the fundamental principles of the Sikh faith laid down by the 10th guru, Guru Gobind Singh ji.

Statements by Members

All across Canada, at their local gurdwaras and at home with their families, Sikhs will participate in colourful parades, ceremonies, and celebrations and will reflect on those values that embody the heart of our faith: harmony, unity, justice, equality, and service to all mankind. These values are not only at the core of Sikhism but are shared by all Canadians of all walks of life. I encourage all Canadians to participate in their local Vaisakhi festivities and to engage with their local Sikh communities in celebration of our common cause and purpose as Canadians.

Happy Vaisakhi to all.

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

[English]

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GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE, CONDEMNATION AND PREVENTION MONTH

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I stand in this House to recognize the most heinous of all crimes: genocide. This House has recognized six genocides: the Holocaust; the Holodomor; and the Armenian, Bosnian, Rwandan, and Yazidi genocides. What these genocides have in common is not only their horrors but that all of them were preventable.

As recognized by this House, April is Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month. This presents an opportunity to learn about how these atrocities started and how we can prevent their tragic repetition. To prevent genocide, we must first recognize its precursors: racism, hatred, exclusion, dehumanization, and demonization. Most important, we must never forget the moral imperative to never be indifferent in the face of evil.

I stand here to honour all of those who have had their lives cruelly ended by genocide and the survivors whose stories we honour. Their memories must live on.

* * *

VAISAKHI

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, Vaisakhi marks the Sikh new year and commemorates the formation of the Khalsa Panth of warriors under Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Every year, Sikhs participate in Nagar Kirtan processions, bringing communities together to socialize, share delicious food, and reflect on the teachings of Sikhism. This can be seen today in the GTA, where the Guru Gobind Singh Children's Foundation is holding a fundraiser for underprivileged kids around the world.

Vaisakhi is also a great occasion for us to celebrate the tremendous contributions of the Sikh community to Canada's culturally rich and diverse society. As the member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, I wish all those celebrating Vaisakhi a joyous celebration.

[Member spoke in Punjabi as follows:]

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh.

* * *

●(1110)

[Translation]

CERTEX

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a social economy enterprise and charitable organization that I consider to be a jewel of my riding of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine.

For the past 25 years, Certex has been providing permanent jobs for people with disabilities by operating the largest textile recovery and sorting centre of its kind in Quebec. Thanks to this organization, over 6,000 tonnes of textiles are kept out of our landfills every year.

Certex, which has always focused on innovation, is also involved in research and development in order to find new ways to further reduce our environmental footprint.

Congratulations to Certex and its team. I thank them on behalf of my community and our planet.

* * *

[English]

MARK WAINBERG

Mr. David Lametti (LaSalle—Émard—Verdun, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in sadness today, as Canada has lost a giant. Dr. Mark Wainberg passed away tragically yesterday at the age of 71. Professor Wainberg was known for his part in the discovery of the antiviral drug 3TC in 1989, and his work was continuing at both the Jewish General Hospital and the McGill University AIDS Centre.

[Translation]

He had the courage to lead the entire HIV/AIDS research community to Durban, South Africa, at the height of the crisis in 2000 so that they could witness the devastation first-hand.

[English]

He said he was an AIDS activist because we have to be.

[Translation]

Through his work, Mark Wainberg saved millions of lives around the world. He was an officer of the Order of Canada, an officer of the Ordre national du Québec, and a knight of France's Légion d'honneur.

[English]

As a member of the McGill family, I join the Wainberg family, the entire McGill community, all of Quebec and Canada, and indeed the world in mourning the loss of a brilliant man who was, indeed, a mensch.

I thank Mark.

EASTER

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last weekend Canadians celebrated the tremendous sacrifice of those who participated in the allied victory on Vimy Ridge and the many who gave their lives in that battle for our freedom.

This week, Christians here in Canada and around the world are remembering and celebrating Easter. During Holy Week, we remember Christ's sacrifice for us by his willingness to die on the cross for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. On Easter Sunday, we will celebrate Christ's victory over sin and death through his resurrection.

As a Canadian and as a Christian, history's examples of individuals laying down their lives for the good of others fills me with deep gratitude for the freedoms I enjoy as a result of their sacrifice. I wish everyone in this place and back home a happy Easter.

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VANCOUVER CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of the Cherry Blossom Festival in Vancouver, where more than 40,000 cherry trees are welcoming spring, finally, into our city. This festival began as a recognition of the 500 cherry trees given to our city by the mayors of Kobe and Yokohama, Japan, in the 1930s.

Congratulations to founding executive director Linda Poole and her team, who have hosted concerts, workshops, art exhibitions, and fairs under pink-hued cherry tree canopies since 2005. This year, the festival offers more than 20 public events, including Plein Air blossom painting and the Sakura Days Japan Fair at VanDusen Botanical Garden, and the Cherry Jam Downtown Concert at the Burrard SkyTrain station. Visitors can also stroll through the picturesque Nitobe Memorial Garden of the UBC Botanical Garden in Vancouver Quadra.

In honour of this great yearly tradition, I wish Vancouverites a happy Cherry Blossom Festival. Let us give spring a very warm welcome back to our city.

* * *

• (1115)

SASKATCHEWAN TRANSPORTATION COMPANY

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this year's federal and provincial budgets threw Saskatchewan under the bus. The provincial budget proposes to eliminate the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, STC, depriving communities of needed bus service with less notice than required by the Canada Labour Code.

The federal budget allocates transit funding mostly based on existing ridership, which favours large centres that already have extensive transit systems. Saskatchewan's share of federal transit funding is less than half our share of Canada's population, shortchanging our province by far more than the Saskatchewan Party says axing STC will save.

Statements by Members

I invite all Saskatchewan's elected representatives to join me in pushing for an equal per capita allocation of federal funding to improve transit in Regina and Saskatoon and to save STC.

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VIMY RIDGE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one 96-year-old veteran described it as the best week of his life.

This past week, I had the privilege and honour to be part of the Canadian delegation that travelled to Vimy Ridge to celebrate the 100th anniversary of this great battle, where for the first time, Canadians fought together as one and became a nation. Three thousand five hundred and ninety-eight of us died that day; 11,000 were wounded. Walter Allward's monument that stands atop the ridge is magnificent. Like well-known sites around the world people go to for personal or religious pilgrimages, Vimy Ridge, and the monument that towers over it, is our Canadian pilgrimage site.

I want to sincerely thank both past and present ministers of veterans affairs and staff and Veterans Affairs Canada. The Vimy 100 celebration was seven years in the making, and it was incredible. It was incredible paying tribute to those who died, those who served, and those who continue to serve. Other than marrying my wife and the birth of my four children, being at Vimy was the best week of my life.

* * *

CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we were proud to welcome Malala Yousafzai to Parliament Hill. We honour her courage as an activist for education and a champion of girls' rights.

Canadians believe that the rights of all women and girls are human rights. This year marks the 35th anniversary of Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, in which these fundamental rights are enshrined.

I am proud that my city of Winnipeg is home to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, a place of education and reflection that commemorates both our charter and Malala's inspiring story. As we celebrate this accomplished young woman, now an honorary citizen of our country, we also encourage Canadians to celebrate their charter, which for 35 years has helped us work toward the respectful, inclusive nation we aspire to be.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***SOFTWOOD LUMBER**

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, by the time we return to the House in two weeks, countervailing duties will most likely have been slapped on our Canadian forestry industry because of this government's failure to take action and get its ducks in a row as soon as it was elected so it could fix this problem.

We have talked about this many times now. The only thing people know for sure is that this is highly likely to affect their jobs and cause major job losses across the country. However, there is still time.

Will the Liberals deal with the issue this week or in the coming days?

[English]

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is working very hard both with all departments across the Government of Canada and with our provincial counterparts. I have had the pleasure of meeting with ministers, and we keep in touch regularly, to make sure that Canada's response is a coordinated one. We understand the importance of the forestry sector to Canada. We understand it is important to make sure those jobs are protected as best as we can. We are working tirelessly to make sure that happens.

• (1120)

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister can talk with the provinces, but it is the government's job to discuss it with the U.S.A. and fix it.

The Liberals transferred that to the provinces. It was their responsibility to fix it, but they have not. That is the problem. It is just a question of leadership. Former prime minister Harper fixed it in two months. It has been 19 months since the Liberals have been there, and they have not fixed it. That is the truth.

[Translation]

The problem is that the only thing forestry workers know for sure is that the cost of living will go up along with the cost of electricity, groceries, and gas. They do not know if they will still have jobs because the Liberals keep talking to people other than the Americans.

Will they fix the problem?

[English]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to inform the member opposite that this morning I spent 45 minutes on the phone with Wilbur Ross, the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, talking about the softwood lumber issue. We are very closely engaged with the U.S.

I also want to say, not only to the member opposite but to all Canadians, that while we are actively engaged in negotiations, we are also concerned about supporting our industry, and in the interim we will not let the threat of countervailing duties weaken our negotiating position.

[Translation]

We want a good deal, not just any deal.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have been spewing the same rhetoric from the beginning: "a good deal, not just any deal". However, there are no deals on the table. They cannot refuse a deal that does not exist. It is just more talk. All they want to do is silence the opposition, as they have done over the past few weeks by changing how we work.

It is that thick, but their budgets are not. They want to muzzle the parliamentary budget officer. That is nonsense. The Liberals believe that they are always right; they do not want any opposition and they do not want anyone to contradict them. The parliamentary budget officer must keep track of this government's spending, deficits, and broken promises.

Will the Liberals respect him?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the 2015 election campaign, our government committed to end the improper use of omnibus bills.

The budget implementation bill that we introduced contains budget measures only and nothing else. We are implementing our plan to promote equity and grow the economy by strengthening the middle class, creating jobs, and giving people the skills they need to succeed.

* * *

*[English]***TAXATION**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister is taking lavish and expensive family vacations at a cost of \$133,000 to the Canadian taxpayer, he is at the same time nickel-and-diming everyday families who want to plan a modest vacation or maybe a long weekend with their loved ones. Passports are going up. Gasoline is going up under this Prime Minister. Uber will be going up. Even beer and wine will be going up under this Prime Minister.

Why does the Prime Minister think he is entitled to make Canadian families pay for his excessive spending?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the Conservatives, low- and middle-income Canadians were stuck with the bill for the increased costs of government services. For example, drug assessment fees take in \$45 million less every year than what it costs the government to assess the drugs. That means that there is a \$45 million subsidy every year that Canadian taxpayers fork out for the big drug companies.

We believe that big businesses using government services ought to pay their fair share of the costs of those services, and enabling fees to be aligned with inflation will ensure that is the case.

*Oral Questions***GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY**

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, Canadians know it is costing them to pay for all of the Prime Minister's big spending. He is arrogant and entitled, and Canadians are seeing that. He is also shutting down anyone who opposes or criticizes him. We know he is shutting down the ability of opposition to criticize him; we have now learned that he has neutered the parliamentary budget officer.

The Prime Minister clearly has a big problem with accountability and transparency. How long does the Prime Minister think he can keep running and hiding from all of his mistakes? How long does he think he can keep silencing anyone who dares to criticize him?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is listening and is engaged. That is why our government has undertaken unprecedented levels of public consultations. Our government is listening to Canadians and responding to the very real challenges they are facing, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

Our government is committed to giving more independence to the parliamentary budget officer. Canadians expect their government to be open, transparent, and accountable, and that is exactly what our government is doing.

We look forward to the debate on the bill and we are open to amendments on how to further improve the proposed legislation so that it accomplishes the goal of an independent PBO.

* * *

• (1125)

MARIJUANA

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, young and racialized Canadians continue to receive charges and criminal records by the thousands for simple possession of marijuana, and yet the Liberal government refuses to do anything to stop these harmful arrests for at least another 15 months.

Criminal records have serious consequences. It makes it harder to get a job and it makes it almost impossible to travel. What does the Liberal government plan to do to support Canadians who have been convicted of a crime that the Prime Minister himself has admitted to?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to introducing a strict framework that would regulate and restrict access to cannabis in order to keep cannabis out of the hands of children and profits out of the hands of criminals. Decriminalization will not achieve these objectives.

Creating a comprehensive and responsible system will take time, but that is necessary to get this right. We look forward to bringing forward comprehensive legislation later today.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was more of the evasiveness and dodging. Canadians expected immediate action on updating Canada's marijuana laws, yet 18 months later we continue to see cases of Canadians charged and convicted for simple possession. That means

that approximately 60,000 could have criminal records during this government's mandate. That is a shameful statistic.

Will the minister acknowledge this harm, and will she commit to pardoning Canadians who have been convicted of possession of marijuana?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the member that he will not have to wait longer for legislation because we are introducing comprehensive legislation later today.

Our government has committed to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to cannabis in a careful way in order to keep it out of the hands of children and youth and to stop criminals from profiting. Canada's current system of controlling cannabis through the criminal justice system does not adequately protect the health and safety of Canadians, especially youth. We look forward to introducing comprehensive legislation today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals fail to understand is that the NDP would like decriminalization and prevention to be part of their transition plan.

There were almost 50,000 arrests for possession in Canada in 2015. This disproportionately affects young people, cultural communities, and people in Canada's north. Many organizations such as the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse are in favour of decriminalization or an amnesty. Even Jean Chrétien and Joe Clark agree on that.

Until legalization comes into effect, will the Liberals stop arresting people for simple possession?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to legalizing and strictly regulating cannabis and limiting access to it in a prudent fashion in order to keep it out of the hands of young people and to keep any associated profits out of the hands of criminals.

Currently in Canada, cannabis is controlled through our criminal justice system, and the health and safety of Canadians, young people in particular, are not being adequately protected. We really look forward to introducing this bill later today.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as usual, the Liberals are avoiding the questions. They just said that they want to protect people from marijuana trafficking, but they have completely forgotten about prevention, and they are continuing to give young people criminal records.

Oral Questions

Quebec is asking the federal government to pull up its socks. Spending two million dollars a year on prevention for the biggest legislative change in the past 20 years? That is ridiculous. The prevention budget for youth in Colorado, which has a population of five million, was \$45 million for 2015 alone.

Will the Prime Minister and Minister of Youth present a real transition plan that includes the funding needed for prevention?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has committed to legalize, strictly regulate, and restrict access to cannabis in a careful way in order to keep it out of the hands of children and youth, and to stop criminals from profiting.

[English]

Decriminalization will not achieve these objectives. Creating a comprehensive and responsible system will take time, but it is necessary to get this right. We are very happy to be introducing comprehensive legislation later today.

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• (1130)

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the day that the Liberals roll out their marijuana legislation, we learn that the person they handpicked to chair the pot legalization committee has deep ties to the industry.

Anne McLellan's firm promotes itself as the go-to advisers to the industry, and at least 12 of its employees stand to make millions from their ownership stake in one of the pot companies. She herself is criss-crossing the country promoting the Liberal policy and handing out her own business cards.

How deep in the grass does all this Liberal cronyism go?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. gentleman wants to attack the integrity of Anne McLellan, good luck.

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will attack the integrity of Anne McLellan when she and her law firm partners stand to make millions of dollars because they are connected—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Tony Clement: Mr. Speaker, Anne McLellan is a former Liberal cabinet minister, and now we know she has close connections to the pot industry. While she was designing the framework for this new system, her legal colleagues were waiting in the wings to make big pot profits.

Is this new legislation merely a smokescreen for Liberal cronies to fill their pockets?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the clear answer is no. If the hon. gentleman would like to make those suggestions outside the House, I am sure Ms. McLellan will meet him in court.

ETHICS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told the House on several occasions yesterday that he will answer questions from the Ethics Commissioner about his trip to billionaire island.

