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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 11, 2017

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 11, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A), 2017-18

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (A) for the financial year ending March 31, 2018, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

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● (1005)
[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32, I have the honour to table, in both official languages and with respect to Bill C-46, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (offences relating to conveyances) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, a document entitled “Legislative background: reforms to the Transportation Provisions of the Criminal Code (Bill C-46)”, including a charter impact statement.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to four petitions.

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INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Canada-United States Inter-Parliamentary Group.

The first concerns the 70th annual meeting of the Council of State Governments' Southern Legislative Conference, held in Lexington, Kentucky, United States of America, from July 9 to 13, 2016.

The second concerns the annual legislative summit of the National Conference of State Legislatures, NCSL, held in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A, August 8-11, 2016.

The third concerns the 69th annual meeting of the Council of State Governments–West, held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, United States of America, September 6-9, 2016.

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[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in relation to Bill S-217, an act to amend the Criminal Code (detention in custody).

[English]

The committee has studied the bill and recommends not to proceed further with this bill.

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, in relation to the main estimates 2017-18.

LIAISON

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Liaison Committee regarding committee activities and expenditures.

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 16th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, in relation to the main estimates 2017-18.

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[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions, and if you were to seek it, I think you would find that there is consent to adopt the following motion:

Business of Supply

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Beloeil—Chambly, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 16, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

WATER QUALITY

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition to the minister responsible for Global Affairs Canada. In 2008, the International Joint Commission began its study of water quality problems in Missisquoi Bay but has not pursued the matter since.

All levels of government on both sides of the border, as well as other watershed organizations, are making a tremendous effort to combat cyanobacteria in Lake Champlain.

Despite their efforts, cyanobacteria still pose a threat to local people's quality of life. People in my region, Brome—Missisquoi, and around Lake Champlain drink that water. I am not sure that water is even potable at certain times of the year.

Residents of the Lake Champlain region are asking the minister responsible for Global Affairs Canada to instruct the International Joint Commission to develop effective solutions to the cyanobacteria problem in order to restore water quality in Lake Champlain.

• (1010)

[English]

CHRONIC IMMUNOLOGICAL AND NEUROLOGICAL DISEASES

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this day, exactly one day before the International Awareness Day for Chronic Immunological and Neurological Diseases, I have the honour to present electronic petition 734 on behalf of more than 1,000 signatories, calling the attention of the Government of Canada to create a national strategy with respect to addressing the diseases referred to as chronic immunological and neurological diseases, which implicate upwards of 1.4 million Canadians. They ask the government to consider how it might address the impacts of these diseases, not only on the health care system and the economy, but of course also on those living with these diseases.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night I had the honour in this place to speak in support of labelling genetically modified foods, and today I am pleased to table a petition on behalf of my constituents for labelling genetically modified foods.

Various polls consistently show that over 80% of Canadians want mandatory labelling of GM foods, and the petitioners ask that the

House of Commons establish mandatory labelling of all genetically modified foods. I thank Lilian Martins and the Big Carrot natural food market for advocacy on this issue, and Kate McMurray from the Big Carrot, who was here on the Hill last week to advocate.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE BANK

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House: (a) public infrastructure should serve the interests of Canadians, not work to make private investors rich; (b) during the election, the Liberals did not reveal to voters their plans to privatize investment in public infrastructure; (c) infrastructure built by private investors will cost more than public infrastructure; (d) it is a conflict of interest to allow private corporations, who will be the largest beneficiaries of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to participate in the planning and development of the Bank; (e) the Bank will leave taxpayers with an unacceptable burden of fees, tolls, and privatization that will only make private investors wealthy, to the detriment of the public interest; and (f) the clauses concerning the Canada Infrastructure Bank's creation should be removed from Bill C-44, Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 1, so they can be studied as a stand-alone bill.

He said: Mr. Speaker, am happy to present this motion.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say at the outset that I will be sharing my time with my fantastic colleague from North Island—Powell River.

[Translation]

As members just heard, today, we are presenting a motion on the Canada infrastructure bank proposed by the government, which we could call the privatization bank, the bank of broken promises, or the conflict of interest bank. These synonyms all aptly describe the Liberal government's proposal.

During the election campaign, there was an issue that was very important. All our communities, all our constituents, and, I would even go so far as to say, all the parties here in the House of Commons were concerned about it. That issue was, of course, our public infrastructure. We see various infrastructure problems every day, depending on where we live. If we live near a big city, we know that there are problems with traffic congestion and commute times. People from ridings like mine, Beloeil—Chambly, and those who live in remote areas are dealing with issues related to Internet access and other problems.

There are still major infrastructure problems affecting our communities and the people who live there.

Business of Supply

What we heard during the last election campaign was a proposal to take advantage of low interest rates to help municipalities and the provinces to capitalize on that reality and invest public money in their public infrastructure. What we are seeing today is a plan that proposes a so-called infrastructure bank, but really, is more of a privatization bank, a bank that benefits people in the financial sector, groups like BlackRock, rather than people who are experiencing the day-to-day problems associated with our infrastructure.

● (1015)

[*English*]

I think when we look at how this whole plan of the infrastructure bank has gone ahead from the outset, we see it has happened behind closed doors. It has gone on with investment groups, like BlackRock, which we learned last week is going over presentations and talking points with ministers. I think there is a pretty clear indication of who stands to gain the most from this proposal that the government has put forward.

There are tangible facts here. It is not just wanting to go after the private investors who stand to gain the most at the expense of taxpayers, at the expense of Canadians. It is also looking at what we saw in *The Globe and Mail* just this morning, that an internal memo from Infrastructure Canada said a few things that are important for the motion that we are debating today.

The first is to take our time. It is hard to do that when it is part of an omnibus budget bill, which the Liberal Party promised to do away with in the last election. It is difficult to do that when we are going to spend one or two hours studying something that will so fundamentally change how we invest in infrastructure in Canada. Not only that, but it is going to be once again at the expense of Canadian taxpayers.

What else did we see in this report that was revealed to us today?

We saw that this is going to slow down, potentially, the going ahead of infrastructure projects. Why? It is because it will create all kinds of jurisdictional snafus.

I want to read one quote from the article, if I may, which I think illustrates very well the exact kind of problem that this kind of bank poses and the problem of putting what is done so well by public dollars, for the public interest, into the hands of the private sector. The report states:

Catalyzing private capital to invest in Canada's water utility industry is challenging and would require a transformation of the industry as a whole.

It uses the water utility industry as an example because, of course, issues related to water are some of the core issues related to infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

It is hard to examine this kind of fundamental issue when it is part of an omnibus bill that includes so many important points and that is also now under time allocation, I might add. The Liberals are cutting off the debate.

That is why we are asking the government to honour a number of its election promises. Obviously, we are talking about the election promise to invest public money in public infrastructure, but we are also asking it to separate this aspect from the rest of the bill. We

simply cannot accept such an important change without giving it the attention it deserves, and we must have a separate bill on this issue alone.

Another thing that is problematic about the whole issue of the infrastructure bank and the omnibus bill is that the board of directors positions are already posted. The Liberals are going ahead with choosing the location of the bank and which of their friends will be on the board of directors.

All this is being done not only before we get to committee, but before Parliament has even voted on the bill, omnibus or otherwise. This is totally unacceptable for something as fundamental as infrastructure. Let us not forget that infrastructure is one of the federal responsibilities that has a direct impact on the daily lives of the people we represent.

Speaking of the impact on taxpayers, let us not forget that the Liberals were elected on a promise to invest this public money, whether we like it or not. On that we can all agree. There is no doubt that we desperately need to invest public money in our public infrastructure. We could have a whole other debate on the fact that these investments are being spread out over 10, 11, or 12 years and not over a shorter period to allow communities with the greatest need to benefit immediately, but that is a discussion for another day.

Let us focus on the impact on the public and let us talk about user fees and tolls. Taxpayers are being asked to pay twice. First, they are asked to pay taxes. We have a social contract in Canada whereby we agree to invest public money in our infrastructure so that our bridges do not collapse when we are commuting to work. The public is prepared to accept that.

However, it is not prepared to accept that the government will invest a significant amount of its money in infrastructure only to then tell its friends, such as BlackRock, behind closed doors that it will let them charge Canadians a second time by imposing user fees and tolls.

The government tells us not to worry, that there will be no tolls or user fees, and that it will depend on the project. However, we really wonder where businesses are going to get a return of 8% or more if not from the pockets of taxpayers, who have already invested in their infrastructure through government spending. It is completely unacceptable to ask middle-class families, which this Prime Minister says he is always defending, to pay twice for this infrastructure. This goes against what this government promised.

● (1020)

[*English*]

I want to focus on that point, because what is key here is what we are asking Canadians to be on the hook for. We are asking them to be on the hook through their tax dollars, and that is fine. They are ready to accept that. However, we are asking them to be on the hook for the friends of the Liberal Party, who are meeting Liberals behind closed doors and looking over their talking points and their presentations. They are then turning around and saying, "Great, we are going to pick and choose."

Business of Supply

We hear MPs from Toronto, for example, who tell us, “This is great. We are going to invest in social housing.” Good luck looking to the private sector to invest in social housing. Maybe it is social housing for the people who go to the Prime Minister’s fundraisers at \$1,500 a pop, but I certainly have a hard time believing it is going to be the priority for those private investors. That is exactly why government has to play a role. The government’s role is not bankrolling private companies to fleece the taxpayer twice on critical infrastructure. It is to really live up to its commitment to invest those public dollars in our public infrastructure. We cannot repeat it enough.

[*Translation*]

I will end by saying that we have hope today. We may be naively optimistic, but we have hope because it is not just the privatization bank, the Liberal Party’s bank of conflicts of interest and cronyism, it is also the bank of broken promises, as I said at the outset.

In fact, this bill, which would create a bank that will fundamentally change how we invest in infrastructure, and that is worth repeating, and give power to the private sector, is part of an omnibus bill. The Liberals promised not to use this type of bill.

They promised to invest public money and not to privatize our infrastructure and airports. The privatization of our airports is another matter we could discuss, but I do not have enough time. In short, these are all commitments that the Liberal Party made.

I would remind my colleagues, cabinet ministers and back-benchers alike, who all represent their communities and say they want to invest in green infrastructure and affordable housing, that the commitments they made during the last election campaign consisted of investing public money, not BlackRock’s money. BlackRock, I might add, will not be interested in investing in environmental protections and access to affordable housing for Canadians in need, which are fundamental issues.

We are making a heartfelt plea to the Liberal Party. We are asking the Liberals to put an end to their old ways, which have traditionally been to hold meetings behind closed doors with their Bay Street friends. We are asking them to finally follow through on their commitments to Canadians, who desperately need public infrastructure paid for with public money. We are also asking the government to put an end to omnibus bills and to really examine this fundamental issue.

[*English*]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague and the motion put forward today, because this is of the utmost importance. It is really relevant now that Canadians begin to understand exactly what this bank is all about.

The committee allotted one hour of discussion for this bill. I wonder if the member can comment on that as well as on shutting down debate on this issue.

• (1025)

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the work she does on this file.

I would say, tongue in cheek, and with all due respect to my Conservative colleagues, that the questions we have heard from them on this issue show that even the previous government realized that this kind of scheme is a bad idea and serves to benefit one group of people, those in the financial and private sectors, and not Canadians who really need public infrastructure to serve their needs and the needs of their communities.

To get to her question about what is going on in committee, she is absolutely right. There was one hour in committee on \$35 billion of taxpayer money going to a privatization bank that is going to fundamentally change how we invest in our infrastructure in Canada. Not only that, it is exempt from access to information requests. There are all these fundamental issues that turn around this bank.

It does not need to come from us. It can come from the internal memo to Infrastructure Canada from KPMG we are reading about this morning in *The Globe and Mail*. It should slow the heck down. Instead, the government is putting it in an omnibus budget bill, with one hour in committee. It is totally unacceptable.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat disappointed in my friend in the sense that he does not highlight what this government is actually doing on the bigger picture of infrastructure. Imagine \$180 billion being invested in Canada’s infrastructure over the coming years. That is an incredible amount of public dollars being committed to things such as housing, recreational facilities, roads, and so much more. A very small percentage of that, less than 10%, would go through this infrastructure bank.

If the NDP maintained its balanced-budget approach and were to invest in public infrastructure, how much more than \$180 billion would it have invested?

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, if I were to share the clip of Kevin Sorbo screaming “disappointed” every time the member feigned disappointment on these issues he campaigned on in the last election, that joke would get old very fast.

The member talks about housing. I have a hard time imagining that a private investment company is going to say that it is going to help the little guy and the people who need it the most through that kind of infrastructure.

[*Translation*]

In the last budget, the Liberals listed all these great public transit projects that the bank could pay for. However, they used the word “could”. At the end of the day, it is the private sector that will decide. It is the friends of the Liberal Party who will decide. We find that completely unacceptable. We are prepared to work with the government to invest public money in public infrastructure.

The money must be available immediately, but instead it looks to us like it will be available in 10, 11, or 12 years. Obviously, this does not meet the dire needs our communities have right now. This is exactly the opposite of what this member and all the others in the House promised during the last election campaign. Today they have an opportunity to fix this, and I urge them to do so.

Business of Supply

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the infrastructure bank has been a long-standing issue that continues to be locked in the shadows. New Democrats had to put forward this motion today because of the lack of clarity, transparency, and accountability with respect to this bank. I believe that the most important part of today's discussion is this: If the government is so proud of the infrastructure bank, why make it part of an omnibus budget bill in 2017? Why not have this section of the bill separated out?

I believe that Canadians and municipalities deserve the right to hear, in detail, how this bank will work, especially when its creation is under a cloud of suspect behaviour, with private companies that will be the same companies making the profits from these ventures sitting in the driver's seat. This shows a clear conflict of interest. Now Liberals have cut our ability to debate this by virtue of shutting down debate.

This needs to be clear. First, the infrastructure bank was squished into an omnibus bill, creating a lack of accountability and vigorous debate in the House. Second, the debate was shortened so these issues could be rushed over by the government.

We have asked for this provision to be split from the omnibus bill, something the Liberals have yet to do. If the government is so proud, it should not be afraid and should be willing to have this discussion. I believe this would truly allow for an in-depth analysis, more hours of debate, and a specific committee to review the process, rather than one hour, as it currently stands. This provision will be reviewed quickly at committee, in conjunction with the 300 pages of legislative changes in Bill C-44. This is a lack of accountability.

It is important that all parliamentarians take this seriously. There is a general lack of clarity with respect to the infrastructure bank, and there are many alarming issues surrounding this scheme. First, many measures will have to be dealt with in future legislation. Second, the lack of transparency is troubling. The bank will be able to withhold important information from the Attorney General of Canada and the parliamentary budget officer under the guise of being sensitive commercial information. Third, the bank will have serious consequences for our public infrastructure and the lives of Canadian citizens.

As the deputy critic for infrastructure, it has been a pleasure to advocate in this role, most notably for Canadians living in rural and small communities. Too often we hear the word "infrastructure" tied to larger communities. Too often smaller centres are simply left out of the equation.

For us to quickly demonstrate how the scheme will never benefit our rural communities or the middle class, we can simply break down the nature of the beast. The bottom line is that private investors will not be joining the government's scheme for the pleasure of building infrastructure but rather will be expecting a significant financial return.

I want to be clear. It makes sense to me that these investors will want a return. Investing is for the purpose of making a return. My concern is that infrastructure is moving in this direction. I am concerned that Canadians are not having a say on this bank. I am

most concerned that these investors have been shown to be in the driver's seat in building this bank. It is like asking the fox to guard the hen house, with a complete lack of acknowledgement of the role of a fox.

The Quebec pension plan, for example, is very clear. It expects a return of 7% to 9%. Where do members think it would get that from? It would be from the tolls and user fees collected from Canadians. Simply said, rural communities cannot sustain the level of returns Bay Street bankers require. That means that all the communities I represent will be ignored. Other MPs in this House should really reflect on the usefulness of this bank in their ridings, and most importantly, must ask who this bank is really helping.

Why is the government so proud to encourage the urban-rural divide? Canadians deserve to know what will bring these returns. What will be sold off? Where will the new tolls be imposed? What user fees can we expect? Every time the Prime Minister is asked, he talks about the different models and the potential. The outcomes of these models require more taxpayers to shell out more money.

It was hard to understand the reasoning to create this bank from the start. This dubious venture was not in the Liberals' major campaign platform. Why suddenly is it such a major project priority? We have all witnessed the government's mammoth infrastructure stimulus plan fall flat: all this taxpayer money and very little to show for it. Does the arm's-length nature of this bank allow the government to relinquish the hard decisions on the infrastructure file? Is this an excuse for its failed stimulus?

● (1030)

The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy says the Liberals have not shown a solid business case for its new infrastructure bank. At the head of the institute is the former parliamentary budget officer, surprisingly enough. The omnibus budget bill also limits the independence of the current PBO. It does not look good when the Liberals are limiting the PBO's powers in this year's budget while ignoring calls from the previous PBO about this year's budget.

What are the Liberals hiding? It could do with the fact that the bank has the potential to increase overall costs to taxpayers, because infrastructure built by private investors will always cost more than public infrastructure.

The government has the capacity to borrow at a very low cost, so why will it not? It may have to do with its friends on Bay Street. Rather than building critical infrastructure that benefits everyday citizens, the Liberals are creating a privatization scheme that puts the need of their wealthy friends first.

Business of Supply

Government records show that corporations and private investors were given unprecedented control in the planning and development of the Liberals' privatization bank. BlackRock's extensive involvement in the creation of the infrastructure bank of the private sector raises conflict of interest questions. These are very important questions that need to be discussed in the House. It is a conflict of interest to allow private corporations which would be the largest beneficiaries of the Canada infrastructure bank to participate in the planning and development of the bank.

The Conflict of Interest Act states that a "public office holder is in a conflict of interest when he or she exercises an official power, duty or function that provides an opportunity to...improperly further another person's private interests."

The Liberals promised investments in infrastructure to benefit everyday Canadians, but instead they are getting a government that puts the interests of larger corporations first. This is a fine example of a Prime Minister who has lost touch with Canadians who rely on public infrastructure. It is also a sign that he has lost touch with the middle class and those working hard to join it.

Infrastructure can create meaningful employment for many, but this bank will pay with taxpayer money with one hand and take our user fees and tolls with the other. Therefore, Canadians will be paying twice.

The government has yet to make a compelling case for why it would be better to work with private investors seeking high returns when Ottawa has the ability to finance projects itself at a much lower cost.

While the Liberals are unphased and standing tall in the face of this important criticism, Canadians deserve better. They deserve to know what is happening. Canadians need to know what is being pawned off, where the tolls will be, and what user fees they can expect.

This project will hinder the growth of middle-class Canadians by imposing costs that will line the pockets of millionaires and billionaires while leaving everyday Canadians on the hook.

While the Liberals and their buddies are too busy figuring out how to make this venture profitable, Canadians are quickly figuring out how unaffordable and impotent the government is.

Last night on *Power Play* on CTV, the member for Gatineau said on a panel about the infrastructure bank that Canadians do not need to know. I disagree. The Liberal government needs to take this discussion out of the backroom secret meetings, pull it out from the omnibus budget bill, and put it in the House for debate. I hope the government will stop hiding and do the right thing.

• (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I actually found the previous speaker's remarks to be more honest and principled because here we have a catalogue of completely unfounded allegations and speculation, which strikes me as a bad way to let people know how an infrastructure project is going to help them.

Public transit and Internet access are services that have an impact on people's day-to-day lives.

I am therefore wondering what budget she has in mind to not only invest in those kinds of projects, but also keep them up and running.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I have the great honour and privilege to represent the riding of North Island—Powell River. It is the third largest riding in B.C., with many remote communities that are asking for help. They need sewers and water.

There is one community in my riding that is at risk of forest fire because it simply does not have the water pressure for the fire trucks to get the water that is needed. I have many communities begging for infrastructure so they can have meaningful Internet access to open up doors for them.

If members on that side of the House are so proud of the infrastructure bank, why is it not in this place for discussion? Why are they hiding it? Why are they in secret rooms talking with corporations that will make the profit instead of having the discussion here where it belongs?

• (1040)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is \$15 billion being extracted from projects that have already been announced in communities: \$5 billion coming out of public transit projects, \$5 billion from trade and transportation corridors, and another \$5 billion from green infrastructure projects. How does the member feel that is going to impact her community?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, it is important to be looking at the realities of where the infrastructure funding is going, where it is being taken out of projects that are desperately needed in communities across the country.

I serve small communities. The largest community I have is just over 34,000 people. The smallest has about 20 to 30 people. They face unique challenges. I think of Kingcome, which is desperate for funding to help get off diesel because it is costing too much money. It is a small indigenous community trying to build up an economy for itself and it is paying a lot of money toward energy costs.

It is not going to have an impact because those small communities cannot make the returns that the Bay Street people want. That is why it needs to be separated.

I am so concerned that the government is not separating this very important information and making it legislation so that it can be accountable, talked about, and something that is open. Canadians have a right to have their voices heard.

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member just said is precisely the point. She seemed to suggest in her speech that only large communities can benefit from large projects and that rural and smaller communities cannot. In the case specifically of getting communities off diesel or coal, these are projects that may be of some interest to the bank itself, but also to the \$2 billion in specific project funding for traditional infrastructure we have for smaller and northern communities.

Business of Supply

I wonder whether the hon. member has actually given consideration to that thought and believes we can actually have larger projects in smaller communities, as we plan to do, where it is feasible, in our budget plan. Had she given any sort of consideration to that before she spoke today?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify that at no point did I say that smaller communities could not benefit from larger projects. What I did say is that they do not have the resources to make sure that the Bay Street people who are investing and expecting a significant return are going to be able to pay those tolls.

I do not know why we cannot have a discussion in this place about what those tolls are going to look like and what we are asking Canadians to be on the hook for. It is shameful that the government will not separate these bills. It is too important. The government should do it right.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the members of the NDP for their belated support for infrastructure. When we were discussing the infrastructure plan during the campaign, they were so focused on artificially balancing the budget at the cost of ignoring the needs of the communities that need infrastructure. I remember having a debate with one of the NDP's prominent candidates. I asked what the New Democrats' plans were for infrastructure. What I heard was they would build infrastructure five or 10 years from now.

When the New Democrats rise in the House to talk about affordable housing, public transit, water, and waste-water infrastructure or their support for rural communities, I welcome that, because at least they recognize that infrastructure is important, that it is the bones of our economy.

Since taking office, our government has been working hard to deliver unprecedented investments in infrastructure. I am pleased to tell the House today about the investing in Canada infrastructure plan. As well, I will speak more about the Canada infrastructure bank which is one of the government's new, innovative solutions to help address Canada's pressing infrastructure needs and build more infrastructure.

We want to build strong foundations that will allow all Canadians to thrive, excel, and innovate. In budget 2016, we launched the first phase of our long-term infrastructure plan which is designed to achieve three important goals: create long-term growth for those middle-class Canadians and those who are working hard to join the middle class; build inclusive communities so everyone has a fair chance to succeed; and support a low-carbon, green economy.

The plan would invest more than \$180 billion over 12 years, bringing new and innovative infrastructure investment tools to the table and would support five key areas for investment: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation infrastructure, and the rural and northern communities infrastructure. Our plan would deliver better public transit, clean water, and more social housing units for Canadians while creating long-term growth and jobs for the middle class.

When we ran during the last election, we said we would double the infrastructure investments across the country. We said that now is the time to invest in our country and in Canadians. Now we are delivering on that commitment. When we came into office, we

started consulting broadly with our partners—provinces, territories, municipalities, and indigenous communities—to make sure we were investing in the right way, to make sure our investments would have maximum impact and would address the real needs of our communities.