Every time the Prime Minister stands up and plays a game of political dodgeball in the House of Commons, he undermines his credibility and undermines the legitimacy of this place. I have news for the Prime Minister: he also has a responsibility to answer to Canadians, who are represented by every single member in this place.

Can the Prime Minister stop dodging, dipping, ducking, and diving, and answer this question: who told him to break the law?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has answered to Canadians every single day, and that is exactly why this government has taken unprecedented levels of public consultation.

We will continue to engage with Canadians. We will continue to respond to the very real challenges that they are facing. Canadians know that wherever the Prime Minister travels, whether for personal or business, he must always be in a position to carry out his official duties. The resources that were provided to him are exactly the same as has been the case for previous prime ministers.

This Prime Minister takes his role very seriously. We take the work Canadians need us to do very seriously. We will continue to deliver for them.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 18 months ago, this Prime Minister asked Canadian voters to place their trust in him, but he continues to stretch the truth and say just about anything. I hope that on this Holy Thursday he does not believe that he can obtain absolution without going to confession. With regard to his false statement about the use of the Aga Khan's private helicopter, will the Prime Minister give us the facts and tell the truth? How can this Prime Minister look honest Canadians in the eyes and say to them that he is telling the truth when that has been proven not to be the case?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister will continue to respond to the real challenges that Canadians are facing. Wherever the Prime Minister travels, he must always be in a position to carry out his official duties. Like his predecessors, the Prime Minister must always be in contact with his office, and is always provided with support during his travels in Canada and abroad, whether for personal or official business.

Oral Questions

[English]

STANDING ORDERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, transparency, accountability, and sunny ways: this was the Liberal platform. Now the same government is trying to force through measures that would significantly reduce Canadians' ability to hold the Liberals to account.

Is the Prime Minister going to continue standing in this chamber while he orders ministers to do his dirty work?

When will the Liberals come clean to Canadians about their shady attempt to dodge accountability?

• (1135)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are delivering on exactly what we committed to deliver to Canadians. We had said a more open and more transparent government. That is exactly why we have taken unprecedented levels of public consultation.

We will continue to work hard for Canadians, because we know that is exactly what will allow us to implement the budget and the investments we have made, strategic investments, to create the conditions of growth that Canadians expect, to create jobs, to have a stronger economy. Exactly what middle-class Canadians are asking for, we will continue to deliver on.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me have a discussion with the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. What does the term "election promise" mean to her? What did the Liberals promise? They promised to run a small deficit of \$10 billion, to balance the budget by 2019, to completely overhaul the election system, and to cut taxes for SMEs.

Obviously, the government House leader has shown us that a Liberal promise is an alternative fact.

For once, will the government keep its promise to be open and transparent and commit to not changing our Standing Orders without the unanimous consent of members?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign we promised to modernize Parliament and to turn it into a 21st century workplace. We are willing to work with all of the parties to deliver on the promises that we made to Canadians, but we will not give the Conservatives a veto over our campaign commitments to Canadians.

We know that we can all work together. I encourage all members to participate in this conversation.

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[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last Parliament, Bill C-15, the strengthening military justice act, was adopted as a first step in reforming Canada's outdated military criminal justice system. The bill received royal

assent four years ago, yet 44 sections of the act are not yet in force. That represents nearly one-third of the act and some of the most important reforms to the system.

Since justice delayed is often justice denied, could the Minister of National Defence explain to the House what possible excuse there can be for this long delay in reforming Canada's military justice system?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the military justice system is extremely important, and National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces are looking closely at this matter to improve the conditions of all men and women in uniform.

* * *

[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, conserving and restoring wild salmon is vital to the future of B.C.'s wild salmon fishery, yet the minister wants to dismantle the policy for the conservation of wild Pacific salmon. The Liberals have yet to restore the Fisheries Act. They have approved harmful industrial projects. They have even slashed budgets for monitoring salmon. Now they want to gut the wild salmon policy.

I have a simple question for the minister. Is he going ahead with this harmful plan, or will he stand up for British Columbia?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concern. The sustainable management of Canada's fisheries is of the utmost importance for our government. We understand that wild salmon are the lifeblood of the west coast. Consultations are under way, and the department is engaging with first nations as well as recreational and commercial harvesters. We are finalizing the integrated fisheries management plans.

On top of that, I would like to share with the House that this is the reason why we are putting \$197 million over the next five years into science. It is to make sure we can hire more scientists within the Department of Fisheries and Oceans so we can manage these resources properly.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, local officials in Emerson, Manitoba, and the media are being denied information regarding the continuing influx of illegal migrants. RCMP and border officials, who only a few weeks ago were providing regular updates about the number of illegal migrants they are intercepting, have now been told to keep silent. Individuals on the ground are saying this gag order came from Ottawa.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister admit that he is keeping that information from Canadians to cover up his own inaction on this issue?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): No, indeed, Mr. Speaker, we have taken steps among CBSA, the RCMP, and the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to try to comprehensively collect all of the data for the country and to release it in a complete form on a monthly basis, and that information for the last month will be forthcoming in the next number of days.

• (1140)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a very eloquent way of saying, “We are muzzling the RCMP”.

The public deserves to know how many people are illegally crossing the border into Canada. Covering up these numbers will not make problems go away for the Liberals. Without these numbers, local officials cannot plan to cope with the situation and the government cannot be held to account by us.

If, as the Liberals claim, there is no problem and there is nothing to see here, why are they telling the RCMP to hide these numbers?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, we are collecting all of the data from all of the departments and agencies of the Government of Canada that are relevant to the situation, and we are making sure that they are presented publicly, providing more information about the situation than has ever been provided before.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that Liberal cover-up stinks, and I will tell you what else stinks: the Liberals' response since cutting the danger pay of Canadian troops fighting ISIS, and it has been embarrassing.

Conservatives forced the hands of the Liberals in fixing this outrageous decision, but today we learned the Liberals issued a ministerial order that is only returning some of the danger pay for some of our troops.

Military families who are no longer receiving this military danger pay are now turning to food banks to get by.

Why is the Minister of National Defence not standing up for our troops who are being treated so poorly by these Liberals?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rioux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to providing appropriate compensation to our troops for the remarkable work they are doing in Canadian Armed Forces operations. As the minister has said repeatedly, he is determined to take action on this.

We recently modified the dates on which risk levels came into effect so that Canadian Armed Forces members deployed in Kuwait when the risk levels were lowered will not be affected by this change during their deployment.

[English]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the military see the truth. They see it on their paycheque at the end of the month.

[Translation]

On April 6, the hon. member for Gatineau told me that I would get evidence of the capability gap that was cited as the reason for procuring the 18 Super Hornet jets without a bidding process. He told me that the Department of National Defence would provide me with that information.

However, on Tuesday, in committee, the Liberals voted twice against the Conservative motion calling on the Minister of National Defence to come present that evidence.

The Liberals keep saying that this capability gap exists. Why are two ministers responsible for this file unable to prove it and unable to illustrate their point in writing in a letter?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the debate, I shared some good news with my colleague. I told him that our government is determined to provide our men and women in uniform with the equipment they need, the equipment they did not have access to for the nine years of the previous government's reign. These aircraft are needed to satisfy an interim operational requirement until the fleet is permanently replaced through a competitive procurement process.

In a letter of request to the U.S. government, Canada listed its capability, scheduling, and economic spinoff requirements pertaining to the procurement of the 18 Super Hornets.

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CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning's edition of *Le Devoir* stated that Donald Trump intends to renegotiate NAFTA and that he wants to abolish the cultural exemption that has protected our distinct culture for 30 years. This means that our films, our music, and all of Quebec culture will get no protection from the American steamroller.

Even Liza Frulla, president of ADISQ, is sounding the alarm. This morning, she had this to say about the minister: “Her intentions are still not clear. We want to know what the federal government's position is on this file.”

When it is at the negotiating table, the government will have to defend our distinct culture. One must be clear when negotiating.

Will the minister immediately declare that the cultural exemption in our free trade agreements is non-negotiable?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his important question and recognize his passion for this matter.

Of course we recognize the important contribution of the arts and culture to society and Canada's economy. NAFTA negotiations have not begun. However, if Canada receives notification of the intent to negotiate, we will be ready.

Oral Questions

I would like to remind my colleague that cultural diversity is the basis for my efforts. That is why I am working in Canada and abroad to preserve cultural diversity in the digital age.

* * *

• (1145)

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many organizations are waiting for funding from the skills link program, but the news from the minister's office is not good. They cannot provide a date or tell groups that applied last July how long it will be before they get an answer. Groups whose projects were supposed to start on April 1 are being advised to seek other sources of funding. How arrogant. These organizations need funding now.

When will the government be able to fund these projects?

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that these talks are ongoing, that the province and the federal government are in the midst, and we anticipate decisions will be made in the near future.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Status of Women. Like many Canadians, residents from Oakville North—Burlington watched with hope and optimism as Malala Yousafzai addressed our Parliament yesterday. Her dedication to girls' education and gender equality through such hardship is a testament not only to her character but to what all women, girls, men, and boys are capable of.

While we recognize it is a long road to ending gender-based violence throughout the world, I would like to know what we here in Canada are doing to end gender-based violence.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague, the member for Oakville North—Burlington, for her ongoing leadership.

Malala's story reminds us why we need to work together to put an end to gender-based violence. That is why budget 2017 put aside \$100.9 million to do just that.

We heard from survivors and experts from across the country. Our gender-based violence strategy is framed by three pillars: prevention, support for survivors and their families, and a responsive legal and justice system.

Malala is a living reminder of how one girl, one voice, can make real change.

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INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are trying to sell a flawed Canadian free trade agreement, but Canadians and producers are not buying it. It does eliminate interprovincial trade barriers and subsidies. It is not free trade. In fact, all that our

Canadian craft brewers, distillers, and winemakers received from the Liberals was a crippling tax increase.

The owner of Whipsnapp brewery, right here in Ottawa, said he would be able to create more jobs if he had an open market, but with the rules he has, he is so suppressed.

When will the Liberals ask the Supreme Court for clarification on section 121 of the Constitution so we can finally truly have free trade in Canada?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, landing a new interprovincial trade deal is no small achievement.

We congratulate the Federal and provincial governments for delivering on their commitment to complete a new free trade agreement as we celebrate our 150th year as a country.

Do members know who said that? It was Luke Harford, president of Beer Canada.

* * *

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, shippers need to begin negotiating contracts for this fall's harvest. Unfortunately, they will be doing so in a climate of uncertainty.

Once again, the transport minister is coming perilously close to allowing key provisions of the Fair Rail for Grain Farmers Act to sunset. These provisions are good for producers and good for our economy. They should be maintained.

When will the minister introduce legislation to make these measures permanent?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure my colleague that we have this in hand. We have been working very hard with the shipping community, the farmers, the railways, in the past year, with enormous amounts of consultation. We are very aware of the schedule. We will be bringing forward modern freight rail legislation quite shortly.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in my province of Saskatchewan almost 10% of all judicial appointments remain vacant. These vacancies have lingered since the Liberals were elected 18 months ago. The Chief Justice of Saskatchewan has been very clear. He has said, "Talk is cheap."

We all know there are plenty of qualified candidates to fill these vacancies. However, the justice minister continues to stand by as accused murderers and even rapists go free.

Oral Questions

How many families will be denied justice before the minister finally does her job?

• (1150)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to say that the government is walking the walk on this side of the House when it comes to judicial appointments. Our government has implemented an open, transparent, and merit-based appointments process. Since being elected, we have appointed 51 judges, including 22 deputy judges, across the country. Under our merit-based appointments process, 60% of the judges named have been women. That is up 35% from the last government.

In addition, budget 2017 provides funding for 28 new judicial positions. We look forward to filling them with great dispatch.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while they dither, criminals go free.

However, those are not the only vacancies going unfilled: the Chief Electoral Officer, the lobbying commissioner, the Ethics Commissioner. Now the Information Commissioner is retiring. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is under investigation by the Privacy Commissioner, the acting commissioner of lobbying, the interim Commissioner of Official Languages, and the acting Ethics Commissioner.

Why is the Prime Minister so reluctant to make these appointments? Could it be that he is afraid of permanent oversight officers investigating him?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, exactly as we committed to Canadians, we introduced a new merit-based appointment process. These positions that Canadians fill are very important positions, and we take them very seriously.

Within our merit-based appointment process, which is more open and transparent, diversity is taken into consideration. The two official languages of our country are taken into consideration. We are looking at gender when we make these decisions. It is really important. Most importantly, all these positions can be applied for online. I encourage all Canadians to apply.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Trois-Rivières are disappointed in the Liberals' latest budget for a number of reasons, one of them being that there is no money in it for a high-frequency train.

The Minister of International Trade would like us to believe he is promoting it, the Minister of Transport has been telling us since 2015 that he is studying it, and the Minister of Finance is probably waiting

until his infrastructure bank is set up so he can line his friends' pockets instead of making sure costs and fares stay reasonable.

Everyone from Quebec City to Windsor is wondering if the Liberal train even has a conductor.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I can reassure my colleague that we are working on this file. We allocated \$3.3 million in the 2016 budget to examine the possibility of a high-frequency train between Windsor and Quebec City. This issue is top of mind these days. We will be able to make decisions once we have completed our study.

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[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one month ago, UNESCO warned that Wood Buffalo National Park might be put on the UN's world heritage endangered list. This would be an international embarrassment for Canada and for the Liberal government.

UNESCO said that the Site C dam in British Columbia should not go ahead until a proper impact assessment was complete. In response, the environment minister said that the report was "a call to action", but we have had nothing but silence since then.

What action will the minister take to protect Canada's largest national park, and when will she finally take it?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for raising this very important issue. We do consider the UNESCO report a call to action. I met with Wood Buffalo people to talk to them about how we can move forward. We understand that we need to be working also with the provinces to find a solution. We are moving forward right now to do so.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new report reveals that the Prime Minister will take \$130 million out of Alberta and B.C. this year by charging GST on top of their provincial carbon taxes. It is shocking. That is \$130 million in federal taxes, despite the Prime Minister's promise that carbon pricing would be revenue neutral for the federal government. It is yet another broken promise that will take more money out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister stop increasing taxes, keep his promises, and immediately eliminate this unfair tax on a tax?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to consider the actions we have taken on taxes. We lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians. That is the very first thing we did. We are committed to tax fairness. That means we are going to think about Canadian families first. We are going to continue with measures that are going to help families so we can have a better economy. We know that works.

Oral Questions

What we are seeing with the changes we put in place is that our economy is becoming more resilient. We are seeing more jobs. Behind those jobs, families are being more successful. This is what we are working toward in making our economy better.

● (1155)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are adding bigger deficits, and Canadians are being taxed deeper and deeper in debt.

The Prime Minister claimed that revenue from his carbon tax would stay in the provinces and territories where it was collected, yet the GST on carbon tax goes to Ottawa.

When will the Prime Minister get his story straight, come clean with Canadians, and not tax a tax to pay for his out-of-control spending?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to be clear that what we are working toward in all of the efforts we put forward is improving the lives of middle-class Canadians and making our economy stronger. As we think about taxes, we are thinking about how we can lower the impact on middle-class Canadians, so we can have a more optimistic sense of what they can achieve. That is helping to turn around our economy. We have more jobs being created and we have a future that looks brighter as a result of the actions we have taken in this regard, in all of our measures.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the last election, do members remember what the Prime Minister promised? It was small, modest deficits.

Since then, the Prime Minister has been nickel-and-diming Canadians by raising taxes and eliminating tax credits. This week, the Liberals tabled 300 pages of billions of dollars of new taxes and user fees on struggling Canadians, including increases for passports, fishing licences, and permits for small businesses.