It quickly became clear that everyone was feeling that the infrastructure deficit was caused by the lack of sustained, predictable funding from the previous government and it was clear that an ambitious plan was needed now. Our partners told us that existing infrastructure across the country was in dire need of repair and modernization.

We decided to roll out our plan in two phases. The initial phase of the investing in Canada plan was designed to focus on the recapitalization, repair, and modernization of existing infrastructure assets, making buses accessible, and giving access to clean drinking water to communities facing boil water advisories. Phase one also recognized the challenges municipalities face when trying to plan for the long term by funding the design and planning work of new, larger-scale infrastructure projects like Ottawa's second phase LRT, the downtown relief line in Toronto, Calgary's Green Line, or Edmonton's LRT expansion.

• (1045)

We did this to help municipalities rebuild the foundations of their systems and to start planning for projects that will form the core of our ambitious long-term plan.

Our plan is about building not just more infrastructure but building infrastructure that meets community needs and addresses the pressing infrastructure gaps that are felt throughout Canada. To ensure that we are supporting the infrastructure that our communities need, we continue to work in close relationship with our provincial, territorial, indigenous, and municipal partners to plan and deliver infrastructure projects that will shape our country for years to come.

We have made great progress in delivering projects under Infrastructure Canada's new programs. We streamlined approvals under the new Building Canada fund to better support our municipal, provincial, and territorial partners, and to approve projects faster.

We added new eligibility categories to recognize our partners' priorities, making cultural and recreational projects and ferry infrastructure eligible, for example. The members of the NDP will remember that, because they are the ones, along with Liberal MPs, who requested that we change the category to include ferry infrastructure in our plan. These changes were not only made by our provincial and territorial partners, but also at the requests of other MPs.

Business of Supply

Since taking office, we have approved 2,200 projects across the country, with a total combined investment of \$20 billion since November 2015. We have approved more projects to help our communities in a year and a half than the previous government did in five years combined.

These projects are now rolling out in communities large and small and will make a big difference across Canada. Our investments so far mean 200 projects that will make public transit more accessible for people with disabilities, with more than 1,000 new buses along with other improvements. Together these investments will develop faster, more reliable service and help reduce traffic congestion and pollution. Another 1,000 projects will give more Canadians access to clean drinking water and reduce pollution in our lakes and rivers.

More than 89,000 social housing units have been renovated under our plan. As well, 182 arts and heritage facilities in 109 communities are being improved, and nearly 6,000 housing units on reserve for indigenous communities have been built, renovated, or planned, along with 125 projects aimed at building and improving schools for indigenous children. There are 251 projects under the post-secondary institutions strategic investment fund under way to enhance and modernize research and commercialization facilities on Canadian campuses.

An example of the results of our investments so far can be found in the town of Lanigan, Saskatchewan. Due to a lack of infrastructure investment by the previous government, the people in Lanigan were lacking quality water to bathe their children, wash their clothes, and prepare their food. Thanks to the financial support from our government, the community will soon upgrade their water and waste water treatment systems.

We have helped communities in North Bay, Ontario; Selkirk, Manitoba; and Moncton, New Brunswick to buy new buses that are reliable and accessible. They are better for the environment.

North Vancouver, London, and Inverness in Nova Scotia have installed new transit shelters. Durham in Ontario and Winnipeg in Manitoba have expanded their facilities to accommodate maintenance of their fleets.

Our plan is funding water supply main replacement in Clinton, Ontario. It is helping the community water conservation project in Tahsis, British Columbia, and funding the Mayo lift station in Mayo, Yukon.

•(1050)

In my home province of Alberta, we have supported key infrastructure projects such as the expansion of the Edmonton Yellowhead Trail, a project that was ignored by the previous government for 10 years. The Fort Edmonton Park expansion is a very important project from an indigenous reconciliation point of view. Other projects are the Southwest Calgary Ring Road and the Lacombe and Red Deer water and waste water line.

Our long-term infrastructure plan is focused on investing in the projects that will transform our communities for the 21st century. We know that Canada's infrastructure demands outpaced investments for decades, and let us make no mistake: underfunding infrastructure has a cost, and it is significant. That is why budget 2017 builds on the measures announced in budget 2016 and clearly outlines the next

steps in our government's plan to make smart investments that will help grow our economy and strengthen the middle class.

The proposed budget implementation act includes legislation to establish the Canada infrastructure bank, which I would like to talk about now. Even with our historic investment in our country's infrastructure, there remains a gap that we cannot completely fill. We need to find a new way to build more infrastructure, understanding the limited resources of all orders of government. During the campaign, we committed to creating the Canada infrastructure bank. Through our consultations, our government recognized that we needed to find innovative new ways to effectively mobilize private capital to supplement our historic public investments and build more new infrastructure projects that will benefit Canadians.

Through consultations with mayors from across the country, municipal associations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, provincial and territorial governments, first nations, industry associations, global organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and investment groups such as the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, we drafted the details of the bill that is before this House.

We are proposing the creation of a Canada infrastructure bank because we believe there is an opportunity for the federal government to attract private sector investment in infrastructure and partner with world-leading institutional investors to build more projects across our country. The bank would finance those projects that are in the public interest, but that often do not get built because they are too costly or face competing priorities. Such projects have a potential to be transformational but often do not receive funding under traditional infrastructure programs.

If approved by Parliament, the Canada infrastructure bank would do just that. It would invest up to \$35 billion in new growth-oriented infrastructure across the country, including public transit systems in our largest cities, energy transmission corridors, and more. Fifteen billion dollars would be sourced from the investing in Canada infrastructure plan. This \$15 billion is approximately 8% of the total commitment of infrastructure funds that we have made under our \$180-billion long-term plan. It is on top of our initial commitment to doubling infrastructure investments.

We would make an additional \$20 billion in capital available to the Canada infrastructure bank for investments that would result in the bank holding assets in the form of equity or debt. This \$20 billion would therefore not result in a fiscal impact on the government.

Business of Supply

If approved by Parliament, the bank's mandate would be to make investments in revenue-generating infrastructure projects that are in the public interest as well as to seek investments from the private sector and institutional investors in those projects.

• (1055)

To carry out its mandate, the bank would structure investments in infrastructure projects that have revenue-generating potential and are in the public interest; attract private sector and institutional investors to projects so that more infrastructure can be built; serve as a centre of expertise on projects in which private sector or institutional investors are making a significant investment; foster evidence-based decision-making and advise all orders of government on the design of revenue-generating projects; and collect and share data to help governments make better decisions about infrastructure investments.

The bank would amplify federal support by bringing private sector and institutional investors to the table to help pay for the transformational projects that our country needs.

The bank would offer our funding partners a new way to help meet their pressing infrastructure needs. It would be a new tool for provincial, territorial, and municipal partners to use in building infrastructure that Canadians need, should they wish to use it. It would free up public dollars to build more public infrastructure, such as housing and recreational and cultural facilities, and it is expected to attract private sector capital that would otherwise not be available for building the infrastructure our country needs.

If approved by Parliament, the bank would be established as an arm's-length crown corporation that would be accountable to Parliament and would report on its activities to Parliament twice a year.

The Government of Canada has engaged Canadians and stakeholders from across Canada on our long-term infrastructure plan. The development of the Canada infrastructure bank, we believe, will help us achieve the results that we want to achieve.

I would like to stress a few points again.

The bank is an optional tool for our partners to use. It is up to provinces, territories, and municipalities to decide if they choose to use the bank to help build more infrastructure.

The bank will focus on new infrastructure, not selling existing assets. We need to build even more infrastructure in this country. The bank is one way of doing that.

The bank is one additional tool we are putting into our infrastructure tool kit. Of the total of \$186 billion in the plan, less than 10% would be delivered through the infrastructure bank.

The bank would be a tool for certain projects that have a revenue stream. It would enable us to focus our grant money on infrastructure that does not have revenue attached to it. It would allow us to stretch our infrastructure dollars even further.

Earlier this week, we were proud to announce the search for the leadership of the bank. This is an important milestone toward the creation of the bank and, if Parliament approves it, will allow us to be well positioned to have the bank operational in late 2017.

These searches will identify a chairperson, board members, and a chief executive officer. The process will be open and merit-based and will identify experts and professionals who are needed to lead and govern the bank.

The selection process is designed to attract diverse and highly qualified individuals, taking into consideration the desire to achieve gender parity and to reflect Canada's linguistic, cultural, and regional diversity.

We know that our country is stronger when decision-makers reflect Canada's diversity. That is why we are searching for people with the right talent who can help us design and build this bank and also help us deliver on the commitments we have made to Canadians.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

I wonder if the Minister of Finance will also be making a speech today. I know the minister has done a lot of work in the municipal sector and is very familiar with the issues.

A lot of people are wondering if the Minister of Finance and his Bay Street buddies are actually the ones making decisions about how this bank is set up. I would like to read an excerpt from the Liberal platform that explains what the bank is all about.

[*English*]

Where a lack of capital represents a barrier to projects, the Canada Infrastructure Bank will provide loan guarantees and small capital contributions to provinces and municipalities to ensure that the projects are built.

[*Translation*]

When I read this, I have trouble reconciling what was said during the election campaign and what is being proposed today by the government, which is giving all the power to private investors.

I want to ask the minister about an important aspect of the motion, and that is our request that the bill be split. He said many times that Parliament should pass it. In this case, he should acknowledge that it is important to have Parliament's approval before moving forward.

Will the minister agree to split the omnibus bill so that we can have a genuine, robust study even as his government looks for a board of directors?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Speaker, we held a wide range of consultations leading up to the introduction of the legislation. We consulted with provinces, territories, municipalities, the private sector, labour unions, trade councils, and all sorts of other stakeholders to ensure we were crafting legislation that would reflect their needs and allow us the flexibility to build the infrastructure they needed. That is why the legislation includes the oversight of Parliament, as well as an arm's-length decision-making process on project selection and financial execution.

Business of Supply

We feel very comfortable that we will select the right talent to establish the bank, board members, and CEOs, who will guide us in the execution as we move forward in establishing the bank by the end of 2017. Canadians expect us to deliver on infrastructure. That is why we are doing this and why it is part of the budget implementation act.

• (1105)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not arm's length because the minister has to approve the financing of projects.

I want to talk about some of the alternative facts. The minister spoke about sustainable funding. The Conservative government brought in the gas tax that went directly to communities. He talked about historical spending on infrastructure of \$180 billion. There are \$90 billion in the existing Conservative programs. We announced 7,800 projects and completed 7,300, which was 94%.

Pages 266 and 277 in budget 2017 talk about lapsed funding. There was so much red tape that there were \$1 billion in lapsed funding, something the Liberal government said it would never do. If there were any money, it would go back to communities. We see in the budget that it will not be reallocated until 2022. When will communities be receiving their money?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Speaker, let me focus on the bank. I will share an example of how municipalities struggle to make decisions. Members from Alberta may remember that a number of years ago, the provincial government consulted with Albertans on the need to build a rail link between Edmonton and Calgary. Albertans wanted that kind of rail link, so they supported it. However, the mayors of major urban centres like Edmonton and Calgary were concerned that if the link was built, it would take resources away from their own LRT projects and were reluctant to support this. With the bank, they would not have to compete with those kinds of projects.

We have dedicated funding for urban centre public transit systems. With the creation of this bank, we could look at potentially building such a link that would link Edmonton and Calgary with a high-speed train. What is wrong with that? Members may not like it, but we want to explore the potential and believe that if we can engage the private sector in making those kinds of projects a reality, Canadians will benefit. I can give more examples—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I hold my colleague opposite in high esteem but, honestly, Canadians expect the Liberals to keep their promises. That is what Canadians expect. They are not expecting a pan-Canadian infrastructure system with tolls.

I would like to ask my dear colleague how the Liberals had the nerve to break another promise and bury something so important in an omnibus bill if this is so important for them and for all Canadians. That is truly shameful.

The only thing the minister can do is rise and answer the question honestly and frankly.

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Speaker, we are so proud to be delivering on our infrastructure commitments. We promised Canadians we would double our infrastructure investments and we are in fact almost tripling those investments.