How much more will these Liberals take out of the pockets of hard-working Canadians?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we care about hard-working Canadians. We care about putting Canadians to work.

What we can see from the things we have done is an enormous difference in our country. Over the last year, 286,000 new jobs have been created in the country, 81% full time. Behind every one of those jobs is a family, a family that is more optimistic, a family that can help their family to be more confident about the future. That is what is creating the growth in our economy that we need.

We are focused on growth and on making our economy better, and it is working.

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[Translation]

TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one sector that is particularly important to my constituents in Alfred-Pellan is the burgeoning electric vehicle industry. My constituents want to contribute to reducing emissions and protecting future generations.

Can the Minister of Transport tell Canadians how he plans to make it even easier to use electric vehicles across the country?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Alfred-Pellan for that very good question.

Canadians know that a strong economy and a clean environment go hand in hand. That is why we are actively working on making Canada a leader in the green transportation sector.

In budget 2017, we announced a \$120-million investment to deploy infrastructure for electric vehicle charging and natural gas and hydrogen refuelling stations. These are the types of measures that are going to help us achieve our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the chance to travel coast to coast across Canada listening to young people. They have told me that they want real action when it comes to the unemployment crisis they are facing.

In the past year, 42,000 full-time youth jobs have been lost in our country. Instead of providing incentives to employers to create new jobs, however, budget 2017 only provided money or incentives for existing jobs.

Will the minister of youth finally listen to Canada's young people and quit attacking innovative employers that want to create new jobs? Will the government equip them as the best-equipped individuals in the country to give Canada's youth a second chance?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing as a government.

We are equipping the youth for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow by providing those opportunities in skills training, apprenticeships, access to post-secondary education, co-op placements, work integrated learning opportunities, and summer jobs, doubling the number of summer jobs that went 10 years under the last government without any investment. We are getting the job done for young Canadians.

* * *

● (1200)

TAXATION

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, although many people may have overlooked it, budget 2017 announced changes to the GST treatment of ride-sharing services. Could the Minister of Finance share the rationale behind this decision?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the House knows, we are focused on tax fairness for Canadians. We know that as the economy changes, we need to ensure our tax system stays up to date. That is why in budget 2017 we made sure that ride-sharing services and taxi services were at a level playing field. They both are subject to GST/HST. That is a fair way to deal with this system.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week I introduced Bill C-350, a bill that is identical to Bill C-561, which had been put forward by the former Liberal justice minister Irwin Cotler. This is good, non-partisan legislation to combat forced organ harvesting, people being killed and having their organs taken.

Will the Liberals do the right thing, regardless of the opinion of the Chinese government, and support this life-saving bill?

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend my hon. colleague across the aisle for introducing the legislation. Of course this government stands against the harvesting of organs. We look forward to studying the bill when it goes to committee, and receiving a report back.

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[Translation]

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec suppliers have already begun to pay the price for the sale of Rona to Lowe's. In some cases, their sales have already dropped by 20%. It is remarkable.

The Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development had the power to impose guarantees, but he did not. He had a duty to examine the net benefits of the transaction, but he did not. He just wanted to get the file off his desk. This is about Quebec suppliers and jobs in Quebec.

Will the economic development minister finally admit that he did not do his job on the Rona file?

[English]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the file, we made sure that we did the proper net economic benefit examination. Based on that, we were able to secure good, quality jobs in Canada, particularly in senior management positions. We were also able to secure the head office in Boucherville. More important, this transaction will allow the company to tap into global supply chains as well. This is good for Quebec, this is good for the economy, and this is good for job security.

[Translation]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is certainly not what is happening.

With its mammoth bills, the government is breaking more election promises. Last fall, it was Bill C-29. The government pulled a fast one on us by allowing the banks to get around Quebec's Consumer Protection Act. The change was so well hidden that no one saw it except for the Bloc Québécois. It was a close call. With spring came another mammoth bill, Bill C-44, which is 50% longer than Bill C-29.

What bill of goods is the government trying to sell us this time?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the budget is really about improving the lives of middle-class Canadians and boosting our economy. Every measure in our budget can be found in our bill. It contains only budget measures. That is our approach, and it is the right approach to improve our economic situation now.

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MARIJUANA

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a few minutes the Liberal government is going to introduce its bill to legalize marijuana. This bill will have many more implications for the Government of Quebec than it will for the Government of Canada. It raises issues related to public health, safety, education, economic development, agriculture, and more. This file raises a lot of issues that do not fall within Ottawa's jurisdiction.

Will the government make a solemn promise to not use marijuana as an excuse to infringe on Quebec's jurisdiction?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, I have spent a lot of time working with my counterparts, the health ministers. We have discussed many issues. We discussed the introduction of the cannabis legislation, and we are going to continue to work hard and work with them to protect Canadians' health and safety.

* * *

●(1205)

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): *Qujannamiik uqaqti.* Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Public Services and Procurement.

On February 16, a letter signed by all indigenous members of Parliament was received by the minister requesting that the name of Langevin Block be changed. This request has been made because we believe that the building that houses the Prime Minister's Office should not be named after a key architect of the devastating Indian residential school system.

Could the minister provide the House with an update as to the status of this request?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed the minister did receive the letter, and I thank the member for Nunavut and his colleagues for their advocacy.

As our government has said, there is no relationship more important to our government than the one with indigenous peoples. Our government is fully implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls for action, and this includes developing a reconciliation framework for Canadian heritage and commemoration. Any decision on this issue will be made, of course, in full partnership with indigenous peoples.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have a report from the Library of Parliament that I seek unanimous consent to table. It is a report that clearly shows that the carbon tax is not federally revenue neutral.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Ted Falk: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier today during question period when we questioned the minister about the gag order placed on the RCMP and the CBSA and the Prime Minister's inaction on the issue of illegal migrants, the Minister of Public Safety made reference to a report that would provide data that the RCMP and CBSA officials have been compiling.

Mr. Speaker, I know you could not get unanimous consent from the Liberals on tabling a report that the hon. minister had, but could you ask for unanimous consent to table the report that the minister referred to in his response?

The Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. member is seeking unanimous consent that a document be tabled by a minister. I am not sure that we are into the realm of points of order, but more in the realm of debate, so we are not really at a spot where we can request unanimous consent.

I do see the hon. Minister of Public Safety rising. Perhaps he could bring some clarification to the point.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated during question period, these statistics will be published very shortly, and I will make sure the hon. gentleman gets a copy as soon as they are available.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is Thursday, but it feels like a Friday for some reason.

I would like to ask the government House leader if she could let us know what we will be doing when we get back after our two-week constituency break in early May.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during the next two weeks, as the opposition House leader has said, members of the House will be in their ridings, working hard for their constituents. Upon our return on

Routine Proceedings

Monday, May 1, we will commence second reading debate of Bill C-44, the budget legislation, for the week.

[Translation]

Thursday, May 4, shall be an allotted day.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CANNABIS ACT

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-45, An Act respecting cannabis and to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Criminal Code and other Acts.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (offences relating to conveyances) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

EXPORT AND IMPORT PERMITS ACT

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-47, An Act to amend the Export and Import Permits Act and the Criminal Code (amendments permitting the accession to the Arms Trade Treaty and other amendments).

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

* * *

● (1210)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, three reports of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The first concerns the annual summer meeting of the Western Governors' Association, held in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, U.S.A., from June 12 to June 14, 2016.

The second concerns the annual summer meeting of the National Governors Association, held in Des Moines, Iowa, U.S.A., July 14 to July 17, 2016.

The third concerns the annual national conference of the Council of State Governments, held in Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, U.S.A., from December 8 to December 11, 2016.

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

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates regarding the certificate of nomination of Patrick Borbey to the position of president of the Public Service Commission.

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 15th report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled “Canada’s Housing Markets: Benefits, Barriers and Bringing Balance”.

This study started with a motion to do a comprehensive study of issues surrounding the Canadian residential real estate market. I will admit, if I could put it this way, that it became a moving target, with events happening fast in the market during our study. I therefore want to give a special thanks to the extraordinary effort put in by analysts Dylan Gowans and Florian Richard, their manager June Dewetering, and clerk Suzie Cadieux.

I also want to thank committee members from all parties as well as the witnesses for their efforts in getting this study done.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I think there is a dissenting opinion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a dissenting opinion with regard to both the form and the substance.

In the name of the official opposition, I would like to thank the people who support the work of the committee, the clerks and the other employees. I would also like to thank them for the good work they do.

I have the honour to table the dissenting report of the official opposition regarding Canada’s housing market. At a time when the government is increasing Canadians’ tax burden, there was a need for a study of the housing market because people need to save before they make the biggest investment of their lives.

After several weeks of testimony, it is obvious that the October 3 changes to mortgage rules have had a negative effect on the housing market and the Canadian economy. It is now more difficult for buyers to obtain a mortgage. These changes are detrimental to buyers, mortgage brokers, and the construction industry.

For these reasons, the official opposition is tabling this dissenting report.

* * *

•(1215)

[*English*]

CANADA SHIPPING ACT, 2001

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-352, An Act to amend the Canada Shipping Act, 2001 and to provide for the development of a national strategy (abandonment of vessels).

She said: Mr. Speaker, for decades now, all three of Canada’s coasts have been experiencing repeated calls from coastal communities about the repeated occurrence of the issue of abandoned vessels. These risk oil spills . They risk jobs in our communities, jobs in aquaculture and the commercial fishery. A no man’s land of jurisdiction, a hole in responsibility, has been identified.

My predecessor, Jean Crowder, brought similar legislation to the House. Last February, more than a year ago, I tabled Bill C-219. Today I rise to update that legislation in response to repeated calls from local government and the failure of the Liberal government to meet its six-month deadline imposed by this Parliament to table solutions before the House.

Together, let us end the runaround and name the Canadian Coast Guard as the agency responsible to act on abandoned vessels. Let us fix vessel registration and get the costs off taxpayers. Let us build a coast-wide strategy in co-operation with provinces and municipalities. Let us act before vessels sink and spill oil by piloting a vessel turn-in program. Let us create good green jobs by supporting local marine salvage companies and recycling.

This legislation is built on the good work of many local government associations, the Union of B.C. Municipalities in particular. Just this Sunday its local chapter for Vancouver Island and the Sunshine Coast unanimously endorsed this legislation in an emergency resolution. I am grateful for the support, I look forward to the debate, and I look forward to receiving the support of the House for this long-standing marine pollution problem.

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

* * *

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-353, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (Canada Pension Plan payments).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I want to first thank my colleague the member for Hamilton Mountain for being the seconder of the bill. Not only is he our party’s pension critic, but the bill was also introduced in the last Parliament by his predecessor, Chris Charlton.

Sadly, there is still a dire need for a bill that would preserve the cost of living increase on the Canada pension plan for seniors living in poverty and the many more at risk of falling into poverty.

The indexation of the Canada pension plan was meant to be a safeguard against the cost of living outstripping a senior’s income, yet even a marginal increase in the CPP often means that the same amount is clawed back on the GIS, leaving many seniors no further ahead.

Routine Proceedings

The bill I am introducing today would prohibit any reduction in the guaranteed income supplement if the only change to one's income is as a result of CPP indexing.

If the government is truly interested in bringing about real change for seniors, it will immediately adopt this bill into law, thereby allowing seniors' net income to keep pace with inflation. I hope that all members of the House will agree that this is the very least we can do.

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

* * *

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES ACT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-354, An Act to amend the Department of Public Works and Government Services Act (use of wood).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia for seconding the bill.

The bill calls on the government to give preference to construction with wood when building infrastructure, balancing those decisions on the relative costs of various building materials and the savings in greenhouse gas emissions that those materials might produce.

Designers of modern buildings too often do not think of wood when creating new infrastructure, and there are many reasons to consider wood. It would provide a boost to the Canadian forest industry that is looking to increase domestic markets for their products. It would lower the carbon footprint of large buildings. Buildings made of mass wood products can be built more quickly than conventional buildings, and they are just as safe.

Canada is a world leader in the design and construction of wood buildings. I hope that the bill will promote the construction of many beautiful, clean, and safe buildings made from Canadian wood.

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

* * *

● (1220)

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF CORRUPT FOREIGN OFFICIALS ACT (SERGEI MAGNITSKY LAW)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC) moved that Bill S-226, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of foreign nationals responsible for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights and to make related amendments to the Special Economic Measures Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, be read the first time.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to table my colleague Senator Raynell Andreychuk's bill, Bill S-226, the justice for victims of corrupt foreign officials act, the Sergei Magnitsky law, here in the House.

Sergei Magnitsky was a Moscow lawyer who had uncovered the largest tax fraud in Russian history. He was arrested, detained without trial, tortured, and murdered while he was in prison. He died

on November 16, 2009. It is in his memory that this legislation is being brought forward.

In May 2016, I tabled my own piece of legislation, Bill C-267, which was drafted alongside Bill S-226. By working together, we have been able to expedite the legislative process.

I believe the Liberal government must do more than talk a game when it comes to human rights. It must take concrete action. Bill S-226 would make the amendments, as has been mentioned, by imposing more sanctions on foreign kleptocrats and on violators of human rights. As well, it would empower Parliament, in both the Senate and the House through their foreign affairs committees, by giving them the power to review and report on how the Special Economic Measures Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act are working, and review the list to make recommendations on who should be sanctioned.

Corrupt foreign officials who continually abuse human rights and disregard international law have been using Canada as a safe haven. This must stop. Already the United States, Estonia, the European Parliament, and the U.K. have adopted Magnitsky-style legislation on a global basis. We have to work in concert with our allies to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to sanction individuals who are responsible or complicit in gross violations of international human rights or abusing their positions of authority.

This legislation has already been studied in the Senate and by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, both of which recommend its implementation. The Liberals' policy of normalization and the appeasement of Russia, Iran, and others is not working and must stop. It is time for the government to do the right thing, support this legislation, and sanction corrupt foreign officials.

(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time)

* * *

PETITIONS

PENSIONS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions that I have been keenly waiting to present to the House on behalf of Canadians.

The first is an electronic petition signed by 8,425 Canadians from across the country. They are calling on the Government of Canada to withdraw all support for Bill C-27, an act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985, that the Minister of Finance has tabled in order to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985, and to remind the current Liberal government of its promise to help Canadians realize their goal of a secure retirement.

Routine Proceedings

● (1225)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from Canadians asking for the government to deliver the promise to reform the Canadian electoral system, to end first past the post before the next election, and adopt a fair and proportional voting system so that the Parliament of Canada can actually reflect how electors vote.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from Edmontonians asking the government to comply with the historic ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to fund systemic shortfalls in first nation child welfare and end the systemic discrimination against first nation children.

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the final petition is from Edmontonians asking the government to cease continuing the Harper cuts to health care and to step up and defend universal public health care for all Canadians.

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at Camping Domaine Chartrand in Lefaivre, Ontario. It is located in a pristine peninsula in the Ottawa River in the riding of Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time employees year-round be treated and taxed as small businesses.

CHILDHOOD CANCER

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table e-petition 627 on childhood cancer submitted by my constituent, Wayne Reil. There are 4,641 signatories who have shared their concern and passion for increasing the supports available to children with pediatric cancer.

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Algoma passenger rail service is still off the rails and therefore I continue to get petitions for the Minister of Transport.

The petitioners basically indicate how much of a substantial hardship it has been for residents, businesses, and other passengers. The petitioners are from Sault Ste. Marie, Echo Bay, Goulais River, and Hilton Beach. The rail used to get a \$2.2 million investment from the federal government and that investment actually netted \$48 million a year. We can see how difficult it has been for the communities in those areas. The petitioners have also indicated that alternate ways of access are not reliable, safe year round, or are non-existent, and that the few industrial roads are only maintained when and if industries need them. They are not for public use.