We understand that Canadian communities have been denied the opportunities to succeed, to grow their economies, to create jobs, to have safe, clean water to drink, and to reduce congestion in major urban centres. We heard from those communities. That is why we have created this additional tool kit that will free up resources for Edmonton to build its LRT, for Calgary to build its LRT, for Toronto to build its subways, for Vancouver and Surrey to build their LRT systems and still engage the private sector to build community infrastructure that otherwise will not be built.

What is wrong with them? Either those members do not get it or they—

• (1110)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ottawa West—Nepean.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for outlining for the House the significant investments made by the government in infrastructure.

We know there is a direct link between infrastructure investment and job creation. The minister mentioned the post-secondary institution strategic investment fund. In my riding right now, construction is under way at Algonquin College, at a cost of \$22 million, which will create a centre for innovation, learning, and entrepreneurship. It will also include an indigenous entrepreneurship centre. This will allow students to literally create the partnerships and the skills to make the jobs of tomorrow.

Could the minister elaborate on the direct connection between infrastructure investments and good middle-class jobs?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Speaker, our government clearly understands this. That is why we are focused on infrastructure to grow our economy and create long-term prosperity. Investment in post-secondary infrastructure, public transit infrastructure, trade-oriented infrastructure, and rural communities infrastructure is necessary.

When infrastructure is underfunded, people are denied access to clean water. They are stuck in traffic, wasting their time, and losing productivity. That is why we have committed to invest in infrastructure.

Business of Supply

I am so proud that with the introduction of the Canada infrastructure bank we can do more. We can undertake projects that some people think are unimaginable, like the rail link I talked about or the high-speed link from Toronto to Windsor. How do we fund those projects? We fund them by engaging the private sector, by mobilizing the innovative thinking around that. People who can utilize these projects are excited.

Our municipalities want to see more infrastructure, but they do not want to compete with other priorities. They want to have dedicated funding and we have given them that dedicated funding. The bank will do more on top of that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister is fond of taking every opportunity to say that he consulted a lot of people about his infrastructure bank. I managed to get my hands on a document through the Access to Information Act. I cannot show it to members because there are clear rules in that regard. However, this document sets out all of the work that was done with BlackRock, a private investment firm that has a vested interest in the bank's creation because the bank will generate significant investment revenue for the firm.

Oddly enough, the entire list of people who were consulted is blacked out in the document. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Finance participated in the meeting. It is impossible to find out the names of those who wanted to meet with the Prime Minister.

If the Prime Minister really wants to work with the other parties, can he tell us the names of the people he actually consulted?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi: Mr. Speaker, the presentation that was made to investors is publicly available. The member can see it. There is nothing secret about it.

We take pride in our investments. We are attracting foreign capital to invest in our country. Canada is open for business. Our country has lacked the infrastructure that could transform our communities and allow people and goods to move faster. We see a lot of potential not only through \$180 billion out of that 92% being delivered through traditional ways, but also mobilizing the value capital through the infrastructure bank.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to hear the minister defend this bank.

First, I will be splitting my time with the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

I want to thank the member for Beloeil—Chambly for bringing this motion forward. This is a very important issue. Many of us would agree that Canada is open for business. However, it is about what kind of business and what that process looks like. As we have seen with the development of this bank, there are some serious concerns on this side of the House. I want to give a bit of an overview of this bank.

Of a total of \$35 billion of taxpayer dollars, \$15 billion are being taken away from communities, but the government has announced these projects. Therefore, there is an anticipation from communities

that these projects will be built in their communities. However, that is not so, because \$15 billion are being taken away from communities, \$5 billion are being taken away from public transit projects, \$5 billion are being taken away from trade and transportation, and \$5 billion are being taken away from green infrastructure. Therefore, the minister should really let communities know which ones will be affected and which projects that have already been announced will not go forward. That is the prudent thing to do. The government talks about being transparent. That is a measure of transparency.

Also, the CPP Investment Board has stated that investors will only look at projects worth over \$500 million because it needs a return on its investment. However, \$20 billion will be provided to the bank through equity and debt, which means it will not be on the books unless the project defaults. This is another very problematic issue.

The bank will seek out private investors and public pension funds to invest in Canadian infrastructure projects. However, if we come back to what the expectation is from investors, they want a return on their investment as high as 12%. For those who have RRSPs invested or any investments whatsoever, 12% is a really good return rate. What is missing in this is that the minister has not identified where that money is coming from. How is that being paid back to the investors? If it is through taxes, tolls, road pricing, whatever fees and mechanisms that looks like, it should be implicit in the legislation. It is not there. There is no mention of what the return on investment will look like. Again, that is very problematic.

I go back to 2009, when the Conservative government set up PPP Canada. At the time, I was the mayor of a large city of 520,000 people. We were a beneficiary through PPP Canada. We worked together and commenced the building of a biofuel facility, which is being completed now. We leveraged private sector dollars. However, the taxpayers are not paying fees to investors on that front. Therefore, the structure is already there in PPP Canada. The initial investment into PPP Canada was \$1.3 billion, which leveraged \$6 billion in infrastructure. The mechanisms and the tools are there.

One of the other functions of the bank is data collection. The FCM has been doing data collection for quite some time. In fact, \$50 million were given to the FCM by the current government specifically for data collection. Therefore, again, it is a repetition of things that are already being done.

● (1115)

The infrastructure bank portion of Bill C-44 will be studied for just one hour. For something as significant as this, with \$35 billion of taxpayers' dollars, to be studied at committee for one hour is absolutely not enough time. Within the motion that has been put forward today, the NDP has requested that this be brought back to the House separately so we can have a wholesome debate on it. Unfortunately, the government has invoked time allocation. It is shutting down debate and giving one hour in committee. This is absolutely unacceptable.

Business of Supply

In a *Globe and Mail* article on Wednesday, May 10, the Minister of Infrastructure stated: “We are not hearing concerns from [those on] whose behalf we are doing this.” Of course there are no concerns from the people for whom they are doing this. That comment from the minister is really telling.

I want to talk about the significant conflict of interest. The Liberals gave direct control over the development of the bank to the very same private investors that will be profiting from the bank. This is a clear and blatant conflict of interest. BlackRock officials were invited by the Liberals to work directly with senior public servants, as well as ministerial staff, ahead of a closed-door meeting with the Prime Minister and ministers on November 14. This was to ensure that BlackRock clients would hear from the minister about the infrastructure bank. In fact, they even looked over the speaking notes of the minister. Documents also reveal that a member of the finance minister's advisory council, who is the president and CEO of Quebec's largest pension fund, was the lead in the policy decisions of the infrastructure bank. That is interesting, because now the pension fund is seeking a \$1.3 billion contribution from the Liberal government for a \$6 billion light rail transit project. Again, this is a blatant conflict of interest.

The postings for the positions on the board are closing before the end of this month, and the legislation has not even been passed.

Let us talk about the Liberal infrastructure plan. Ninety per cent of the announced infrastructure projects have failed to start construction. That means there are no jobs being created and the economy is not being stimulated. The majority of the funds in the Liberal infrastructure plan are back-ended after 2022. There are no bilateral agreements for phase two that have been signed, and no projects have been submitted by the provinces.

The PBO, the Fraser Institute, the Senate, and the C.D. Howe Institute all have serious concerns. They cannot follow the money, there is no transparency, the projects are not getting built, and there is no way they can measure progress. No wonder the government wants to muzzle the PBO.

The Liberals continue to say “historic” amounts of spending, and they are spending. They are spending \$253 million on the Asian infrastructure bank, but we are going to be on the hook for \$1.3 billion in loan guarantees. The Chinese government is taking the lead on that.

I would like to make an amendment to the motion. I move:

That the motion be amended by adding to part (c) after the word “investors” the following:

using taxpayer dollars while also imposing user fees on Canadians

•(1120)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion.

I therefore ask the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly whether he consents to this amendment being moved.

•(1125)

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do consent, and I would add, tongue in cheek, that if the NDP and the Conservatives are working together against this measure, then it must mean the government is really headed in the wrong direction.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: The amendment is in order.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): I thank my colleague for her speech, her amendment, and I dare say, her support. She can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe she supports the motion.

She skilfully illustrated the problem with studying such an important plan, which requires a \$35-billion investment by taxpayers, in just one hour in committee. The speaking time of parliamentarians and their ability to provide input are being limited.

Earlier, in response to my question, the minister said that the government held consultations before introducing the legislation. That is too bad because legislation is a way of consulting parliamentarians and it leaves a lot to be desired right now.

I would like my colleague to say a few words about the fact that the government is looking for candidates for the board of directors and has chosen a location for the bank with no regard for our opinion on the matter. The fact remains that making such decisions before they are reviewed or voted on by Parliament is extremely problematic.

Does the hon. member not agree?

[English]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts: Mr. Speaker, we do support the NDP motion put forward. It is very problematic; there are serious conflict of interest issues. We need to have this legislation reviewed. We need to have the recommendations coming out of the advisory board reviewed. We need to have the request for \$1.3 billion, which was made by an individual on the board, reviewed. To not have the time to have a wholesome discussion is absolutely unacceptable, when we are talking about \$35 billion of taxpayer monies that are being shuffled behind closed doors, and debate is being shut down. I do not know how any Canadian across this country would accept this kind of behaviour from a government.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a historical note, it was the then finance minister, now public safety minister, who introduced the gas tax transfer to assist with municipal infrastructure. Budget 2017 is now taking extra steps on top of the \$180 billion commitment to restore infrastructure and rebuild infrastructure in this country with the announcement of the Canada infrastructure bank.

It is also important to note that this will be debated in two committees in this place and two committees in the other place. How can this possibly not benefit our Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast, when the Canada infrastructure bank is going to add more of the infrastructure Canadians need and address the \$500 billion deficit we have in this country?

Business of Supply

Ms. Dianne L. Watts: Mr. Speaker, actually it was the Conservatives who made the gas tax permanent and indexed it.

We look at the mechanism of PPP Canada that has already been set up, already has a track record. If there is a mandate the Liberals want to expand, then they should look at expanding it on exactly the structure that has been there and proven for many years. We should not set up a new bank that is supposed to be at arm's length using \$35 billion of taxpayers' money, taking out of the communities the money that has already been announced in the communities. I find that absolutely outrageous.

For the member to think that one hour of debate on this significant bill is appropriate, then he needs to think again, because this is not appropriate. The House needs to debate the bill, we need to have proper transparency, and we have to have the parliamentary budget officer look at this conflict of interest. That is where we need to go as Canadians. Obviously, the government does not want to have this shown to Canadians.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely pleased to rise in the House today to talk about the Liberals' infamous infrastructure bank, which I would say is loaded with conflicts of interest. I want to begin by thanking the NDP for moving this motion on such an important topic today.

I will have another chance to talk about these dubious relationships a little later, but I want to begin by outlining the unusual progress of this plan and the problems we have had from the start getting to the bottom of things because of the lack of transparency of the Liberal government, which was supposed to be so open and transparent.

In October 2015, the Liberals promised to run small deficits of \$10 billion and announced the creation of an independent infrastructure bank. What a good way to hide public money in a shiny new Liberal government toy.

When the bank was finally announced in November 2016, I asked the Minister of Infrastructure where he intended to get the money to finance it. It was radio silence as usual, and I did not get an answer. The next day, when I again asked where the money was supposed to come from, I was told that the government was planning to take \$15 billion out of the infrastructure program for Canadian municipalities and put it into the bank. At that point, a lot of people in municipal government did a double take, when the money they could have used to fund major projects in communities across Canada just evaporated.

A few weeks later, the government rubbed salt in the wound. Not only was it going to take Canadian municipalities' \$15 billion away and invest it in the infamous infrastructure bank, but now, most of the projects funded by the infrastructure bank would be worth over \$100 million or even \$500 million because investors would not be interested in funding anything smaller. Where I come from, people call that getting shafted.