The petitioners are calling on the government to put the Algoma passenger train back in service and to ensure the mission of Transport Canada be fulfilled.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to present this petition that states: “Whereas hospice palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual; and whereas hospice palliative care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, affirms life, regards dying as a normal process, and intends neither to hasten nor postpone death; and whereas hospice palliative care is not specifically mentioned in the Canada Health Act; and whereas hospice palliative care is not accessible and available to all Canadians; we, the undersigned, residents of Canada, request the House of Commons in Parliament assembled to specifically identify hospice palliative care as a defined medical service covered under the Canada Health Act, so that provincial and territorial governments will be entitled to funds under the Canada health transfer system to be used to provide accessible and available hospice palliative care for all residents of Canada in their respective provinces and territories.”

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of residents in the Cowichan Valley on beautiful Vancouver Island, British Columbia, who recognize that climate change is resulting in lower water flows in the Cowichan River, which is posing a threat to fish and fish habitat, both of which fall under federal jurisdiction.

There is a Cowichan River weir up at Lake Cowichan, and that is responsible for maintaining adequate flow rates in the summer to ensure that healthy populations can survive in the river.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to recognize its jurisdiction in these important areas, recognize that the Cowichan River is an important heritage and index river for British Columbia, and to provide the necessary funding to raise the weir to make sure that drought does not happen anymore.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present two petitions. The first addresses gender-based violence. It is very appropriate with yesterday's visit from Malala.

It highlights that ultrasounds are being used to tell the sex of an unborn child, so if it is a girl the pregnancy can be terminated. It highlights that there are over 200 million girls missing in the world due to the use of sex selection.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to condemn discrimination against girls occurring through sex selection.

● (1230)

IMPAIRED DRIVING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in regard to vehicular homicide. The petition sadly informs the House that 22-year-old Kassandra Kaulius was tragically killed by a drunk driver, a person who chose to drive while impaired.

Families for Justice are Canadians who have lost a loved one, killed by an impaired driver. They believe that Canada's impaired driving laws are much too lenient. They want the crime to be called what it is, vehicular homicide.

The petitioners are calling on the Prime Minister to honour his letter and to support legislation to condemn this. The petition also highlights that 1,200 Canadians are killed every year by a drunk driver.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish you and all members of this House a wonderful blessed Easter as we remember the great love and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table petition e-516 on behalf of Mothers Offering Mutual Support.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Public Safety to conduct a full review of the use of ion scanners in prisons, and to explore alternative measures of keeping drugs out of prison, given the extremely high rates of false positives and the impact that has on the rehabilitation of inmates as it causes problems with visits from family and friends. We know that is an important component to rehabilitation, and consequently to ensuring public safety.

I am very pleased to work with them and to table this petition on their behalf today.

TAXATION

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from constituents right across Ontario.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Finance to ensure that family-run campgrounds are granted active business status, similar to other tourism operators, such as hotels, motels, and marinas, in order for campground owners to be able to claim the small business tax deduction.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present petitions signed by Canadians from Westlock in my riding.

These petitioners are concerned that assisted suicide creates new opportunities and occasions of abuse against seniors, disabled people, and other socially vulnerable people. As such, these petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to adopt the strongest possible legislation against the legalization of euthanasia

Routine Proceedings

and/or assisted suicide, and to establish a robust national strategy on palliative care.

* * *

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.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

On Monday evening, I submitted a request for emergency debate to the Chair. The normal process would be that the request for emergency debate would be considered during requests for emergency debate, which is the following day. Typically that happens on Tuesday. However, because of various motions that took place on Tuesday and because of an order set out changing the normal rules on Wednesday, I did not have a chance to move that motion for an emergency debate.

The Standing Orders, as I read them, are quite clear. They do not prescribe a maximum amount of time for that prior notice. They only prescribe the minimum time. The member must provide a letter to the Speaker at least one hour before that motion is moved, then the member has an opportunity to move that request during requests for emergency debate. I sent a letter asking for an emergency debate with respect to the crisis in Syria.

Today would be the first available opportunity after I sent the letter to move the request for an emergency debate. There has been no period of requests for emergency debate since that letter was placed on Monday. There is nothing in the Standing Orders to describe a maximum period of notice, be it 24 hours, the day before, or anything else. Therefore, given the Standing Orders, I think I should have the opportunity now to request an emergency debate with respect to the situation in Syria, as per the letter I sent to the Speaker on Monday.

● (1235)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Sherwood Park for his point of order. I refer to page 690 of O'Brien and Bosc, under initiating debate, pertaining to emergency debates. It states:

Any Member...who wishes to move the adjournment of the House to discuss a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration must give the Speaker written notice of the matter he or she wishes to propose for discussion at least one hour prior to rising in the House to make the formal request.

Privilege

In respect to the member's request, it is noted that the member did submit the request at an earlier time. In fact, the House was not in a position to accept that request for emergency debate as routine proceedings had not completed at that time. Therefore, the member would be obliged to resubmit his request for said emergency debate. Therefore, due to the fact that notice had not been given in the last hour, or at least an hour prior to today's consideration of routine proceedings, we are not in a position to receive the request for emergency debate.

Of course, the hon. member will have the opportunity to do so the next time we have routine proceedings, which will be on Monday, May 1, at the ordinary time of routine proceedings. He can get his request in prior to one hour before routine proceedings that day, which typically occurs after question period.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up debate on the question, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill had eleven and a half minutes remaining in the time for her remarks, plus the time for questions and comments that will follow.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great privilege to speak to a question of privilege. Before question period today, I finished my remarks by talking about how the subamendment that has been moved in this House is to address this question of privilege by having it take precedence at PROC. I would like to spend the remainder of my time trying to persuade some of my colleagues here on the import of supporting this particular subamendment.

Right now, I believe PROC is looking at an issue that should definitely be punted to the side in terms of the importance of this particular motion of privilege. What is PROC looking at right now? As I mentioned earlier, the government House leader has introduced some marching orders on behalf of the Prime Minister to unilaterally change the rules of Parliament. The proposed changes would effectively and permanently shut down Parliament on Fridays, allow the Prime Minister to be accountable to this place for only 45 minutes per week, and also permanently curtail my voice and the voice of others who are sitting here, in terms of the amount of time and the different mechanisms at our disposal to raise the issues that our constituents bring to us.

I believe that PROC started looking at this particular issue on March 22, and that meeting has extended until today because, regardless of political stripe in this House, we feel that nobody should be able to change the rules such that they make it more convenient for the Prime Minister to push an agenda forward. My colleague from Chilliwack earlier today talked about how these seats do not belong to us but rather to the people of Canada, and our role here is to hold the government to account in its legislation. That of course means that many of us are not going to agree with government legislation. Sometimes we might. However, our purpose here is to come up with policy instruments that are in the best

interests of all Canadians, which is why this place exists. This is why debate exists. Each of us is elected by people to stand here and debate legislation. What these marching orders from the government House leader would do is permanently curtail our ability to do that, because the Prime Minister sees this place as an inconvenience.

Earlier today, I noted that the key difference between us and dictatorships like China is that we actually have the ability to push back and hold the government to account. This place here is Canadian democracy, and if they take away our ability to utilize the rules of democracy, they are actually fundamentally changing the tenets of Canadian democracy, which we do not support.

PROC has become a tool of the Prime Minister's Office, so instead of the committee itself becoming a master of its own domain, it is taking orders from the Prime Minister's Office. Some of the things that are in here are very Orwellian newspeak. The term "modernizing the Standing Orders" I find hilarious. Basically, what the Liberals are trying to do is to permanently take away my right to speak for my constituents, and even Liberal backbenchers would lose their ability to hold the government to account. That is not modernization.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That is called a dictatorship.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, that is called a dictatorship. My colleague from Lethbridge filled in the blank for me on that one.

Mr. Speaker, here are some of the things that I find absolutely crazy. Listen to this line: "...decisions must be made after a reasonable amount of debate." The government does not get to decide what a reasonable amount of debate is. The people of Canada get to decide what a reasonable amount of debate is, by electing us. The Prime Minister cannot unilaterally change the rules of Parliament to decide what that is. That is a function of Parliament.

It also states, "Societal changes have also brought about the need to ensure greater predictability in the House...to ensure Members have a better balance; and, to encourage under-represented segments of society to seek elected office." I do not understand how curtailing the amount of debate time that each of us who has been elected here has would achieve better "balance". I take that as meaning that the Prime Minister wants to work less. That is better balance to me. Taking Fridays off seems a little crazy. As for "to encourage under-represented segments of society to seek elected office", I am not sure who would want to seek elected office after we have all had the ability to rise and speak, per the rules of this House, taken away. This is why what is happening at PROC is so ridiculous.

● (1240)

Even under previous Liberal governments, former prime minister Jean Chrétien utilized a mechanism by which all parties had to have consensus on any rule change, because we realized that while we may disagree vociferously on matters of public policy, we all agree that Canadian democracy has to function by some standard framework of rules that cannot be unilaterally changed by the dictator who is the current Prime Minister.

Privilege

The other thing that I found in here was that the Prime Minister's Office said that the ringing of bells and taking of recorded divisions is a time-consuming exercise.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, my colleagues are laughing. What the Liberals are saying in this paper is that being summoned to vote on legislation is somehow an inconvenience. For anyone who might be watching this debate, that is our job. That is what we get paid to do. When the bell rings, we get to stand up and vote. However, they want to change that somehow.

The Liberals want the House to agree to sit beyond the dates of adjournment, and to sit longer days. I am just reading through this, and every time I look through this craziness, I wonder why the government is doing this.

I have just had a note passed to me suggesting I explain what PROC means, for the people who are listening. This is the procedure and House affairs committee that examines these types of changes. This committee is also tasked with looking at motions of privilege.

The Liberals tried to do this last year. We all remember the infamous Motion No. 6, where the government tried to change the Standing Orders unilaterally. The only reason that motion failed was that the House of Commons got so heated over our rule changes that the Prime Minister elbowed somebody in a fist fight here in the House of Commons. What I am wondering is why, instead of wasting all of this time trying to change the rules to make Parliament less democratic, the government cannot just get on with the business of governing this country. Canadians must be watching the Prime Minister trying to make his job easier and saying he should just do his job; that is what they are paying him to do. However, no, here we are today.

One of my many colleagues here today who sit on the PROC committee told me that—I think it was last night—one of the Liberal members on the committee stood up and professed not to understand why members were doing this, saying it is just such a waste of time. For the Liberal Party of Canada, Parliament is a waste of time. What we do here when we stand up and oppose the tax hikes or the justice legislation that waters down the rights of victims to seek justice, and all of these sorts of things, the Liberals feel is a waste of time because they just want to push their agenda through.

My colleagues opposite will not agree with my position on many issues, as I don't agree with them, but what we do here matters. This debate matters. That is why we will see members from the NDP, the Bloc, and the Green Party all stand up and say in unison that this is important.

In fact, the member for Malpeque, who is a Liberal member, said the same thing in debate. I do not have time read the whole quote, but he said:

However, this place is called the House of Commons for a reason. It is not the House of cabinet or the House of PMO. Protecting the rights of members in this place, whether it is the opposition members in terms of the stance they are taking, is also protecting the rights of the other members here who are not members of cabinet or the government.

He is recognizing the fact that Liberal members who are not part of the executive, who are not cabinet ministers, have to have the

right to stand up and oppose or hold the government to account. This is not a partisan issue; this is Canadian democracy. When this motion comes forward, when the subamendment comes forward, anybody who votes against it is voting against that principle, that fundamental principle that there should be unanimity among parties before we change the rules, because they are checks and balances on us.

Going back to the comment made by the member for Chilliwack—Hope, these are not our chairs; they are the chairs of the people of Canada, so we cannot unilaterally change the rules of Parliament without the consent of the people of Canada, which the government does not have. That is why this motion of privilege should take precedence at the PROC committee.

I want to make this point. Some people have said that the Conservative Party invoked time allocation on so many bills, and we did. I take responsibility for that. However, Canadians held us to account for that in the last election. It was an election issue. People said, "You guys invoked time allocation on many bills." For those people who are listening, time allocation is allowed in the Standing Orders to put a time limit on debate. However, there is a political cost to doing that.

● (1245)

What the Liberals want to do here is unilaterally change the rules so they do not have to be held to account by Canadians for curtailing debate on bills. The Liberals should have to stand every single time they invoke time allocation and say, "This is why we are invoking time allocation." Every single time we did that, we were able to say, "This budget bill needs to pass. We feel that debate has been done." The opposition was able to stand, and the media, and say, "No, it is not done", and that discussion occurred.

Even in this marching-orders paper the House leader has talked about, there is actually a quote that says that somehow the discussion by the opposition parties and media about invoking time allocation being a bad thing should be taken out. No. That is democracy. What happens here, we should all be held to account for.

Every single person in this place, cabinet minister or not, should first and foremost prioritize the rights of Canadians to have their voices heard through elected members of Parliament. That is why this discussion is so important here today.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the heart of this debate, if we read the motion and the rulings that are tied to that original motion, is a question of privilege raised by a member who was on a bus when the bells were ringing, and because of the way security detail was leaving the Hill, that bus was blocked and that person failed to get to the House to vote. I think we all agree, because I certainly was here in the last term of Parliament when the same thing occurred to a member of the New Democratic Party, that this is a significant and serious issue. I do not think we would find any debate about that on this side of the House.

Privilege

What we are also hearing is this now being linked to a debate happening in another committee. It is not on a motion or a bill or an act by the government proposed by anyone on the government bench. It is simply on a discussion paper on how to change some of the rules in this House to make sure that people do not get stuck on buses and miss their votes, which is the fundamental principle to which the member just spoke.

We seek to have a conversation about modernizing Parliament, and we seek to protect people's privilege on that. I respect the opposition for fighting for their rights as hard as they are fighting. That is their job and that is their privilege in this House. We are trying to fix the situation where someone with the intent to vote, the intent to represent their constituents, the intent to get to the Hill, is prevented from doing so because of a process that was developed two centuries ago on how to notify people about votes. Nine times out of 10, it is a text we get telling us to vote, not a bell we hear in our offices. It is a light that flashes, not the bell, that actually gets us here.

When we are trying to modernize Parliament, why are the members opposite not talking about how to fix that bus being stuck, to protect people's privilege? That is actually what is on the floor of the House today, not all the other stuff we just heard about for the last 10 minutes.

• (1250)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Number one, Mr. Speaker, I absolutely and unilaterally reject my colleague's newspeak and the use of the word "modernization". What he is saying is that he supports the PMO's dictatorial approach to unilaterally ram down the throats of parliamentarians changes to Canadian democracy.

Second, I reject my colleague's premise, because it was the Prime Minister's Office and the Liberal Party that tried to shut down debate on the original motion. It is the second question of privilege we are debating, which the Speaker of the House of Commons called unprecedented. The premise of the member's question is false.

Third, let us say there was a bill that would give Bombardier subsidies to a company out east, government subsidies, because a member of Parliament in the Liberal Party would like to make it easier for him to get re-elected by not allowing the Billy Bishop airport to have jets. I would argue that it is very important for us to get here to vote, and I am quite pleased to stand here to continue to debate that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I am pleased to see that she corrected the parliamentary secretary's remarks because, in fact, had he been present for the entire debate, he would know that we resumed debate after the government tried to end debate on the question of privilege and that—

The Deputy Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just referenced when I have been and have not been in this House by

suggesting that I have not been following this debate. There is more than one way to follow a debate. One can follow it in the back, via television, and in the office. That is why the bells ring.

I fundamentally ask the Speaker to correct the record. We are not to reference the presence or absence of members in the House. That is a privilege I would hope all parties agree to and all parties respect.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his intervention. He is correct. I must confess that I did not pick up on the commentary of the member for Beloeil—Chambly in that respect. Members are not permitted to make reference to the absence or presence of members in the chamber. There is a long history of practice and convention in that regard.

[*Translation*]

I would ask the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly to avoid those kinds of comments.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Are we resuming debate or are we at questions and comments?

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize. We are indeed at questions and comments following the speech from the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly may continue with his question.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I was not actually talking about the member's presence in the House, but rather the fact that he did not properly identify the substance of the debate on the question of privilege and the Speaker's ruling.

As my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill explained so well earlier, cutting short the debate on a question of privilege is unprecedented. It is funny because, in his speech last Tuesday, the member for Winnipeg North and Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons spent 10 minutes selling the merits of the conversation we are supposed to have and the discussion paper the government put forward. So much for relevance.

The comment I would like my colleague to respond to first of all has to do with the very important link between access to Parliament Hill and our ability to do our job. Second, I want to emphasize the link between that and the fact that the government does not want to discuss this privilege. Lastly, I want to emphasize the very important link between this question of privilege and what is happening at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

• (1255)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the member in saying that my colleague opposite mischaracterized the debate. The motion we are debating right now is on an unprecedented move in Canadian history. We are going to be celebrating Canada's 150th birthday this year. This is the first time we have had to discuss this. The government tried to shut down debate on a motion of privilege without a vote. That is exactly what happened. I think the member missed that point.

Any Canadian who is watching this today should be affronted and absolutely taken aback that the government tried to shut down debate on something as fundamental to Canadian freedom as a question of a member of Parliament's privilege. My colleague from Sarnia—Lambton called it draconian, and she is absolutely right.

My Liberal colleagues are asking why this is happening and cannot believe that we are having this debate. They just want to go home. No. We have to be here, and we have to debate these kinds of issues, because that is how Canada works. It will be over the dead bodies and over the fight of every single opposition member in this place before we allow the Prime Minister of Canada to use this place as some sort of convenient audience before he goes to Broadway to have a selfie taken.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 99% of the things I just heard from the member were most inappropriate. She is attempting to come across as a defender of democracy. I am sorry to disappoint the member, but she is wrong on so many counts.

This is an issue of privilege. I have had the opportunity to debate issues of unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct. This has occurred in the past. The member should listen to the debate that has taken place. I have listened to the debate thoroughly. It seems to me that the Conservatives are working with their brothers and sisters in the New Democratic Party. It is great to see the two parties getting along so nicely. It is nice to see them giving hugs and high-fives and feeling good about their relationship.

What is actually taking place in PROC is all about a discussion on reforming and modernizing Parliament. I get that they are having a difficult time with that.

This motion is all about unfettered access. That is the privilege issue. That was the motion being moved. Why would the Conservatives and the NDP not want to see it ultimately come to a vote?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, much to my colleague's chagrin, I am debating the subamendment, which says that this particular issue should take precedence at the PROC committee, which has been sitting for hours pushing back against the government's attempt to unilaterally change the rules of democracy.

My colleague opposite says it is me who is trying to push back on this and that somehow I am at fault for this. No, it is the people of Canada, who are represented by me and every single other person in this place, who are standing up and saying that this is wrong, and we are not going to stand for this.

I could read quote after quote from the member of Parliament. In fact, I am going to start having on my desk the numerous times, when he was in opposition, he stood and railed against time allocation as somehow an affront to democracy. Now he stands when he has to defend a Prime Minister who is changing the rules of Parliament. That is the epitome of hypocrisy. That is disgusting. He has a daughter in the legislature in Manitoba. For him to stand and defend this vile tripe is probably one of the worst things I have seen in my history as a parliamentarian.

Privilege

We will stand here and continue to push back against this utter garbage, and Canadians will take note, and the Liberals will pay in the next election.

● (1300)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak about this important privilege motion and to share some of my thoughts with the government, other members, and those watching at home.

Because there are many issues that are alive in this conversation, it is important to set the stage a little in what we are discussing and why it is so critically important.

We are in the midst of this pitched battle between the government and the opposition in this place. It is not a partisan fight. It is a battle between government and a united opposition, united on the issues with respect to procedure. That includes not just the Conservatives and the New Democrats, but also the Bloc and the Green Party.

The four opposition parties do not always agree, but when we are talking about the fundamental rights of the opposition and the integrity of our parliamentary institutions, then there are times when we do come together to challenge the abuses being proposed by the government, especially by the Prime Minister and government House leader.

The context of this discussion is a particular privilege motion. Here is what happened.

We had an important vote taking place in the House of Commons on budget day. A number of members were trying to get here for the budget vote. They were prevented from doing so because of some issues with security. They were told that it had to do with the Prime Minister's motorcade, and thus they were unable to vote.

It is a very important principle of this institution that members of Parliament ought to have unfettered access to the parliamentary precincts. It is so fundamental to our job that we be able to be here to vote, but in general that we be able to access Parliament in order to do our job. When things happen to prevent members from accessing parliamentary precincts, therefore preventing them from doing their job, that is by definition an issue of privilege.

This issue was raised and it was recognized by the Speaker to be a prima facie case of privilege. That then opens a debate on the question of privilege, which is supposed to then lead to a vote and then a referral to the procedure and House affairs committee. However, another piece of context is that the procedure and House affairs committee is in the midst of a discussion about the government's desire to unilaterally impose Standing Order changes on the House of Commons.

The government House leader put forward a discussion paper which contained a variety of different ideas, most of which marshalled in the direction of strengthening the relative power of the government in the House, not just the power of the government over the opposition but also the power of the government relative to individual members of Parliament, be they on the government backbenches or on the opposition side.

Privilege

This was proposed as an issue to study at PROC. Quite wisely, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston put forward a motion to have a requirement in the context of that study that there be unanimity on changes that went forward, the principle being that if we were to change the underlying substructure of democracy, the rules that shape how decisions were made, then it was important that all parties agree on them.

We do not want to set a precedent where the government gets to make unilateral changes to the way our democracy works to their advantage. I think government members can understand that this would be a problem, because they are not going to be in government forever. One day, hopefully after the next election, they will be in the opposition, and we, or perhaps somebody else, will be in government.

It is not in their interest or in the interest of this institution to establish a precedent by which a government, any government, could make unilateral changes to the way our system works that would work to its own advantage.

This was the context in terms of the study that was happening at PROC, and the ongoing discussion about the Conservative amendment. It was an amendment that was supported by all opposition parties. As the rules allow for us to do, we are doing the important work of talking that amendment out to ensure the government is not in a position to rush forward with unilateral changes.

While we raise these concerns about the government making unilateral changes, we see continuing actions of the government which contribute to, unfortunately, bad faith. We had this discussion going on about the question of privilege in the House. Then the government realized it did not want the question of privilege going to PROC directly in a way that was envisioned by the amendment put forward, because if it were to do so, this would supersede the discussion on the Standing Orders.

● (1305)

The government is eager to make unilateral changes to the Standing Orders without allowing a meaningful voice for the opposition. It does not want this question of privilege to go to the committee in a way that supersedes the existing piece of committee business being discussed.

The Liberals came up with what they thought was an ingenious strategy to circumvent the way privilege motions were supposed to work. They did something that the Speaker acknowledged in a subsequent ruling was without precedent. They tried to adjourn or end the debate on the question of privilege without a vote on it. They wanted to simply remove the discussion of this important question of members having access to the House of Commons without even voting on it.

At the same time, the Liberals had a member at the procedure and House affairs committee move a motion to say we would do a study of this question of privilege from the House, but we would do it at some point in the future. This was their way of taking the heat off them in the House and then also, in the context of that committee, continue to try to force through the changes they wanted to the Standing Orders.

There are a few important points to recognize about this. One is that this is a failed strategy. It assumes that at some point the opposition will give up with respect to the resistance we are providing at the committee. I can say quite confidently that no member on this side of the House has any interest in giving up that important fight for the integrity of our institution. We have had a number of members speak so far at the committee, but many members have many things to say, have not yet spoken and are eager to speak.

Ironically, this is in the midst of a discussion that has gone on for so long one would expect us to run out of speakers. However, the Conservatives, the New Democrats, and other members in the opposition are eager to continue to bring forward these arguments. Last night and this morning I spoke for about six hours and I have many more things to say. I look forward to bringing those forward at committee. I know other members are in the same situation. We are not backing down on this point of the integrity of our democratic institutions and the way in which Standing Order changes are made.

Nonetheless, the government members thought they were clever by doing something totally without precedent, which was to adjourn a debate on a privilege motion without a vote. This further has contributed to the bad faith that exists here, the concern we have that the government simply cannot be trusted when it comes to preserving our institutions.

What happened after that is what brought us into this subsequent discussion of a question of privilege raised by another member, pointing out what had happened, saying that it was inappropriate and a violation of privilege for the government to end the debate on the previous question of privilege in the manner it did without a vote. The Speaker, quite wisely, ruled that it was not appropriate for the debate to simply end at that point and the possibility of a motion discussing this brought forward at committee did not replace the very important discussion that was happening, that needed to happen in the House of Commons followed by a vote in the House of Commons, which then would go to the procedure and House affairs committee.

Now we are back to this point of discussing this important privilege issue. Yes, it speaks to the issue of members having unfettered access to the House. In principle and in theory, everyone says yes, members of Parliament should have unfettered access to the parliamentary precinct, that they should be able to vote. However, what is happening is that we have a government that is more interested in pushing aside these vital points of discussion because it wants to take advantage of the opportunity it thinks it has to make unilateral changes to the Standing Orders, which would work to the advantage of the government.

We are very saying very clearly, through this motion and also through the amendment we put forward, that this privilege motion is vital. It needs to be addressed here in the House. After that, it needs to go to the procedure and House affairs committee to be studied, and it needs to take priority. This is an urgent question. We are voting quite often in this place because of the current circumstances with, unfortunately, the failure of the government House leader to work constructively with the opposition around the Standing Orders. We are in a situation of having frequent and relatively unpredictable votes.

Privilege

• (1310)

It is very important in the present time that we ensure members have the access they need to the House of Commons. We take that position very seriously.

There can be a discussion on changes to the Standing Orders. In the context of my remarks thus far at the procedure and House affairs committee, where I have talked for a total of about 16 hours, I have barely scratched the surface of the kinds of prospective changes I think could be made to the Standing Orders. I have actually put out a lot of different ideas for the kinds of changes we might see. The discussion of those changes has to happen in the context of an acceptance of the principle of consensus, that we would work together among parties to identify things that would actually improve the functioning of our institutions. We could bring those forward, they would then get support, and we could get them done.

First, we need to deal with the privilege question. Then we need to have an amendment pass, the amendment we proposed, which has the agreement of all the opposition, to ensure the government does not make unilateral changes that undermine the health of our institutions and put all of the power in the hands of the small group on the front bench of the government.

These are the things we need to do. We need to address this privilege question. We need to support it and move it to committee. At the same time, we need to move to a framework in which political parties are co-operating. We are all better off when parties can work together, but that can only happen if we have serious responses from the government with regard to our concerns about unilateral action. We do not see the kinds of efforts the government has put forward to change our institutions. We also have heard the very disingenuous arguments the Liberals have brought forward for them.

It is hard to make sense of the arguments coming from the government on Standing Orders issues. The Liberals reference a mandate from Canadians and they reference the platform they ran on in the last election. Of course, the platform has not been an impediment for them to do things that they had previously said they would not do. It is interesting how selectively they apply it.

Nonetheless, two things in the platform dealt with things that may in some sense have had a relationship to the Standing Orders. One was this idea of having a prime minister's question period where the prime minister would answer all the questions. The other dealt with omnibus bills.

As we have seen, it is not outside the scope of the Standing Orders as they presently exist for the Prime Minister to at least stand after every opposition question is posed. I did not say to answer or respond to, but certainly to stand. There is nothing to prevent that. In fact, there is nothing in the Standing Orders to prescribe which member of the cabinet responds to which question.

Today, we had questions about the legalization of marijuana that were answered by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. I am not aware of what the impact of marijuana use has on climate change. Maybe there is something I do not know about the carbon footprint there. There is nothing in the Standing Orders to say that the minister responsible for a particular file has to answer the question. A member of the government is seen as speaking for the

government in response to the question. Therefore, it would actually be quite unusual for the Standing Orders to prescribe that a particular member of the government respond to questions.

If we put in the Standing Orders that the Prime Minister has to answer questions every Wednesday, it actually creates some problems. We on this side of the House would accept that there would be certain times when the Prime Minister, because of international travel meetings, could not be in the House for, let us say, a week at a time. Perhaps there would be a situation where he could not get back here for legitimate reasons. Let us say he is stuck on an island somewhere and there is no commercial travel available. How would he get back? These are the kinds of situations that may arise if the Standing Orders narrowly prescribe exactly who must answer what questions when. If the Prime Minister wants to answer all of the questions posed every Wednesday, he is welcome to do. Although we have not seen that yet, he can stand after every question on Wednesday if he wants. That does not require Standing Orders changes.

Regarding omnibus legislation, again it is entirely within the purview of the government to decide what kind of legislation it brings forward. The Liberals brought forward a budget implementation act that is over 300 pages and would make amendments to over 20 statutes.

• (1315)

The discussion paper no longer says what the Liberals previously said. It no longer says that the Liberals would cease to bring in omnibus bills. It only says that they would end the inappropriate use of omnibus legislation. It is hard to understand what principal difference there is between their version of the appropriate use and what they described as inappropriate use at previous times.

I said in committee earlier today that omnibus legislation should be used conservatively, in both senses of the term. The government is using omnibus legislation liberally, in both senses of the term. It has not in any way offered a clear way of distinguishing between the two.

In any event, if we are going to talk about prospective standing order changes that have some relationship to the commitments that the Liberals made in and before the election, those are the two we could talk about, that being prime minister's questions, which in some sense the government has started to implement and clearly without requiring changes to the Standing Orders, and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader rising on a point of order?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I truly do appreciate the level of interest in the Standing Orders and the discussion paper. I really would love to see PROC have that discussion. I have been somewhat lenient in rising on a point of order, but I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that you encourage members to be more relevant when it comes to the motion that is being debated currently.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his intervention on the issue of relevance.

Privilege

Members know of course that there is a great degree of liberty on the part of members to pose their arguments in a way that supports a particular premise that they may introduce, usually at the front end of their speech, and we follow this as best we can. We always encourage members to make sure that the points that they include in their remarks are pertinent to the question that is before the House. They do have the option of making points of comparison and then exploring arguments around those comparisons in the course of their speech. I recognize that has tended to be the pattern that we have been seeing in this particular debate.

I would encourage hon. members to make sure that they do, in making these comparisons to a particular premise that they might introduce in their remarks, continue to keep them relevant.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will just say with a great deal of goodwill for my friend from Winnipeg North that his challenging someone on relevance is like the government challenging someone else on omnibus bills.

I do want to clarify that the important point we are establishing here is that there is a pattern of behaviour from the government and that a tenor exists within this chamber. I would like to see us resolve that.

What people are seeing from members on this side of the House are members who want to see us move forward, to move back to the place we were at one time, which is co-operating across the aisle in terms of organizing debate and scheduling things in the House or committee. Members know that this co-operation existed.

We are now at this point that the government sought to adjourn the debate on a question of privilege without a vote, and we have arrived at this point in the debate of efforts to make unilateral changes to the Standing Orders. It is striking because what we heard from some members in the context of the discussion at PROC was that they would like to get to unanimity, that they would like to reach an agreement with respect to changes that are going to happen to the Standing Orders.