In November, December, January, February, March, April, and May, I asked the Minister of Infrastructure at every opportunity to name a single project worth \$100 million or more that could be

funded by this infrastructure bank in a small or medium-sized municipality in Canada. I did not ask him to name 10, 20, or 100 municipalities, but just one little project. I have asked him this question at the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, during question period, and during various discussions, but he has never been able to name a single project.

That makes sense, because if you look at all Canadian municipalities, you see that the average value of the projects partially or fully funded by the federal government is not \$100 million or more, but rather \$6.7 million. With the exception of projects in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and a few provincial megaprojects, there are no projects worth \$100 million or more in the vast majority of Canadian municipalities. This means that \$15 billion that could have helped all Canadians will serve only a small group of individuals, namely foreign investors, the friends of the Liberal Party.

The Prime Minister and his Minister of Infrastructure did not understand the story of Robin Hood, who steals from the rich to give to the poor. What the Prime Minister and his Minister of Finance, Minister of Infrastructure, and government are doing is taking money that should have been given to small and medium-sized municipalities and giving it to multi-billionaire foreign investors. That is what is happening.

Then, we learned from Michael Sabia, president of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, who sits with other investors on a committee that was put in place to advise the minister, the government, and the Prime Minister, that these investors will want returns of 7% to 9% before they are interested in investing in this bank.

• (1135)

My colleague who just spoke and I are former municipal officials, former mayors. We can say that all the municipalities are able, with obligations, to get funding at a maximum rate of 2%. As a result, the municipalities have no interest in investing in this infrastructure, except on the recommendation of the government. It will only serve to fill the pockets of these private investors, these foreign investors, and these friends of the government who are filling the Liberals' election coffers at fundraisers across Canada.

Every time we ask the government about this, it is radio silence. We learned from a document that I mentioned earlier, written by BlackRock, that in August 2016, the largest investment firm in the world secretly met with senior officials and their guests, potential clients of this bank. Through the Access to Information Act, we were able to get access to information about all of these meetings, including the agendas and subjects discussed.

Business of Supply

Oddly, we have no information because everything except for the titles was redacted. We do not have the names of the people who attended the meetings with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the Minister of Transport. Where is the list of BlackRock's guests and clients, those who are going to profit from this infrastructure bank? This is frustrating. The Liberal government says it is transparent, but it is impossible to get this list or what was on the agenda for the meetings.

BlackRock even helped the minister write his speech during an event that was held in November. It is unbelievable when we think about it. With all the support around the minister, including writers, he had to ask a private firm to help him write his speech.

As I was saying, all the top Liberals were at that meeting: the Minister of Finance, the Minister of International Trade, the Minister of Innovation, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Heritage, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of the Environment, and, of course, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Surprise, surprise. The infrastructure bank is exactly what the investors were hoping for. Investors have managed to create a bank to meet their needs and that will yield minimum returns of between 7% and 9% and possibly 10% to 12% in some cases. Of course the projects will have to be worth more than \$100 million to be of interest to them.

Who made these smart recommendations? Michael Sabia and Mark Wiseman, two members of the Trudeau government's advisory council on economic growth who, coincidentally, will directly benefit from the establishment of this infrastructure bank.

Michael Sabia is the president of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and Mark Wiseman is member of the global executive committee of BlackRock. There is obviously a conflict of interest. It begs the question: did these people declare a conflict of interest? The answer is no. There is no declaration, and they have no intention of stepping away from the consultations. They came up with the idea for this infrastructure bank. They recommended it to the government. They got the Justin Trudeau government to make that decision. We asked many questions, which all went unanswered.

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind the hon. member that using the surname of other members in the House is not allowed. Even if the name is part of a quotation, for example, it is not allowed. It is preferable to use the name of the riding or the appropriate title of the member.

I am not certain whether the member was finished, so the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska has the floor.

• (1140)

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I think I got carried away and strayed from my text. I made the unfortunate mistake of calling the individuals by their last names. I will pay close attention the next time.

Before concluding my speech, I would like to note that a report by a committee of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy, whose president is Kevin Page, someone we certainly know and who is the former parliamentary budget officer, says that there is no solid

business case for creating the infrastructure bank, since it will have the potential to increase costs to taxpayers while privatizing the infrastructure that is currently profitable and risk-free.

That report questions why the infrastructure bank needs to be created. We do not know. Saying that it is innovative is not a good answer. The case for the bank is weak.

Personally, I am profoundly shocked to see the minister, with the candour he has, trying to make us believe that what he is putting in place is a good thing for Canadians.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, which is indeed based on such relevant experience. He represents Quebecers and the municipalities in Quebec well.

It is atrocious that we are getting these dribs and drabs of information about a project of this size that is supposed to provide structure and could do precisely that, but that ultimately seems to serve the interests of high finance. It is such an important project, but it has been stuffed into an omnibus bill and we will not have time to talk about it as we should.

According to these dribs and drabs of information, a board of directors is already being set up, and applications are being taken. However, \$30 billion of our money, the public's money, is being invested in this bank.

Who, then, will represent the public on that board of directors?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very relevant question.

The explanation is a total lack of respect for democracy. I would not want to imagine things, but it is rather odd that these announcements were made right in the middle of the disaster we are experiencing in Quebec. We might even wonder whether it was pushed forward precisely to pull a fast one on us. A site has been announced and managers are already being sought for this future infrastructure bank, even before it has been created by Parliament and the bill has been passed here.

In addition, the government had the audacity to include it in an omnibus bill so that it would pass unnoticed, thinking that we and the public would not see through it. This is completely unacceptable.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about rural infrastructure, and I want to pick up on that particular point.

We have a government, through the current minister, that has recognized the value of infrastructure in rural Canada. In fact, for the very first time, literally \$2 billion is being designated for rural infrastructure. That is a very important point to recognize.

The member challenges the government and asks about the infrastructure bank and potential rural projects. My question is specifically regarding that question he lobbed over this way.

Business of Supply

Does the member believe that rural Canada will benefit if we invest in infrastructure, in such things as transmission lines? All sorts of projects will potentially be eligible for significant amounts of financing. I would suggest that rural Canada would benefit immensely from that, keeping in mind that this infrastructure bank complements the current \$170-plus billion that is going toward infrastructure.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I am trying not to laugh, because we have already asked all the questions about what my colleague is trying to explain to us.

We have asked the minister to name one project that could be financed by this bank in a small or medium-sized municipality in a rural area, a city with a population of 40,000, 50,000, or 100,000, but he has never managed to do that.

I asked the minister and his senior officials, unofficially, to name a single project that could be funded by this infrastructure bank, and they were never able to name a single one.

If the member opposite, then, is better than the Minister of Finance, let him name one concrete project that could be carried out. He will see that he is going to need all the notes from his strategists, because he will simply not find any.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very enjoyable to hear my colleague's comments, which are based on his experience as mayor. The member knows very well that when you are a mayor, you have major infrastructure projects that require the contribution of the other governments.

In his opinion, why does this government want to do this through a bank, when there are programs such as P3 Canada that already exist?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very relevant question that clearly reveals the government's intention. There is no reason to create a bank. Everything is already in place right now.

A mayor, or a municipal council, has never needed to go looking for financing, because we all have access to funding through municipal bonds, at an interest rate of less than 2%, and the federal government and the provinces are also able to do this.

There is therefore no reason to create a new structure, other than to make people believe it is a good thing or to enable officials in Toronto to get on the gravy train and help foreign investors earn even more money. There is no other reason.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East.

I am very happy today to have the opportunity to rise in support of the motion from my colleague, the member for Beloeil—Chambly. The motion, in my view, is very clearly worded and its purpose is also clear and concise. The clauses concerning the Canada infrastructure bank's creation should be removed from Bill C-44, the budget implementation act, 2017, No. 1, so that they can be studied as a stand-alone bill.

This is not an unreasonable ask. It is widely acknowledged that the government's proposed infrastructure bank scheme is complex. Canadians and parliamentarians should take the time to study it before it is enacted as part of an omnibus budget bill, which is precisely the type of bill that the current government used to decry and condemn as undemocratic. After all, if we are to invest \$35 billion into this scheme, we should allot more than a couple of hours of study.

I am sure my colleagues would agree that this sort of spending deserves more careful scrutiny, which is why it needs to be excised from Bill C-44 and studied as a stand-alone bill. Why is the government burying such an important and expensive initiative in a 300-page bill? What is it afraid of? A government that has boasted over and over again about its pledges to be open and transparent is afraid to allow any sunlight to fall on its infrastructure bank scheme. Could it be because this scheme would benefit its wealthy friends first and foremost instead of the citizens of Canada?

What are the criteria and governance models that this bank would operate under? Already there are concerns that corporations and private investors have been given unprecedented control over the planning and development of this scheme. Where is the consultation with everyday Canadians that Liberals are so fond of? Why will the Liberals not even allow elected members of this House to study this scheme? Are they concerned that their scheme will not pass the smell test?

The government promised that investments in infrastructure would benefit Canadians, but it is difficult to see how a scheme that would pad the profits of corporations and wealthy private investors would do that, especially when everyday Canadians would be paying the price through new tolls and years of user fees with nothing to show for it in the long run. This is the oldest trick in the book, and we all know how it ends. Governments give sweetheart deals to corporations for infrastructure projects, people pay through the nose, corporations make profits, and then the crumbling infrastructure is dumped back on the public. It is not a scenario that benefits taxpayers.

How can Canadians be sure that decisions made by this bank would, indeed, be in the best interests of taxpayers? Will corporate profits always trump public good, or just sometimes? Either way, it is not acceptable to push this through without consultation, without study, and without the disinfectant of sunlight on this scheme that seems to have been concocted between the government and a few of its wealthy friends. It is just the latest example of the arrogance of the government, "Just trust us; we know best."

Business of Supply

It is passing strange that the consultation the government loves to trot out as a delaying tactic whenever convenient is so conspicuously missing here. When it came to pay equity for half of our population, the Liberals conveniently kicked the can for a couple of years, citing the need for consultation, even though pay equity is a human right and has been studied to death. After ragging the puck on electoral reform for months, the Liberals insisted on consultations in many forms, town halls in each riding, postcards, and even a famously incoherent and universally ridiculed online questionnaire, only to abruptly pull the plug on their promise to make 2015 the last election under first past the post. However, when there is an opportunity to help their wealthy friends get even richer off the backs of Canadians, it is suddenly inconvenient to have consultations. It must be just a coincidence.

• (1150)

If the Liberals think they have a case to move forward, they should not be afraid to pull the plug, just like they did on electoral reform. They should pull the infrastructure bank scheme out of the omnibus budget bill so it can be studied properly. If they acted as they claim, in the best interest of Canadians, they should not be afraid of scrutiny, and their scheme should be able to stand, or fall, on its own merits. This unseemly haste does not bode well for Canadians. If elected representatives cannot be allowed to properly study this costly scheme, one must ask again what the government is hiding. What is it afraid of?

Public infrastructure should serve the interests of Canadians. Privatizing investment in public infrastructure is not just a bad business decision for the taxpayers of Canada; it represents a blatant conflict of interest.

We do not have to look very far to find examples of boondoggles that have cost taxpayers dearly. In my home province of Saskatchewan, I can point to a couple of infamous examples. The Regina bypass portion of the Trans-Canada Highway is contracted to a foreign company that has been accused of unfair labour practices, and the cost of this project has ballooned from \$400 million to \$2 billion. What about the sketchy land deal known as the Global Transportation Hub scandal, particularly the revelation that the land purchased by the GTH could have been bought years earlier for a tenth of the cost? As a result of the Saskatchewan Party's GTH scandal, two businessmen, who also happen to be Sask Party supporters, took \$11 million in profits out of the pockets of Saskatchewan taxpayers. Now the Sask Party government has unilaterally killed the Saskatchewan Transportation Company, STC, because it thinks that a private operator will be able to take it over. Yes, a private operator would be only too happy to buy STC's assets in a fire sale and then only offer service on routes that would be profitable. What happens to the less profitable routes that serve Canadians in remote communities who have no other means of transportation to get to cancer treatment?