Then the government House leader said on television that the Liberals will not allow the Conservatives to have a veto on changes that the government wants to make to the Standing Orders. Unfortunately, if the government House leader is intent on drawing a line in the sand in favour of unilateral changes, then we are obliged—and it is not just a political choice, but we are obliged—to stand up for this institution, for the integrity of the process by which we make decisions and the substructure of democracy, and to do so not just as Conservatives but as members of a united opposition who are committed to these issues and as proud Canadians who care about the strength and integrity of our institutions.

We are going to continue to raise these issues in terms of this privilege motion, in terms of the discussions at PROC, in terms of the problems with the way the government is approaching it. Right now, there is just no off-ramp unless the government agrees to come back to the table to work with us—yes, to have a conversation about prospective changes to the Standing Orders, but also a conversation that ensures that all voices are heard.

● (1320)

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again I come back to what is at the heart of this conversation, which is the question of whether the question of privilege about a member of this House having the right to vote was dealt with. That is fair enough. The House has made a ruling, and we respect the ruling that the Chair made.

However, the fundamental issue is not really even about the rule changes that have been proposed as a point of conversation. I remind Canadians and people watching that there has been no bill or motion introduced around any particular change to the House procedures; what there has been is a request by the government to have a conversation about how to modernize this place so that, for example, people do not get stuck on a bus and miss a vote, which I think is an archaic way to manage the affairs of a modern Parliament.

What we are trying to figure out and look at is actually a series of contradictory ideas: Should we sit on Fridays? Should we have longer constituency periods and longer sessions of sitting? Should we sit longer in the day, or should we sit shorter in the day, but sit for more days? It is a series of contradictory ideas that are being presented to try to modernize this place.

What I find fascinating is that what is really being stopped here is not a change to the House's procedural rules. What is being filibustered, effectively, by this motion and others, is the idea that the majority of the House of Parliament gets to choose an executive, and the executive gets to set the agenda.

There is no prescribed outcome to this conversation. There is no dictated, formal set of decisions as part of this conversation. If fact, if we read the document that is being filibustered, there are contradictory ideas that we want Parliament to resolve.

I think the two sides are united in their opposition because they share something else: they share ideology as the basis of political operation. This party uses ideas; the other party uses ideology, which means they have the answer before the question is even asked, which is why they resent this government proposing agendas for conversation.

Is it not important for the government of the day to set the agenda, and is that not the right that is being challenged by this filibuster?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I believe I did hear some applause from the gallery, so maybe I'll just make a reminder about that, in terms of the security protocols we have.

It is striking to me, listening to that member's incoherent efforts to distinguish between idea and ideology, that it is beyond ridiculous. It is not even worthy of refutation.

The member, though, cannot get through a series of questions without directly misstating the relationship between the executive and Parliament. He says that it is up to the executive to set the agenda here. We have government orders, which are a period of time in which the government has the ability to bring forward legislation, but the agenda of this place is set according to rules that are agreed on by members of Parliament. It is not up to the government to decide unilaterally when this House sits, when it does not sit, or what kinds of things are discussed and when.

The government is able to bring forward matters for discussion during periods that are prescribed within those Standing Orders. That a parliamentary secretary, an ostensibly senior member of a government, would get up to say that this is designed so the executive can set the agenda shows how fundamentally flawed the understanding of this executive is, how fundamentally flawed this approach is to the way this institution is supposed to work.

He spoke about rule changes being, allegedly, a point of conversation. Maybe I will have a chance to get to that in the next question.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is always so eloquent and informed when he speaks.

I am struck by the hypocrisy that I continually hear in this debate. The government is bringing a message that we are having a conversation. This is so misleading to Canadians. There is a motion that it is using its majority to drive through to change procedures. That is unprecedented in 150 years of Parliament. The government says it is open and transparent, but then there are these sneaky things going on in the background.

I wonder if the member would comment, because he has seen them first-hand.

• (1325)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, this is a good point. I do not have a problem with the government bringing forward a discussion paper. I do not have a problem with that being discussed at committee, but we have insisted that there be a framework for that discussion that ensures that opposition voices are heard, because that is what a discussion is. It is where both sides talk, hear each other, and come to some kind of a conclusion.

The government House leader talks a lot about the need to have a conversation. I am all for that conversation, but it has to be in the context of a framework where both sides are talking and both sides are listening. It is not even actually both sides, it is all sides, all different parties, as well as perhaps the different perspectives that may, and indeed do, exist within parties.

The talk on the government side has these sneaky words, not really that cleverly disguised words, that are designed to paper over its effort to impose things unilaterally. Liberals talk about modernization and yet modernization can mean all kinds of different things. At one time, the modernization of Parliament meant increasing the efficiency of the legislative process so that the executive could pass more bills. At another time, modernization, or reform, was used to mean enhancing the role of the private member relative to the executive.

Privilege

We can see in our own parliamentary history in the last 60 years how modernization and reform have been used to describe opposite impulses. That is why we need to have a real conversation that includes every voice.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity in the past to work with Conservative governments and New Democratic governments when there have been substantial rule changes. I have also had the opportunity to work in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when there were some changes to the rules.

The way the changes to the rules would be made is committee members would say they would adopt the low-hanging fruit that everyone could agree on, and nothing really changed. They could not make reference to Speaker's rulings or electronic petitions. Now we have a government that says it wants to modernize Parliament. That means there will have to be some substantial talks. When I reflect on my years in the Manitoba legislature, never did I ever approach the government and say that if I could not get unanimous consent, there could not be any rule changes in the House, because that would be undemocratic.

Would the member not recognize there is a need, at least from the government's perspective, to modernize Parliament? That cannot be done in the identical fashion of everyone agreeing on the low-hanging fruit, such as adding a comma or a period here and there. There needs to be good faith negotiations from the opposition, too. The opposition also has to have a role. It is not fair to demand a veto on it. Would the member not agree?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, in terms of this characterization of a veto, when my wife and I discuss where we are going to go on vacation, if I told her, "You are not going to have a veto on where we go on vacation", that would be a pretty inappropriate thing to say. If there is a decision that should be made together, then effectively, it is done by consensus. It would be silly to—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: You love her. You love each other.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Well, we can have a kind of love across the aisle, as well, Mr. Speaker.

My friend talks about modernization and asks if we need to have modernization of this House. Before we get to answering that question, I have to know what he means by modernization. As I have said before, modernization can mean completely different things. It can mean opposite things, depending on who brings that forward. If the members across the way want to talk about it, that is great. Let us pass the amendment and get on with the discussion that ensures they are listening.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when my colleague was speaking, he inadvertently pointed out a contradiction in mentioning the Minister of Environment and Climate Change answering a question on the marijuana bill being tabled today. It is a contradiction to the Liberal green ideology, where people would be puffing up and putting carbon dioxide into the air. It speaks to the whole basis of the junk science upon which they implement these types of taxes that taxpayers are subject to.

Privilege

When we see these kinds of contradictions that do not make sense, how would the changes to the rules impact our ability to govern and provide Canadians with fairness?

• (1330)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will only add that it is clear that the government's credibility on this file has completely gone up in smoke. It should work with the opposition.

We can achieve consensus. I believe we can make substantial changes to the Standing Orders. I know the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has told *The Hill Times* that he wants to see substantive changes, not just little changes around the edges. I think we can make those changes with consensus. Actually, it is much harder to make those changes unless we have consensus, and it would not be appropriate to make substantive changes without that consensus.

I am optimistic. I think we can get there. Let us get it done. Let us pass the amendment, and then this Parliament can achieve some great things.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that the debate has evolved since the last time I spoke about the question of privilege that is before us. However, one element has persisted, and that is the fact that the government does not seem to understand one thing about this question of privilege concerning access to Parliament Hill and more specifically access of the members for Milton and Beauce to the House of Commons.

If we are stuck in this debate and the Liberals are frustrated that we are still talking about this, it is their own fault. They decided to take unprecedented action, namely, to end debate without a vote and to simply move to orders of the day when the House of Commons had before it a question of privilege, which is the most fundamental issue, according to the existing rules, at least before a change is imposed by the government.

Shutting down debate on a question of privilege and moving on to the orders of the day set by the executive, as the government seems to want to do in every aspect of our work, is unprecedented. The government does not seem to understand that the reason we are still seized with this question goes beyond simple access to Parliament Hill. Access to the Hill is a very important issue that we are addressing today, but the problem is that the government unilaterally decided, as has been their style for several months now, to put an end to this debate, which sends the message that the members' privilege is not important enough and that we have to move on to one bill or another that they want to debate. That is a problem.

We are debating privilege and I will repeat what I said in my speech earlier this week. Privilege is a word that can have a negative connotation. For example, we might associate privilege with the Prime Minister's vacation on a billionaire's privately owned island. However, when we are talking about our privilege as members, we truly mean our ability to represent our constituents here in the House. That is why this is a critical issue.

[*English*]

On the question of privilege, there is a link that needs to be made. Whether it is access to Parliament Hill and to this building here in

Centre Block or whether it is the debate on privilege, which, as our Standing Orders say, is supposed to be the issue that seizes the House when it is brought forward and when the Speaker rules that there is a prima facie breach of that privilege, that then becomes another question of privilege when the government ends that debate, despite the Speaker's ruling.

The Speaker qualified that as unprecedented. To me it is inherently linked with the behaviour of the government for over a year now. It started with Motion No. 6, when the previous government House leader decided that he was too good for members of Parliament's privilege, he and the Prime Minister. Let us face it: we know where this agenda is coming from, and with all due respect to the government House leader, it certainly is unlikely to be coming from her.

The Prime Minister and the then-government House leader decided that they were going to change the rules of the House in order to limit opposition MPs' ability to do their jobs, which is to speak on behalf of the people who elect us.

What happened then was that this whole place became chaos. The government, realizing that it and only it had driven this whole place off the rails and had delayed its own legislative agenda because of its own belligerence and its complete contradiction of its own electoral commitment to make this place work better, decided, wisely, to withdraw. Then the temperature cooled and things went a little better.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, the consideration given to Motion No. 6 over the summer did not produce any results. When we returned in the fall, the government began to abuse time allocation once again. The Liberals are quickly catching up to the previous government's record number of time allocation motions, despite the clear promises that they made during the election campaign.

The government presented this discussion, this conversation, or this plan for modernization to cause confusion about its real intentions, which are to find a way to make Parliament work better for the executive branch, or cabinet, not for members in general.

The substantive issues that the government wants to discuss are very important, but we are not prepared to talk about them as long as we do not have the simple guarantee from the government that it will not proceed unilaterally, since doing so would go against a tradition that has existed in the House of Commons for over 100 years and that has always been respected by both Liberal and Conservative prime ministers.

That is the essential issue, and I do not know why the government cannot understand that. The Liberals keep asking the House why we do not want to discuss this. The reason is that it is not a discussion. It is a dialogue of the deaf, as I said in my last speech on this subject.

Privilege

This government is looking in the mirror and congratulating itself for its great ideas, but it is not prepared to reach out to us and establish a concrete, formal process that will give Canadians, through their MPs, including opposition members and Liberal backbenchers, the assurance that the government will not proceed unilaterally. It is such an easy commitment to make, except, it seems, for the government House leader and, of course, the Prime Minister.

[English]

I want to come back to access to the parliamentary precinct and the question of the Liberals' true intention and ability to respect their own commitment to make this place work better. I want to look at why this problem persists. In some ways, it is getting worse when it comes to access on the Hill.

I want to preface my comments by saying once again, and on this point we can all certainly agree, anything we say criticizing the structure of how things work in this place is always in recognition of the fact that the work both the PPS, the parliamentary protective services, and the RCMP do is second to none. Certainly, it is something I have no ability to be up to the task on. Therefore, we thank them for that. We always recognize that it is a very difficult job.

However, following the events of October 22, 2014, many may have forgotten that a fundamental change was brought to how security operated on Parliament Hill. I want to remind folks of the debate. It was something the New Democrats opposed, but the Liberals and Conservatives supported giving more power to the RCMP for security. On the surface, that is something seemingly benign. However, the key is how parliamentary privilege operates in this place. When we look at the expertise of different security agencies and groups that operate security on Parliament Hill, it is a complicated thing.

The priorities of RCMP officers and their training is not the same as that of the parliamentary protective services people, who fundamentally understand what parliamentary privilege is. It is part of their training to understand the importance of allowing me, or any of my colleagues as members of Parliament, and consequently the people they represent, to get here unimpeded. It is certainly symbolic through the interventions we make representing them. The priority of the RCMP, as we saw with the events on budget day which prevented the members from Milton and Beauce in particular from getting to the Hill on time for a vote, is to protect the Prime Minister and other aspects of protection. That is fine. That is its mandate.

However, it causes confusion. We have to really wonder if the Liberals truly understand the need to really look at these fundamental questions. In the last Parliament, as on many issues that were brought forward by the previous government, they did not ask those tough questions. They just rolled over and said that they would let that change happen because of whatever reason. Unlike the New Democrats, they were not asking the questions on how this would change how this place worked.

• (1340)

That is important, because once again, it seems that the Liberals are doing the same thing, but on the other side now. They expect us to roll over and fundamentally change how this place works and not have a process in place that allows us to ask those questions so the

work opposition MPs and Liberal backbenchers need to do can be done properly.

[Translation]

If we take a closer look at the overall debate on this question of privilege, the debate we are having today and have been having all week, it is interesting to note that parliamentary secretaries are pretty much the only members speaking to this issue. They represent the executive. We do not hear backbenchers say what they really think. We did hear from one backbencher, but he is very experienced and very respected by all parties in the House. The person I am talking about is the member for Malpeque, and I would like to share what he said about the opposition:

However, this place is called the House of Commons for a reason. It is not the House of cabinet or the House of PMO. Protecting the rights of members in this place, whether it is the opposition members in terms of the stance they are taking, is also protecting the rights of the other members here who are not members of cabinet or the government. We talk about government as if this whole side is the government. The government is the executive branch. We do need to protect these rights.

I could not have said it better, whether it is a question of access to Parliament Hill or a member moving to cut this same debate short, a debate on a question which the Speaker of the House, who also protects the rights of all members, has deemed critical, or when this debate is cut short or a motion is tabled in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in lieu of discussion, even though a unilateral attempt is being made to acquire more power over the same executive.

We are in full agreement when we hear such quotes. It is not in fact for the government or the executive to dictate the agenda of the House of Commons. As the Conservative colleague who preceded me said so well, it is Parliament that has to table its legislative agenda in the periods prescribed in the House. There are certain ways of doing this. There are prescribed periods and routine practices that exist. The whole way that the House works is structured, be it the duration of questions and answers during oral question period or the right to table opposition motions. These procedures have always been established with the support, consensus and consent of all the parties, all the members. This is how we preserve the sanctity and the essential functions of the House in our democracy.

For the first time in a great many years, in over 100 years, we have a government that was elected almost solely on its claim to do a better job of respecting democracy than the previous government, and yet, its actions with regard to the operation of Parliament are worse than those of all the governments that came before—not just its immediate predecessor, but every government, ever.

I do not want to exaggerate. I am not the one who is claiming this: the Speaker himself stated that the act of shutting down debate on a question of privilege is unprecedented. Jean Chrétien, Stephen Harper, Paul Martin, all the prime ministers have always sought the consensus of the opposition parties before making fundamental changes to the way that the House of Commons operates. A few minutes of research is all it takes to know that this is not the opposition's claim, but rather a historical fact.

That is why I cannot understand why the government is not simply willing to stand up and say that it will formally commit to not proceeding without consensus.

Privilege

• (1345)

[English]

It is even more baffling when we consider that a fundamental piece of the Liberals' last election campaign, the platform they supposedly are seeking ways to unilaterally adopt, and the reason they are even doing this move in the first place, was electoral reform. However, there was no consensus on that. I suppose consensus is just about as good as everything else in the Liberals' platform; it is only when it suits them. That is unfortunate.

That is a fundamental problem with the way of operating, because if the Liberals really want to make Parliament work, it is not about cherry-picking from their election platform and deciding that consensus is only good when it is good for the Liberal Party of Canada and the front bench of the Liberal government.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's right. People get it.

Mr. Adam Vaughan: How's provincial auto insurance going, David?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I am being heckled by an MP from Toronto about provincial politics. That shows just how seriously he takes how this place works right now.

He was elected on a commitment to make this place work better, but he stood earlier in this place and said it was about making sure the executive could pass its agenda. I hope his constituents will remember that his priority here is the executive passing its agenda, and not making sure that he has the ability, both in committee and in this place, to protect his privilege.

We are not just standing for our privilege. It is for the privilege of Liberal members as well, who have unfortunately, at least in this place, been silent on this. It would be interesting to be a fly on the wall during their caucus meetings and other meetings that they have.

Not only were many of them elected in the 2015 election for the first time, but many of them also ran for the first time. I have no doubt, as I said in my speech on Tuesday on this very issue, that many of them ran because the leader of their party, who is now the Prime Minister, said that we had been going through a horrendous 10 years with a dictator in Parliament, with Stephen Harper, who does not respect the way Parliament works, who tables omnibus legislation, oops, who got elected with 38% of the vote, a so-called majority, in a system that is unfair, oops, who decides that it is more important to make announcements outside of Parliament than in Parliament, in town halls, not doing them here, oops.

All these people ran because that person, the member for Papineau who is now the Prime Minister, the man from Papineau as my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley called him, said that he would be better. He inspired literally over 100 people to run in politics, in some cases for the first time, who are here now. What does he do to thank them? He takes away their ability to participate in debate in this place and its committees. So much for real change.

[Translation]

The Liberal government was elected on the strength of its firm commitment to do things differently, to be different from the government of Stephen Harper and those of the other Liberal prime

ministers, be it on the issue of access to Parliament Hill or invoking closure on debate and discussion, the advance distribution of the budget or a member taking photos in the House for publication on social media with negative comments about the opposition, which is simply fighting for its right to do its job, or Motion No. 6. The Prime Minister has often said he would do a better job.

[English]

The Liberal Party has to change.

[Translation]

He made that statement often during the last election campaign, and indeed, the Liberals have changed. Not only are they as bad as the others in some respects, but they are worse when it comes to safeguarding the importance of Parliament.

When we look at the proposed subamendments asking that the procedure and House affairs committee do better and make this issue a priority, I think that there are two things the government can do if it really believes protecting members' privilege to be a priority. First, it can support the amendments moved by our Conservative colleagues and support the motion as a whole. In addition and above all, it can support the amendment moved by the Conservatives and guarantee that it will not go off on its own, whether on the issue of privilege or the committee's debate.

This must happen not for the members of the House, but for the people whom we represent. Personally, I want to be able to go door-to-door in my riding without every other citizen telling me that they wanted to get involved in politics because they believed in real change yet again, only to be treated with contempt and told that it was no big deal for the government to break its promises on electoral reform or on making Parliament work better.

• (1350)

This is why I am prepared to work with the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Green Party, and also the Liberals. In the interest of democracy, all I ask of them is a guarantee they will engage with us and not impose their way unilaterally.

[English]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I love listening to the NDP talk about the concept of consensus. The New Democrats' concept of consensus is that first we agree to consensus and then others must do what they think is right, and if others do not agree to that, it is not consensus. I will tell members that where that philosophy falls down and becomes the most absurd is in this debate.

Privilege

There is not one single member of Parliament who disagrees with the ruling and the observation that the privileges of the members who were stuck on the bus and could not vote were abridged. There is complete consensus, unanimous consensus, everyone agrees, and what happens? There is an endless debate afterward, not a resolution of the issue when consensus is reached. Consensus becomes the platform for endless debate, and that is a problem.

I appreciate that the process by which we attempted to bring a close to a unanimous position had a subsequent ruling, and that is what the debate on the floor of the House is today, but the notion that consensus is somehow going to magically unlock things in Parliament is absurd. We saw that during the electoral reform debate as well. The New Democrats said there had to be consensus, and then they did not budge from one idea that they held previous to the election on what that consensus must, not could, look like.

My question is on the notion of consensus and the goodwill to fellow parliamentarians. When is the NDP going to support the Bloc Québécois' call for official party status, the very same call the NDP made when their party did not quite meet the standard and was accommodated. Through the spirit of consensus and goodwill to all members, when is the NDP going to afford the Bloc Québécois official party status and let those members sit at committees and get equal rights, as all parliamentarians should; or is their talk just that: talk?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to talk about relevance, I think we had a great case study there.

When it comes to electoral reform debate, I want to address the comments of my colleague, although I know we are getting very much off topic. I will have him know that one of the key pieces in the report that was tabled by that committee was New Democrats—even though it was not the idea that was top of mind for us—looking to Conservatives who feel we need a referendum to move forward on this, and we were able to have that discussion.

I saw the members for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and Skeena—Bulkley Valley stand at a microphone outside this place and say we had decided that, in order to bring Conservatives onside, and hopefully other parties as well, because electoral reform is a critical issue for us and we are seeking that consensus, we were willing to live with a referendum if that is the path the government chooses to go down. What happened? The Prime Minister stood and said there is no consensus.

We did that work at committee, which flies completely in the face of what the member just asserted. That is what matters in these issues, whether it is electoral reform or the way this place works. We have our ideological differences. We might not be political mercenaries like Liberals can sometimes be, certainly in the Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party, but that being said, the key issue is that, when it comes to these fundamental changes, they have never been done without consensus. We will have fundamental agreements on other issues, but certainly we cannot have fundamental disagreements when it comes to changing the rules of how the heart of our democracy works.

• (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I took some exception to the member's comments in regard to the Prime Minister and the change that was committed to Canadians. I would like to remind the member that with private members' bills we have free votes, unlike the New Democratic Party. We have even seen the government lose a number of those votes. We have seen committees where amendments were passed that opposition members proposed.

The member was here during the Harper administration, and that did not occur. I am wondering if the member could be forthright about how we have seen some positive changes and recognize that if the government of the day wants to make significant changes to modernize Parliament and if the combined opposition—the Conservatives and the NDP are united as one, it would appear, on this issue—does not want to reform the Parliament of Canada and modernize it, that could be a problem for the government. This is one of the reasons why we are struggling to make sure that we get that discussion going, but it would be irresponsible to give it a veto. Would the member not agree?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where my colleague gets the idea that our votes are not free, for I can assure him that they are. I do not understand why he would question the fact that we are mature enough to have robust discussions and then arrive at a certain consensus.

This makes two questions in a row, from two parliamentary secretaries, two representatives of the executive, that have attempted to bring up the Bloc Québécois or the operation of the NDP, even though we are talking about the operation of Parliament.

The example given by the Liberals is interesting. They speak of free votes and say that the Liberal backbenchers have won votes in spite of the government's position, but when Bill S-201 received the support of Liberal backbenchers, the justice minister referred it to the Supreme Court. Furthermore, the amendments to Bill C-22 that were supported by certain Liberal members on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security are going to be reversed in the House.

It is all well and good, then, to say they have free votes and to congratulate themselves on that, but if the government can do an about-face on issues of fundamental importance such as medical assistance in dying and the committee of parliamentarians that will be overseeing national security agencies, then it is only smoke and mirrors. In any case, with the proposed changes, we may not even have to get up to vote any more. We will have remote voting or something.

I want to bring my Liberal colleagues back to the essential issue. To guarantee us that members' privilege to represent their fellow citizens is properly defended, we ask for one simple thing: consensus.

Why are they unable to offer us that?

Privilege

[English]

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is curious. My colleague mentioned the Liberals who were getting up to speak and those who were not. I have taken note of this. On this side of the House, I have the freedom to speak at any point I want, on any issue, and to ask questions of the government, of anyone sitting on the other side. It is clear to me that it is not the same in the Liberal caucus, that there are designated spokespersons within the party.

I have to wonder if the information is only being given to a certain circle of people within the Liberal Party. I have had a lot of conversations with my Liberal colleagues on this issue, on what we currently face at PROC. Either they vehemently disagree with it—they think it is wrong and that we should not be going down this path because they have been a member of Parliament and they understand the way things are done here and that we need consensus—or they do not know anything about it. They really do not understand. They think it is only about what is happening at PROC, or they think this question of privilege is something to tie up their time, to cause some kind of shenanigans over on this side of the House. They really do not have the information about this question of privilege and the subamendment to send it to the committee. It is clear to me that if they are not receiving the information, they are not able to make a good decision on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who have sent them here to perform that role.

Has this been my colleague's experience as well, that there are people on the Liberal side of the House who do not even understand what we are debating today?

• (1400)

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, when we sought to understand who speaks on behalf of the government, all we got were more smoke and mirrors.

The government made another commitment with regard to the operation of Parliament, namely that there would be no more parliamentary secretaries on committees. The last time I checked, however, if only on the committee on which I sit, the parliamentary secretary was still there. He may be a little more laconic than the Conservative government's parliamentary secretaries used to be, but once again, that is because this is all smoke and mirrors.

They maintain that they are doing things differently, but I find that hard to believe when an assistant from the whip's office and a parliamentary secretary sit on the committee. Even if they do not speak, I suspect that the spectre of the Prime Minister's Office looms over the committee's Liberal members as they work.

I would like to come back to the comments by the hon. member for Malpeque which I quoted, to bring us back to the key point: this is the House of Commons, not the House of cabinet. When the opposition stands united, it is in defence of our rights, Liberals included. We are beginning to see that they realize this as well. In any case, they are welcome if they want to join us to ask the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the Prime Minister to require consensus before changing anything at all in our democracy.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take the floor today. I want to congratulate the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly on his very fine speech. His bilingualism is second to none. There is no question that he honours the forefathers of the two founding peoples of Canada.

My colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan has quite clearly explained the matter that I am addressing today. He has provided a good history of the last three weeks, laying out each successive question of privilege. I do not intend to repeat that exercise. Although I plan to speak to the importance of a question of privilege in my introduction, my main intention is to analyze the discussion paper on House reforms, while remaining grounded in the subject at hand.

For three weeks I have been awaiting the opportunity to address my colleagues in the House on the debate before us, whether on the issue of privilege or the reforms debated in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Although some members are trying to differentiate the debates and separate their elements, they constitute a whole. Whether we are dealing with the question of privilege or the Liberal government's proposed reforms, which are meant to modernise Parliament, the issue remains the same, namely the inalienable rights of parliamentarians, and indirectly, every Canadian's right to representation.

Over the last three weeks, I have tried to speak before the committee by getting my name on the list. I did not succeed. I also tried to speak in the House last Friday. I was here to take part in the debate, like my colleagues on the other side. I am happy to be able to speak at last, and perhaps bring a French Canadian perspective to this debate.

Many of my colleagues on this side of the House have tried to demonstrate that questions of privilege are of critical importance to members of the House of Commons as well as to the members of Westminster-style parliaments worldwide.

Questions of privilege have been centuries in the making. I think it was my hon. colleague from Yorkton—Melville who aptly explained how, centuries ago in England, kings attempted certain manoeuvres to prevent the lords or members of the bourgeoisie, who were elected members or senators at the time, lords of the upper chamber, from entering the House to vote in due course on a given bill.

Over the centuries, the respective English chambers acquired certain means of protection, the most important of which pertained to the issue of privilege which we are debating today.

The foremost purpose of the question of privilege is to ensure that access to this democratic precinct is never impaired by any particular situation, the behaviour of an individual, or laws or changes to House procedures and affairs. It is no small matter to say that the question of privilege took centuries to adequately protect.

Privilege

Two weeks ago, two of my Conservative colleagues were unable to vote because they were delayed by a bus which had itself been delayed by the vehicles transporting our right honourable Prime Minister. The privilege of these two members here today to represent and speak on behalf of their constituents has, in effect, been breached, as has the privilege of all members. Every member of Parliament represents approximately 100,000 citizens.

● (1405)

This is a very serious issue for all members of the House, simply because of what could happen. Let us turn the tables. Imagine that this was a confidence vote and that some 30 or 40 Liberal members were unable to reach the House. The government could fall and an election could be called.

That is why we must ensure that access to the House is never restricted in any way. That is extremely important. That is why we should not hesitate to debate this for as long as we must. The breach of a parliamentary privilege could have disastrous consequences. This is a very serious matter.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, directly or indirectly, willingly or not, is trying to manage this debate on the question of privilege. Last Friday, I was here when he tried to manage the debate and call into question the pertinence of debating a question of privilege in the House. He also tried to do something like that today, in my humble analysis of the situation, context, and dynamics in the House. We can see that this is a habit of our Liberal government colleagues and the parliamentary secretary. It is the Liberal habit of wanting to manage, control, dominate, and supervise the elected members of this very honourable democratic chamber.

It would be useful to read the definition of the word “manage”. To manage means to administer. To administer what? According to the dictionary I am reading from, to manage means to administer the interests and affairs of another.

Only I can manage my interests in the House. I read the definition of the word “manage” so that we can refer to it when we read the discussion paper presented by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons entitled *Modernization of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons*. I invite you to go to page 2, where it states:

Therefore, the themes of the proposed reforms are three-fold in addressing the aforementioned issues. They include: (1) the management of the House and its sittings; (2) management of debate; and (3) management of committees.

Management is the act of managing. I can hardly believe that none of the professionals in the government ever told the House leader not to put those words in the paper. Those words, along with several other words, do not belong there. I will talk about that later.

It is not up to the government to manage the House. The government manages affairs of state. It manages Canada. Fine. The government's job is to manage the interests of Canadians, not the House of Commons. Nevertheless, that is what it says here in the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons's paper on reforming the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

The Canadian Constitution is my bible; I refer to it constantly, though I like the Bible too. If we look at the part about legislative

powers, it talks about privileges. The word “privileges” is in the Canadian Constitution, right there in the British North America Act of 1867, but there is no mention of the word “manage” in the part about the House of Commons.

● (1410)

Of course, the Fathers of Confederation never planned, anticipated, or intended for the government or members to manage the House. On the contrary, emphasis is put on the question of privilege.

Let us look at what is happening with the government's proposed changes, which are in fact at the heart of the current debate, although we are now debating the subamendment to the question of privilege relating to issue of privilege. As I said, I will not get into the entire back story, as my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan explained it all so very well.

In fact, the debate is on the opposition members' current frustration with a disingenuous attempt by the Liberal government and especially the Prime Minister to substantially and significantly reduce the right to speak, the right to vote, and the right of all hon. members to act as they see fit in the House. It is hard to see what the government hopes to achieve exactly. I do not wish to impugn their motives. I will leave it to everyone to come up with their own interpretation. However, one thing is clear, the government's discursive arguments are deeply flawed.

Many things bother me about the discussion paper on reforming the Standing Orders. On page one, we read that Parliament “should respond to demands of greater accountability, transparency and relevance.” The Fathers of Confederation, constitutional conventions, and parliamentary conventions have never been concerned with relevance. The only thing that is very much relevant to all members and all Canadians is the election that is now held every four years under the new law. The only thing that is very much relevant is the result of the election which then translates into the division of political powers in the House of Commons. The only matter of relevance in the House is the representation of citizens and the representation of the different interests and different political forces in Canadian society.