Selling off profitable crown corporations like SaskTel will only lead to higher costs for consumers and an unnecessary loss of equity and revenue for the province, and therefore the taxpayers. I really do not care which party people belong to. Stories like these should make their skin crawl.

In the last 30 years, there have been many failed experiments that have exploded the myth that private business can deliver essential public services and infrastructure at less cost and with better results than the public sector. Canadians pay taxes for the common good. That includes public services and public infrastructure.

During the 2015 election campaign, the Liberals promised to establish the Canada infrastructure bank to "provide low-cost financing for new infrastructure projects", but in 2016, they subsequently announced that the bank would be financed largely by private-sector investors. I am pretty sure that private-sector investors are not known for their pro bono work.

Projects financed by the infrastructure bank would have to generate revenues that would pay significant returns to investors, resulting in user fees, tolls, and of course, new costs to be assumed by Canadians across the country. What the Liberals are proposing is nothing short of privatization of our infrastructure. This privatization would benefit their friends: wealthy investors. It would not help middle-class Canadians, and middle-class Canadians are who the Liberals keep saying they are trying to help.

All Canadians should ask this question: If the bank's mandate would be to finance projects with income-generating potential, what would happen to essential infrastructure projects in the regions deemed unprofitable but that are in the public interest and are necessary for public safety? Based on the Liberal plan, the bank would have great autonomy in choosing which infrastructure projects were financed. Given these circumstances, who would guarantee that the decisions made by the bank's board and executive director were in the public interest, and moreover, who would have the power to prevent corruption and ensure accountability?

In fact, we are learning through the news media that there is an internal federal report that warns of a wide range of potential problems with the proposed Canada infrastructure bank, including that it would duplicate the work of provinces, slow down projects, add new layers of bureaucracy, and expose Ottawa to "public relations disasters and embarrassment".

• (1155)

If the government is so convinced that its infrastructure bank scheme is in the best interest of Canadians, it should have no objection at all to severing it from the omnibus budget bill and having it scrutinized by parliamentarians and Canadians. After all, what does it have to hide?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her speech and her criticisms of the bank. That is what we are here for. Both of Her Majesty's loyal oppositions do an earnest job in holding us to account, and I thank them for their advocacy.

Business of Supply

It should come as no surprise that we are investing all over Canada. In the area of Saskatoon alone, we have 13 projects, with a total eligible cost of about \$60-plus million, half of which is the federal contribution. These are things I hope the member will admit are critical for the development of the Saskatoon area. Indeed, the mayors and city councillors are over the hills about these investments, which have been underfunded for so long.

There seems to be a fear of the private sector. Pushed to its limit, the suggestion is that we would have to build all these projects, even in our classical funding model, all by ourselves. That is not the case. We work with partners, and they contribute to our understanding of needs. Indeed, we defer to the provinces and municipalities for their expertise as to which projects are selected.

Has the member read the legislation? It took me half an hour. It is not buried anywhere in an omnibus bill. It is an easy read. I am glad to sit down and work with her. To truly understand the functioning of the bank, it is worth that half-hour sit-down. Has she read the legislation?

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, of course my community of Saskatoon and my riding of Saskatoon West are pleased to get the investments they have received.

I met with my counterparts, colleagues and friends within city council, to talk about what they thought of an infrastructure bank. Members need to know that in the province of Saskatchewan, there are only a million people. The two largest cities have populations of 200,000. Although the City of Saskatoon, in particular, has a very long list, as we all know most municipalities have not been able to keep pace with the infrastructure needs of their communities. It is a very long list of things that need to happen in my community. It was clear from their list and our conversations that none of the ones on their wish list would fall under this infrastructure bank. Therefore, I believe that the \$15 billion used to create the bank has come out of my community.

What we are discussing today is the ability to have the conversation. I am not afraid of private investment. I want to have the conversation. I want this huge investment of taxpayer dollars, and all the stuff that has gone on prior to the bill even being passed, to come to Parliament to see the light of day and be debated. It is within an omnibus bill. It is not being pulled out, because I believe it will not—

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Edmonton Riverbend.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to hear the Liberals on the other side of the House say that city councillors and other members of municipalities are “over the hills” excited about this infrastructure bank. I know it was originally said that it could potentially come to a place like Calgary. I would not describe the mayor there as being over the hills excited these days about the decision to locate it in a place like Toronto.

Is my NDP colleague hearing similar things? A bunch of infrastructure announcements are being made. There are lots of flashy lights, and many members of Parliament on the Liberal side are standing there, excited to make an announcement. However, a lot of it is not funded until the years 2022 and 2023. We heard the

infrastructure minister say that everyone is excited about these infrastructure projects, yet there are no shovels in the ground. I wonder if that is similar in her city of Saskatoon.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I have concerns for sure. Folks in my riding have concerns about so much of the money being back-ended, not only for what we traditionally view as public infrastructure but also for social programs, such as day care and public housing. Although they are bunched in around social infrastructure and public infrastructure, many of those programs are not going to be funded to the levels the Liberals promised during the election until after the next election. I find that very disappointing.

My riding really needs that basic social infrastructure, and we cannot wait until the next election. The Liberals promised that it would happen for the people in my riding during this term.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to speak to this important motion brought forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

For decades, Canada's vital public infrastructure has been suffering from serious neglect from the lack of political will of government after government to adequately invest in it. To make matters worse, not only have federal governments continued to fail to adequately invest in public infrastructure, but there has also been a significant downloading of the responsibility to provincial and municipal governments. In turn, many provincial governments over the years have followed suit and downloaded their responsibilities to local governments, as well.

The result is that local governments have been left holding the bag. Local governments have been even further handcuffed by successive cuts to transfers made to them by both the federal and provincial governments. Between the 1990s and 2000s alone, transfers from other levels of government were reduced from 26% to 16% of total annual municipal revenue.

While estimates of the infrastructure deficit can vary, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, in its annual alternative federal budget, pegs that figure at \$171.8 billion. There is absolutely no doubt that investment is needed.

Canada's public infrastructure is desperate for upgrade and expansion, and these are not just some make-work projects. Public infrastructure, such as improving roads and highways and expanding public transit services would not only significantly improve the lives of Canadians as they go about their day, but would help Canada build a more environmentally sustainable society, allowing us to do our part to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, for example.

As Canadian cities continue to grow, the failure to provide the essential funding to increase public transit options impacts Canadians at a personal level and the broader economy as well.

The 2014 traffic index found my city of Vancouver was home to the third largest amount of gridlock in North America, just behind Los Angeles and Mexico City, with Toronto not far behind. Gridlock was believed to cost the average commuter nearly 79 hours in 2014. That means for over three days per year, people are stuck in traffic.

Business of Supply

In 2009, the OECD estimated that the greater Toronto area alone lost \$3.3 billion in productivity as a result of urban sprawl, congestion, and underinvestment in public transit. Fast, frequent, reliable, accessible, affordable, high-capacity transit is essential.

In my riding, we often see buses drive past stops because they are full. There is no question that more buses are needed. The B-Line on Broadway often has long lineups. People in my community would love to see a rapid transit that takes them all the way to UBC. Enhanced HandyDART services are also much needed for seniors and those with mobility challenges.

Significant and stable long-term funding is required to provide the services needed to meet existing and future transit demands. Investments in public infrastructure are investments in our country's future.

Aside from a deficit in transit infrastructure, we also need soft infrastructure support. Things like libraries, community centres, neighbourhood houses, art and cultural spaces, theatres across Canada in both cities and rural communities are vitally important community institutions.

In Vancouver East, Vancouver's Chinatown is one of Canada's major tourist and historical sites. It is a recognized national historic site yet today, it is number three on Heritage Vancouver's top 10 watch list of endangered sites in Vancouver and on the top 19 endangered places list on the National Trust for Canada.

Today, historic Chinatown is faced with enormous redevelopment pressures and the neighbourhood is fast gentrifying. Currently, the community is very concerned about the future of 105 Keefer Street. It is located next to the Chinese memorial which commemorates the Chinese railway workers and soldiers. This memorial depicts the history of Chinese Canadians in Canada and is profound in its meaning to our community. The Vancouver Chinese memorial is one of a kind in North America and is also a major tourist attraction.

In recognition of the above factors, the Chinese Benevolent Association, the Canadian Alliance of Chinese Associations, the Chinese Canadian Military Museum Society, Chinese Canadian youth and seniors living in Chinatown held a joint press conference earlier requesting all levels of government to work in collaboration to acquire 105 Keefer Street and develop it for the community with special emphasis for low-income seniors housing.

● (1205)

The community would like to see all levels of government contribute to this much needed affordable housing in our community and to include the purchase of 105 Keefer as part of that initiative. This would be an excellent infrastructure project for the federal government to support.

Also, there is a historically significant role for Chinese society and clan associations in serving the social, political, and financial needs of Chinese Canadians. To bridge the history to the current realities of today, the community would like to see our government help rejuvenate these historic Chinese society and clan buildings. These buildings could be renovated in order to better serve the needs of today's community by creating usable community cultural spaces, space for food programs, and affordable housing.

The critical shortage of affordable, social, and co-op housing in this country is acute. Despite big talk about affordable housing strategies and big announcements about making investments, the government is simply continuing to kick the can down the road. In fact, it is investing in this year's budget exactly zero dollars to address the crisis.

My constituent Emily wrote:

Today I had the opportunity with my daughters school, Fresh Air Elementary, to tour Lookout's shelter in North Vancouver.

We learned that the shelter is full every night and that BC Housing waitlists are impossibly long. I know that the people who are homeless often face multiple barriers that will make it almost impossible to find housing in the regular rental market.

We need a national housing plan that includes mixed income housing such as Co-ops, accessible housing, housing for seniors and housing for people that are really hard to house. There has to be affordable options for families too.

The city of Vancouver has 20 sites ready to go, and we can see affordable housing developed there now. One of them is at 58 West Hastings, a city-owned site. The mayor signed a pledge and committed that the project would be 100% welfare, pension rate community-controlled social housing. One partner of the project is the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation. The city is now seeking additional financial support from senior levels of government, and it is vital that the federal government become a partner in this important project.

Aside from housing, soft infrastructure is also critical in our community. Take for example the Chinese Cultural Centre's newly re-elected board chair, Fred Kwok, would like to see a theatre built for community use at the Chinese Cultural Centre. The land is available. The plan was drawn up by the late Joe Wai, an architect that left a huge legacy in our community. A partnership with the federal government would be essential to see this project succeed.

I wholeheartedly agree that Canada needs significant, immediate, and sustained investments to upgrade, improve, and expand our public infrastructure. However, like my New Democratic colleagues, I have very serious concerns about the government's proposed Canada infrastructure bank. The government can pick any name it wants, but it cannot change what it really is: the growing privatization of Canada's public infrastructure. We know the government has given large multinational corporations significant control in the creation of this program. It had even decided where it should go before the matter was examined by committee.

What we know is that this is just another term for private-public partnerships, what we call P3s. Why the fancy name? Years of evidence have shown P3s for what they really are: costly, private profit-generating projects that are prone to cost and time overruns, high user fees, and when something goes wrong, it is the public that is on the hook.

Business of Supply

A 2016 paper from the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy concluded that P3s cost as much as, or even more than, conventional fixed-price procurement arrangements. As I alluded to, it also found "risks that are supposedly transferred to private partners are never truly transferred."

This is going to be done on the backs of Canadians. The government is rushing this through because it wants to hide it so that people cannot have accountability and cannot have transparency, which is exactly what the government said it would not do.

It is time to support this motion. Canadians deserve no less.

• (1210)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, given that debate has been shut down and we have one hour at the infrastructure committee to discuss this, I want to hear the member's opinion and thoughts about posting for positions on the board and for a CEO before the committee has seen the legislation, before the legislation has come to the House, and before the legislation has been passed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, the Liberals promised there would be no abuse of omnibus bills, yet here we are with another broken promise. They are doing exactly what they said they would not do. We have a major initiative here and the government is hiding it within 300 pages of an omnibus bill. In addition to that, the Liberals are absolutely shutting down debate so that we cannot have a thorough debate about the issue.

In fact, today it was reported that an internal report recommends that the government should ensure there is clear accountability on this issue and that parliamentarians should fully investigate this. For the government to have made decisions about the board and the location of the infrastructure bank is absolutely astounding. The Liberals are ignoring the important voices of every single parliamentarian. We represent our constituents, the people who elected us to bring forward points of view on their behalf. The government is usurping all of that. It is inappropriate and wrong.

Canadians deserve accountability and transparency. We are talking about \$35 billion of Canadians' money. The Liberals need to step up and do what they said they would do during the campaign, which is be accountable.

• (1215)

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her advocacy for her community. I heard the passion with which she expressed her concern for development, particularly in social housing. These are needs in any city and most communities. In mine, for example, it is up to 30% or 40% in certain areas and boroughs.

These are the things we need to be fighting for and that is why we have a classical infrastructure model of up to \$180 billion. This is why we will not be using private capital in most circumstances to leverage these purchases and construction. We will be working with private partners and we will be looking to work with private partners for these things. In some areas it will make sense and in some areas it will not.

Has the member talked to any community members for projects that will make sense in her riding, will make sense for the Vancouver area? We recently announced projects in the Vancouver area of \$300 million, half of which are federally funded. Again, not all of those are privately leveraged, but there are circumstances where we will be building more infrastructure in order to build bigger projects, more projects in communities where they need it and where it makes sense to allow private partners to participate, but it is not all of them. It is 8% of our classical funding model. Perhaps the member could consult with members in her party because the projects themselves come from the proponents and they are not pushed by the bank in and of itself.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the member says affordable housing would not be part of the infrastructure bank. Perhaps he should actually talk to his colleague, the member for Spadina—Fort York, who seemed to indicate that affordable housing would be part of that.

To set that aside for a minute, I am interested in the question that is top of mind for my constituents. With this set-up of the infrastructure bank, will people be stuck with user fees and tolls for these big projects? Why will the Liberals not come clean and tell them if that is their plan? Canadians deserve to have the answer and none of us knows that at this point. The government would not confirm that one way or the other. My projection is that they would be stuck with user fees, that they would be stuck with tolls. My community is telling me this in terms of their concerns.

Has the member read the internal report and is he concerned about what the internal report is suggesting?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would first like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

[*English*]

It is an honour to stand in the House today to speak about the important work our government is doing to support our municipalities' infrastructure investments for the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

In budget 2016, we launched the first phase of the plan, which is designed to achieve three major objectives: encouraging long-term economic growth, building inclusive communities, and supporting a low carbon emission green economy.

The initial phase focused on repairing and modernizing existing infrastructure. It also provided for financing the design and planning stages of new large-scale projects.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

That first phase has been successful. Through Infrastructure Canada's two funds, the \$2 billion clean water and waste water fund, and the \$3.4 billion public transit infrastructure fund, the Government of Canada has supported 1,760 projects across the country. Over 70% of these projects are currently under way.

When we first took office, we made a commitment to Canadians and Canadian municipalities to be transparent and to make strategic evidence-based investments in infrastructure. We knew the best way to do this was in partnership with provinces, territories, municipalities, indigenous peoples, and key stakeholders, so we met with them. We talked to them, and we continue to talk to all our partners and stakeholders. We know the best way to be successful is to ensure that the work we are doing and the plans we are putting forward are based on the needs and expectations of the people it is meant to serve.

As the Prime Minister said in the House on Tuesday, we ensure we talk to people, like the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the big cities mayors' caucus, and to engineering and construction industry members. Last week, I spoke to a group of mayors from the UMQ, who put forward their views on our project, and they were very positive about it. With their valuable input and contributions, we were able to develop our long-term infrastructure plan, which we call "investing in Canada", through which we will invest over \$180 billion over 12 years.

Our plan focuses on five key areas: public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, trade and transportation, and rural and northern communities. It also features two new initiatives: the smart cities challenge, which I spoke to the mayor and guests about yesterday in Toronto; and the Canada infrastructure bank.

When we were developing the Canada infrastructure bank, we also met with groups like the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. We knew the importance of having the experts at the table from the very beginning. That is also why I would like to commend the House of Commons and Senate committees that are looking into the bank very carefully. The bank is being reviewed by four distinct committees. I would like to thank those members for their time and hard work on the matter.

The Canada infrastructure bank is a new tool for communities across Canada to take advantage of in order to build strong and stronger communities.

● (1220)

[Translation]

We are proposing the Canada infrastructure bank because we believe that the federal government has an opportunity to make a place for itself among the many private sector investments in infrastructure and to form partnerships with some of the largest institutional investors in the world.

If Parliament approves it, that is exactly what the Canada infrastructure bank will do. It will invest up to \$35 billion in new infrastructure focusing on growth everywhere in Canada.

Fifteen billion of those dollars will come from the investing in Canada plan. That \$15 billion represents approximately 8% of the total funds we have committed to infrastructure under our long-term plan, which I referred to earlier, of over \$180 billion.

We will make an additional \$20 billion in capital available to the Canada infrastructure bank to enable it to hold assets in the form of equity or debt.

The bank will be the federal government's contact point with the private sector and will hire experts from the private sector so that the government can maximize the investments made with private capital.

The bank's funds are in addition to the funding for infrastructure that we have committed to doubling. Most importantly, they represent a new way of helping our financing partners meet their urgent infrastructure needs. We will free up public funds to build more public infrastructure using private capital to build these new projects.

We expect that the bank will attract private sector capital that would otherwise not have been invested in public infrastructure. That will have a multiplier effect on our transformational infrastructure capacities. Once the bank has been created as an autonomous crown corporation, it will provide a new tool that the provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous partners will be able to use to build the infrastructure that Canadians need.

It will also be responsible for negotiating complex transactions and finding innovative financing solutions for transformational infrastructure projects everywhere in Canada. It is therefore essential that we find and attract talented and experienced managers who will ensure that the bank fulfils its mandate. My colleague, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, has initiated the search for senior management, namely the chairperson, the board of directors, and the chief executive officer of the autonomous crown corporation. The objective is to ensure that the bank is operational by the end of 2017.

This process is open and merit-based, and it will enable us to find the experts and professionals who are needed for managing the bank. The selection process is designed to attract diverse and highly qualified personnel.

● (1225)

[English]

At this point, I would like to address some of the allegations made in the House, in particular by the member for South Surrey—White Rock. The suggestion has been made, and it was not simply made by her, that the bank would take away from current projects that have been announced or are under way. That is patently false. The member can rest assured that the projects in her riding, totalling \$72.5 million, half of which is federally funded, will go through.

Business of Supply

Another issue that was raised was the ownership of the gas tax fund. It bears reminding the House that the gas tax fund was created by the last Liberal minister of finance, now the current Minister of Public Safety, to truly balance the budget. The gas tax fund is a Liberal initiative that creates sustained funding to municipalities through regular funding from the government.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, I met with the UMQ. We do not share entirely the same opinion on how much money gets funded by the federal government. We are entering into a difficult, earnest, and open negotiation phase with Quebec, and municipalities will participate in the advocacy. It was very eager to hear what our plans were.

[Translation]

Wherever I go in Quebec to make announcements, the mayors of the cities, and especially the councillors, who work as hard as we do, if not harder, are delighted to be getting infrastructure. There has been a crying need for decades, because of capital underfunding, and that has consequences.

[English]

If approved by Parliament, the bank will be an important new tool for our provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous communities to build more infrastructure, while freeing up public funding for public projects.

The Government of Canada has been open and transparent regarding all phases of the bank's development. We will continue to work openly with our partners to ensure our investing in Canada's infrastructure plan continues to meet the needs of communities across Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

Out of the \$120 billion promised and planned by his government after the election, how much, to date, has been taken out of the treasury to be invested in infrastructure? To my knowledge, it is almost nothing.

How is the infrastructure bank going to make sure that the \$120 billion promised for infrastructure is distributed to the various projects as quickly as possible?

Mr. Marc Miller: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Obviously, we need to clarify the fact that the \$180 billion is being allocated to a 12-year project. As the member well knows, the model agreements we will have with the provinces will vary from province to province, based on need.

For the existing projects in Quebec, and I am certain that this is what the member wanted to ask about, we pay the bills when they are submitted to the government. We do our due diligence, and when we approve a project, the money is allocated to that project. Whether it comes from the bank, as such, or from the treasury, as such, is therefore not as important as the fact that the project is approved and the commitment to providing the funding is made.

● (1230)

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to share a thought with the House. The danger of privatizing public infrastructure is twofold. First, there is a risk that we will be making users pay more; and second, if we introduce a profitability factor, that will put areas outside of urban centres at a disadvantage, particularly in the communities in my riding, Jonquière.

Take for example cellphone service and the purchase of new cellphone towers. Certainly, it will be more attractive, for a private company, to erect these new towers in regions where there are more users. For the smaller communities in my riding such as Lamarche, with a population of about 500, buying new cellphone towers for infrastructure will not be attractive for the private sector, because there are fewer users. This is of crucial importance, however, for developing the economy of these small communities, as well as for tourism and for retaining population.

What does my colleague say to these small communities that will be penalized and will not be able to benefit from what his project is promising? That project will not be important for our communities. They will not actually be able to benefit from it.

Mr. Marc Miller: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her very good question.

We committed to investing \$2 billion in rural communities. That is a very important part of our plan. In addition, \$500 million has been allocated to Internet service for rural and small communities. I want to emphasize that. It is an option in our traditional funding structure.

Some people think that the infrastructure bank will only fund big projects in big communities, but that is not at all the case. Here is how it will work. We will take proposals. Not all of the proposals will be approved, but Canadians and Quebecers will be our primary consideration in selecting proposals that make sense. If a small community submits a major proposal, it will be given due consideration because the infrastructure bank has a multiplier effect. It provides access to funding, to private capital that we could not otherwise afford. Those people invest in projects that make sense for them, but when we evaluate projects, when the bank evaluates projects, it will have to put the needs of Canadians and Quebecers, first.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the importance of public infrastructure and how it will help stimulate the economy and provide additional support to Canadian families.

We believe that one of the best ways to restore the confidence of Canada's middle class is to invest in public infrastructure in order to build stronger communities and build an economy that works for all Canadians and their families.

Strengthening the middle class means that hard-working Canadians can look forward to a good standard of living and better prospects for their children and grandchildren. When the middle class succeeds, we all succeed.

Business of Supply

We know that our investments in our communities will help everyone contribute to improving our economic, social, and environmental well-being, but how can we achieve those objectives in practical terms? That is a good question.

Governments throughout the world are constantly struggling to create public assets, such as roads and bridges, that meet taxpayers' quality expectations while also standing the test of time. That is why, in budget 2016, the government announced its proposal for a historic infrastructure plan.

We are working closely with the provincial and territorial governments on making targeted investments in public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure as soon as possible. Budget 2016 announced \$11.9 billion over five years in support of these priorities.

In the speeches I heard today, several members talked about projects that have yet to start.

• (1235)

[*English*]

This morning, many individuals were saying that there are not a whole lot of shovel-in-the ground or shovel-ready projects. I just made a quick call to my office to find out, in the beautiful riding of Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, what projects in fact had been approved, and that we do have shovels in the ground. Again, we can totally see that the federal contribution for some projects that have been made was \$84 million and project total values were \$225 million.

There are some wonderful projects that we see, which I know I am very proud of and I advocated for very strongly during my campaign. One of them was the restoration of the beautiful Petitcodiac River. For those members who are not familiar with my area, the Petitcodiac project consists of replacing a causeway with a 200-metre bridge in order to achieve maximum recovery of the Petitcodiac River system. Back home, it is a project that is very near and dear to all of our hearts. Restoring the full tidal flow was expected to restore as much as 80% of the functions of the river, creating conditions necessary to restore fish passage and the unique Petitcodiac tidal bore. I can say that even last summer some individuals were out there with their surfboards, so we can almost promote tourism in a lot of ways, which is fantastic.