In the second paragraph, we read that the impetus of the reforms is “to balance the desire of the minority's right to be heard with the majority's duty to pass its legislative agenda.” That is incredible. For a political minority to be heard is more than just a desire; it is a right. I was shocked to read such a thing in a text produced by the Canadian government. Is this an essay by a student at Cégep or is it a government document? It is really hard to tell.

In the third paragraph, we read that debates need to be more effective so that they are reasonable in length. Good heavens. Today I will be speaking for 20 minutes, although most of the time, I have only 10 minutes to speak. That is already unreasonable, because that is not a long time.

Privilege

In my office I have a book called *Canada's Founding Debates*. Our predecessors in the House used to speak for two, three, four, or five hours. They would talk all night. Now we speak for 10 or 20 minutes, and we are being told that it is unreasonable. I was shocked to read those things in a government document.

The document also indicates that it is time “to re-evaluate the role of members and examine ways to increase their influence in the legislative process.” It is not easy to move forward with these kinds of reforms. In that regard, I have two very simple solutions I would like propose to the government, and I say this in all seriousness.

● (1415)

I have two very simple solutions to propose to the government, and I am confident that they will have the support of the House. I, for one, would champion this my entire life. If the Liberals really want to return true legislative authority to all members of the House of Commons, two things need to happen. First of all, the Prime Minister's Office needs to go. It has only been around since the 1970s anyway. Before that time, many prime ministers were both prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. They were able to pull that off without the benefit of the PMO's 700 employees. I know what I am talking about, because I myself was an intern at the PMO, which has about 200 political staffers and 500 public servants.

Then, we need to put an end to party discipline. It does not exist in England, and that is the real Westminster parliamentary system. The concept of a majority and minority is actually an illusion. In a real Westminster parliamentary system where there is a majority and a minority, the majority is constantly changing, at every moment and for every vote. That is how it is in England.

A real prime minister, in the British parliamentary system, must have the pride, conviction, and strength to convince all members of the House of Commons to take his side. In England, David Cameron has lost I do not know how many votes. Sometimes 80 of his Conservative colleagues do not vote the same way he does, but he wins the vote anyway because some democratic liberals and members of the workers' party vote with him. That is the strength of a real parliamentary majority. It is always changing.

To give power back to members, all we need to do is close the Prime Minister's Office and put an end to party discipline. If he were to do so, the Prime Minister would be acting with incredible audacity and remembered for thousands of years to come.

On page 4, the government says that the reforms will provide a greater degree of flexibility, which will “calm the acrimonious proceedings leading up to the summer and winter adjournments.”

Once again, when a person knows how liberal constitutionalism works in a Westminster parliamentary system, acrimony is welcome. Our founding fathers wanted political acrimony. The United States uses a system of checks and balances because they have a strict, airtight division of power. Here the division of power is not strict or airtight. You know that better than I do, Mr. Speaker, since you have served in this great chamber for many years.

Acrimony provides checks and balances in the House. What is more, works written by political scientists Baker, Morton, and Knopff, from the University of Calgary, and Manfredi, from McGill University in Montreal, teach us that there is acrimony among the

three powers, or in other words the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. That acrimony is what allows us to come up with the best solutions for Canadians following a strong and vigorous debate.

I want to emphasize that the government's reforms, which are at the root of the question of privilege we are talking about today, and which are the subject of two more questions of privilege, would take away our rights as opposition MPs. If the Liberals really want to give members more legislative power, all they have to do is get rid of the PMO, which would be great, and put an end to party discipline.

● (1420)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which was very interesting. He had some ideas.

We really want to work with people on both sides. We want to work together. It is good to listen to these ideas. That is how we find answers.

If I understand correctly, today we are talking about the fact that two MPs were unable to get here in time to vote. That is a question of privilege. Everyone knows that we have discussed the matter extensively for several days now.

Basically, what we have been talking about is the fact that we could have electronic systems for people to vote remotely. That is something we can do, and it could potentially prevent some of these problems from arising. My constituents really want us to talk about the work we have to do, about job creation, the environment, and many other things. They want us to talk about those issues.

Does the member think it would be more productive to talk about new ways of voting rather than keep talking about this issue here in the House?

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

I am glad she mentioned electronic voting. Although it might be the smallest proposed change in the discussion paper, I am strongly opposed to electronic voting. I am extremely proud to have to be present in the House. It is not a matter of personal pride. In fact, it is about acknowledging my 100,000 constituents. That is what the Westminster model is all about. That is why in England, the House still reflects the 18th-century House of Commons. It is a good thing.

I do not want us to be like the U.S. congress where there are big television screens, endless voting, and negotiations between representatives where one representative asks another to change their vote in exchange for the other representative's vote another time. No, we must rise with honour, acknowledge the person saying our name and that of our riding, and do so before all Canadians. It is important. Electronic voting promotes disengagement.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend covered a lot of ground. I take much of what he has talked about as underscoring the difficulty the government has between understanding the difference between the executive, cabinet, and government and the rest of us who constitute Parliament.

Privilege

Consistently the Liberals seem to not only want to blur the lines but eliminate them, particularly in the case of control of security in here. Rather than it being under our collective control, it is now under the control of the Prime Minister directly through the commissioner of the RCMP. That is totally unacceptable. At some point, we will get our Parliament back.

Given the mounting evidence that the government clearly does not know, or it does not understand, the important distinction between members of the executive council called cabinet versus the rest of us, and collectively we constitute Parliament, does my colleague share my feeling that in large part the government, the cabinet, sees the rest of us, especially those of us on the opposition benches, as a nuisance, as a minor irritant to get around rather than respect? That is my impression. Would the member share that viewpoint?

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I completely concur with my colleague's analysis.

Not only is what he just said true, but, moreover, the government does not understand its role in the House of Commons. This document is peppered with words that should not be there. We see words that do not reflect the expectation, according to the Constitution and the British North America Act, for the House of Commons. The duty of the government is to manage the state and Canadians. We have to wonder about that too.

The role of the government is to manage the affairs of the state, not to manage the House of Commons. This document was written by a student.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in good part I have really enjoyed a lot of the dialogue and listening to comments across the way. I cannot help but desire to see something happen within the procedure and House affairs committee. The member made reference to a lot of rules by talking about the discussion paper and that is what the government House leader was attempting to do, to bring it to PROC so that the committee would be able to get the type of debate and discussion about the pros and cons of the rules that are being suggested.

The member made a reflection in terms of the mother Parliament in England. I know the member has gone through the document and he has made reference to it throughout his speech. I wonder if he finds that there is anything within that document that would go against the mother Parliament. It seems to me that it is a good discussion paper and many of the things within the discussion paper are in fact quite often reflected within the mother Parliament. Would the member not agree that would have been a very good discussion point in itself at PROC?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, what I see in this discussion paper is an attempt to slowly but surely lead Canada

toward a republican system. We would no longer have a Westminster system, but rather an executive that does whatever it wants, that is not accountable to anyone, and that is not responsible for its actions. That is why I do not like republics. I like the Westminster system, where the government is held to account every day.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to remind our hon. colleague across the floor that the government House leader chose to have a discussion with the rest of the House, but she chose to do it through the media rather than having a respectful conversation. Really the discussion for the last three weeks has been on parliamentary privilege, and that is what we are talking about today. I want to remind folks that on page 61 of O'Brien and Bosc, it states:

The privileges of Members of the House of Commons provide the absolute immunity they require to perform their parliamentary work [for their electors].

It goes on to state:

The privileges of the Commons are designed to safeguard the rights of each and every elector. For example, the privilege of freedom of speech is secured to Members not for their personal benefit, but to [be the voice of electors].

Essentially, what the government is doing is silencing the opposition. It is sending the message that all of the opposition and all of the electors that elected the opposition members, whether they are Conservative, NDP, Bloc, or Green, do not have a say.

Does my hon. colleague not agree that essentially what the Liberals are saying is that all of the electors in the ridings of the opposition members should not have a say and that their points do not really count?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alupa Clarke: Mr. Speaker, what the Liberals want is to make sure that Canadians have less of a voice in the House. Since the constitutional revolution of 1982, led by Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Liberal Party has been trying to do away with the Westminster system. The Liberal Party's ultimate goal is to bring a republican system to Canada. I will never stand for that. We blocked this reform paper before it went to committee to ensure that these proposals will never be passed.

• (1430)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: There will be one and a half minutes remaining in the time for questions and comments on the speech of the member for Beauport—Limoilou when the House returns to consideration of this motion.

[*Translation*]

It being 2:30 p.m., pursuant to order made Monday, April 3, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 1 at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, April 13, 2017

Privilege

Reference to Standing committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Motion	10495
Mr. Généreux	10495
Mr. Lamoureux	10496
Mr. Dubé	10496
Mr. Strahl	10497
Mr. Strahl	10497
Mr. Lamoureux	10499
Ms. Ramsey	10500
Mr. Lukiwski	10500
Ms. Rempel	10501

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Patriation of the Constitution

Mr. Barsalou-Duval	10502
--------------------------	-------

Toronto Maple Leafs

Mr. Erskine-Smith	10502
-------------------------	-------

Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock

Mr. Schmale	10502
-------------------	-------

Vaisakhi

Mr. Grewal	10503
------------------	-------

Mark Wainberg

Ms. Laverdière	10503
----------------------	-------

Boyd Family

Ms. Ludwig	10503
------------------	-------

Armenia

Mr. Albrecht	10503
--------------------	-------

Vaisakhi

Mr. Kang	10503
----------------	-------

Genocide Remembrance, Condemnation and Prevention Month

Mr. Levitt	10504
------------------	-------

Vaisakhi

Mr. Saroya	10504
------------------	-------

Certex

Mrs. Romanado	10504
---------------------	-------

Mark Wainberg

Mr. Lametti	10504
-------------------	-------

Easter

Mrs. Block	10505
------------------	-------

Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival

Ms. Murray	10505
------------------	-------

Saskatchewan Transportation Company

Mr. Weir	10505
----------------	-------

Vimy Ridge

Mr. Brassard	10505
--------------------	-------

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Mr. Duguid	10505
------------------	-------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Softwood Lumber

Mr. Lebel	10506
Mr. Carr	10506
Mr. Lebel	10506
Ms. Freeland	10506

The Budget

Mr. Lebel	10506
Ms. Chagger	10506

Taxation

Ms. Bergen	10506
Mr. Brison	10506

Government Accountability

Ms. Bergen	10507
Ms. Chagger	10507

Marijuana

Mr. MacGregor	10507
Ms. McKenna	10507
Mr. MacGregor	10507
Ms. McKenna	10507
Ms. Quach	10507
Ms. McKenna	10507
Ms. Quach	10507
Ms. McKenna	10508

Government Appointments

Mr. Clement	10508
Mr. Goodale	10508
Mr. Clement	10508
Mr. Goodale	10508

Ethics

Mr. Brassard	10508
Ms. Chagger	10508
Mr. Godin	10508
Ms. Chagger	10508

Standing Orders of the House of Commons

Mr. Schmale	10509
Ms. Chagger	10509
Mr. Berthold	10509
Ms. Chagger	10509

National Defence

Mr. Garrison	10509
Mr. Rioux	10509

Fisheries and Oceans

Mr. Donnelly	10509
--------------------	-------

Mr. Beech	10509
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Mr. Falk	10509
Mr. Goodale	10510
Ms. Rempel	10510
Mr. Goodale	10510
National Defence	
Mr. Bezan	10510
Mr. Rioux	10510
Mr. Clarke	10510
Mr. MacKinnon	10510
Canadian Heritage	
Mr. Nantel	10510
Ms. Joly	10510
Employment	
Ms. Sansoucy	10511
Mr. Cuzner	10511
Status of Women	
Ms. Damoff	10511
Ms. Monsef	10511
Interprovincial Trade	
Mr. Barlow	10511
Mr. Bains	10511
Rail Transportation	
Mrs. Block	10511
Mr. Garneau	10511
Justice	
Mr. Waugh	10511
Mr. Mendicino	10512
Government Appointments	
Mr. Nater	10512
Ms. Chagger	10512
Rail Transportation	
Mr. Aubin	10512
Mr. Garneau	10512
The Environment	
Mr. Stetski	10512
Ms. McKenna	10512
Taxation	
Mr. Warawa	10512
Mr. Morneau	10512
Mr. Arnold	10513
Mr. Morneau	10513
Mr. McColeman	10513
Mr. Morneau	10513
Transportation	
Mr. Iacono	10513
Mr. Garneau	10513
Employment	
Ms. Harder	10513
Mr. Cuzner	10513

Taxation	
Ms. Sahota	10513
Mr. Morneau	10514
Justice	
Mr. Genuis	10514
Mr. Mendicino	10514
Foreign Investment	
Mr. Barsalou-Duval	10514
Mr. Bains	10514
The Budget	
Mr. Ste-Marie	10514
Mr. Morneau	10514
Marijuana	
Mrs. Gill	10514
Mrs. Philpott	10514
Public Services and Procurement	
Mr. Tootoo	10514
Mr. MacKinnon	10515
Business of the House	
Ms. Bergen	10515
Ms. Chagger	10515

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Cannabis Act	
Ms. Wilson-Raybould	10515
Bill C-45. Introduction and first reading	10515
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10515
Criminal Code	
Ms. Wilson-Raybould	10515
Bill C-46. Introduction and first reading	10515
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10515
Export and Import Permits Act	
Ms. Freeland	10515
Bill C-47. Introduction and first reading	10515
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10515
Interparliamentary Delegations	
Ms. Sgro	10515
Committees of the House	
Government Operations and Estimates	
Mr. Lukiwski	10516
Finance	
Mr. Easter	10516
Mr. Deltell	10516
Canada Shipping Act, 2001	
Ms. Malcolmson	10516
Bill C-352. Introduction and first reading	10516
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10516
Old Age Security Act	
Ms. Benson	10516

Bill C-353. Introduction and first reading	10516	Public Safety	
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10517	Mr. Dubé	10519
Department of Public Works and Government Services Act		Taxation	
Mr. Cannings	10517	Mr. Schmale	10519
Bill C-354. Introduction and first reading	10517	Physician-Assisted Dying	
(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)	10517	Mr. Viersen	10519
Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law)		Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Bezan	10517	Mr. Lamoureux	10519
Bill S-226. First reading	10517	Points of Order	
(Motion deemed adopted and bill read the first time) ..	10517	Request for Emergency Debate	
Petitions		Mr. Genuis	10519
Pensions		The Deputy Speaker	10519
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	10517	Privilege	
Democratic Reform		Reference to Standing committee on Procedure and House Affairs	
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	10518	Motion	10520
Indigenous Affairs		Ms. Rempel	10520
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	10518	Mr. Vaughan	10521
Health Care		Mr. Dubé	10522
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	10518	Mr. Lamoureux	10523
Taxation		Mr. Genuis	10523
Mrs. Gallant	10518	Mr. Vaughan	10526
Childhood Cancer		Ms. Gladu	10527
Mr. Ellis	10518	Mr. Lamoureux	10527
Rail Transportation		Mrs. Gallant	10527
Mrs. Hughes	10518	Mr. Dubé	10528
Palliative Care		Mr. Vaughan	10530
Mrs. Wagantall	10518	Mr. Lamoureux	10531
The Environment		Ms. Ramsey	10532
Mr. MacGregor	10518	Mr. Clarke	10532
Sex Selection		Ms. Dabrusin	10534
Mr. Warawa	10518	Mr. Christopherson	10534
Impaired Driving		Mr. Lamoureux	10535
Mr. Warawa	10519	Mr. Doherty	10535

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