[*Translation*]

The first part of our plan outlined a new collaborative approach and use of infrastructure investment to make our communities stronger, but we knew that we needed to do more.

That is why in last fall's economic statement the government announced an additional \$81 billion over 11 years for public transit, green infrastructure, social infrastructure, infrastructure to support trade, infrastructure for rural and northern communities, and smart cities.

In all, combined with existing funding, we will be investing more than \$180 billion over 12 years in our cities, our towns, and our trade corridors to provide cleaner air and water, better neighbourhoods for our children, and smarter, more connected communities. This

investment is unprecedented in Canadian history and it comes at a time when the need is great.

Our communities need to keep people and goods moving. Our most vulnerable citizens need housing. To meet this challenge, we need to think even bigger.

Finally, I will address the issue of the creation of the Canada infrastructure bank. No level of government can achieve on its own the ambitious infrastructure objectives. We must work with the other levels of government, public and private organizations, and investors around the world. Canada has enormous infrastructure needs, with a huge potential for building world-class infrastructure that will improve communities, create good jobs, and make the economy stronger and greener.

It is important to attract investment that will fund a larger number of infrastructure projects. Investors have told us that they want to invest in Canada, but that certain specific conditions must be in place. That is why we introduced Bill C-44, which establishes the new Canada infrastructure bank as a crown corporation. The bank will be run by a CEO and governed by a professional board of directors.

Through the new infrastructure bank, which is an independent institution, we will work with the provinces, territories, and municipalities to build world-class infrastructure that will improve our communities, create good jobs, and make the economy stronger and greener.

The Canada Infrastructure Bank will seek to attract investments from private sector institutions in new public infrastructure projects that will generate revenue in Canada. Simply put, it is a new way of funding transformative projects in communities across our beautiful country. By attracting new investors, we can carry out more infrastructure projects that Canadian communities need.

The bank will be entrusted with investing at least \$35 billion in federal funds using a wide range of financial instruments. Through the creation of a new institution that is able to work with the private sector when it makes sense to do so, public funds will be used more wisely and more strategically. These investments will lead to better projects that will create the good, well-paying jobs that are needed to sustainably strengthen Canada's economy.

In closing, I want to say that we know that we will not overcome the challenges we are facing overnight. We know that to govern effectively, we cannot just focus on today and tomorrow. We also have to focus on the years and decades to come. We need to ensure a better future for our children. We are optimistic, knowing that we can build a better life for the next generation.

Business of Supply

•(1240)

[English]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, we heard earlier from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities that the government was going to use strategic, evidence-based investments in infrastructure as part of rolling out the money. The Senate committee studying infrastructure just two months ago warned that Liberals could end up wasting billions in infrastructure money because it lacks a detailed strategy and that the only metric that Infrastructure Canada is using to measure success is how much is spent and not what it is getting spent on.

I wonder if the member could comment on the Senate's report, which comments quite negatively on the Liberals' ability to spend infrastructure money properly, and how we can trust them to do it properly and hand over control to a bank when they cannot even get their own act together.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

We were elected on a commitment to make historic investments in infrastructure. The previous government neglected our infrastructure for 10 years. Now, we need to move forward and make wise investments.

We are working with the municipalities, provinces, and everyone so we can carry out good projects, projects that our communities need.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Absolutely, Madam Speaker, those are the kinds of projects for which we would like to see federal support. Part of my family originally settled in the Petiboniac. That was the Steeves family, one of whom was a Father of Confederation. It is exactly the kind of project that the infrastructure bank would not fund, so I am puzzled that the member would raise that as an example.

I note in the pan-Canadian framework for climate change and green energy that the report mentions that the private infrastructure bank would be used to provide green energy in Canada. What are we going to be doing, paying for export power lines to the United States?

The member says that this is great news for the provinces and for the municipalities, and yet the KPMG report raised serious concerns about the intrusion of the federal government into areas that are traditionally municipal and provincial. I wonder if the member would be willing to make available to all the members in this place the feedback by the provinces, territories, aboriginal governments, and municipalities on how comfortable they feel about this infrastructure bank.

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question and her comments.

I was talking earlier about the project to restore the Petiboniac River. As I said, I am very happy with this project.

An infrastructure bank will help us release public funds for projects such as this one to restore the Petiboniac River. Attracting more capital will allow us to release public funds to deliver projects that the communities and provinces are asking us for.

[English]

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, out of the \$180 billion for infrastructure, \$90 billion was in the existing Conservative programs, with 7,300 projects that have been completed and some that are still under way. I am glad that, in the member's riding, she saw the benefit of that.

What I also want to say is that, in phase one, there was \$1 billion in lapsed funding. Those projects announced in 2016 had to be completed by 2019, but \$1 billion did not, and that \$1 billion will not be reallocated until 2022, which I find absolutely astonishing. However, PPP Canada has leveraged billions of private-sector dollars for infrastructure since 2009.

Why are the Liberals not using that mechanism if they are looking for new mechanisms to leverage private-sector dollars? We already have one in place.

•(1245)

[Translation]

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Once again, our government was elected on a commitment to make historic investments in infrastructure. We are looking at all the options. We want to be sure that we can deliver as many projects as we can support and finance. That is exactly what we are now doing.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Edmonton Strathcona.

Today we are debating the government's proposal for a Canada infrastructure bank. In particular, today's NDP motion asks the House to remove the clauses concerning the Canada infrastructure bank from Bill C-44, the budget implementation act, so they can be studied as a stand-alone bill.

I would like to start with a short history of the proposal and then move on to some of the concerns I have about the infrastructure bank.

In the 2015 election, the Liberal platform stated that it would:

...establish the Canadian Infrastructure Bank to provide low-cost financing for new infrastructure projects. The federal government can use its strong credit rating and lending authority to make it easier and more affordable for municipalities to build the projects their communities need.

Business of Supply

This was not one of those high-profile promises, like electoral reform, which the Liberals have since broken, and it seems to be an entirely reasonable promise to make: using public money wisely to build and maintain public infrastructure.

Unfortunately, the plan has changed radically. In the latest budget, the government reveals that the infrastructure bank will involve \$35 billion, \$15 billion of which is public money. The rest will come from private investment banks and funds that expect a sizable return on their investments and a real say in the priorities of where that money is invested.

Do we need such a private infrastructure bank in Canada? Do we need to pay more for infrastructure projects? Do we need to pay tolls and extra fees? Do we need to give up the planning control of where our money is spent on public infrastructure?

According to a study by researchers at the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy, the federal government could build even more infrastructure simply by borrowing at preferred rates and then passing the savings on to cities and provinces. That was exactly what the Liberals promised in the last election.

The government seems to be doing this for only one reason, and that is to take the credit for infrastructure projects it has had little or nothing to do with, projects that will profit wealthy investment bankers, projects funded by taxpayers paying extra tolls and fees, all the while taking the costs off government books so its fiscal record looks better than it is.

I would like to look a little more closely at some of the concerns surrounding the Canada infrastructure bank proposal. First among these is that unnecessary added cost that it would bring to public infrastructure projects.

As the Liberals pointed out in their election promises, the federal government can use its strong credit rating to access funds to help provinces and municipalities move forward with infrastructure projects that will benefit all Canadians. Why bring in private investment firms that demand higher returns? The government is simply adding a middleman who wants a profit.

As we heard earlier in various speeches, the Liberal government recently commissioned a study by KPMG to look into the infrastructure bank idea. It obviously did not like the answers it got since it initially refused to release the report.

One of the points the report makes is that Canadians do not like paying extra fees and tolls for the use of public infrastructure, something that really should not come as a surprise, especially when those fees and tolls will not be paying back public monies used for the project, but instead paying for profits to investment bankers.

The report mentions the push back the government might get if we start charging fees for water use. It points out that private investors internationally have only taken on municipal water assets after the community has adopted full costing and metering of water use.

In my riding, water metering is already in effect in many communities, simply because water is a precious commodity in the dry interior of southern British Columbia and paying for use instead of per household is a strong incentive for water conservation. People are paying their own municipal governments, not a private

corporation, for that water use. This example points to the fact that private investors are simply interested in making a profit rather than getting involved for the public good.

Every municipality has ongoing infrastructure maintenance and operating costs that they must bear every year. Small rural municipalities and regional districts already are struggling with per capita costs that are much higher than those in larger cities. It makes no sense to them to embrace an infrastructure bank that will inevitably cost their citizens even more in the long term. They need a federal government that will provide the funding they need in the form of grants or low interest loans, just as the Liberals promised in their election platform, not through a private infrastructure bank.

• (1250)

Small municipalities in rural Canada are also concerned that \$15 billion have been taken out of the infrastructure pot and put in a bank that probably will not be that interested in funding small town projects.

In recent years, governments across the country have been undertaking public-private partnerships despite the obvious fiscal and control problems that come with them.

A couple of years ago, the auditor general in my home province of British Columbia found that provincial taxpayers were on the hook for about \$31 million in extra interest rates on one project alone, the Fort St. John Hospital, representing the private equity in the project borrowed at an interest rate of 14.79%. This led one journalist to wonder if the B.C. Liberals had put the charge on their Visa card.

The amount that B.C. taxpayers pay every year for the extra interest costs of PPP projects has been calculated at \$81 million.

I do not have time to go into all the other concerns about this proposal: concerns about the privatization of airports; concerns about the lack of public oversight, the lack of public input into the priorities of the infrastructure bank, the lack of public involvement in the board of the bank; concerns that the people who the Liberals are getting to design the system are the very people, wealthy investment bankers, who will benefit from it; and concerns about the rush to get this started. The jobs are already posted on the government website before the bill has been fully debated in the House, let alone passed through the House and Senate.

Business of Supply

The KPMG study I mentioned earlier calls for careful study of the infrastructure bank proposal, but instead the government is trying to rush this through with only two hours of committee hearings. We all know what can be done at a committee in two hours, maybe hear from six witnesses who have 10 minutes each to speak and answer a few questions. This is entirely inadequate to cover the myriad of concerns about this proposal.

We are talking about a lot of money, \$35 billion. The Liberals might point out that it is merely the amount of the annual budget deficit, but to Canadians it is a big number, especially with the extra tolls and fees they will be paying to fund this investment. The minister has said, "We are not hearing concerns from [those on] whose behalf we are doing this." We are doing this on behalf of the citizens of Canada and I am hearing concerns from my constituents. I am left to wonder who the minister has been listening to and who he thinks we are doing this for.

We in the NDP feel the Canada infrastructure bank proposal needs to be taken out of Bill C-44 and thoroughly studied as a separate stand-alone bill. That way Canadians can provide some input into a major change in government policy, a change that will unnecessarily cost Canadian taxpayers a great deal of money, while at the same time giving up public oversight into how that public money is spent and which public infrastructure projects move forward.

• (1255)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I disagree with the member across the way. The infrastructure bank and the commitment this government has made to Canadians dealing with infrastructure is being realized by not only this budget but the previous budget. We have seen record amounts of billions of dollars being put into infrastructure for every region of our country.

If we look at the budget itself, it talks about the importance of infrastructure. It talks about the infrastructure bank. We now have a budget implementation bill to implement what has been talked about in the budget. It is completely relevant to the budget.

What causes the New Democrats to believe that having the infrastructure bank is not in any way associated to the budget? All they have to do is read what is in black and white and listen to the commitments given by the Prime Minister and the minister responsible. It is a given.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I do not know where to begin. First, the communities in my riding are happy to get government assistance in the infrastructure projects they need. There was some money announced for my riding and people were happy to hear that. However, it was through the normal way government does business, through the government providing monies that it could get with low interest rates if it needed to borrow. It has nothing to do with a Canada infrastructure bank that is privately managed.

Although one can argue that the infrastructure bank is part of the budget, the NDP wants to take this out of the budget because it is a very different part of it, something brand new that we should look at carefully. It also will not get that careful study in a couple of hours in committee. It needs to be taken out of the budget bill and studied separately so Canadians can make their concerns known and so we

can hear the advantages and disadvantages and make a good, intelligent decision. That is why we want it taken out of the bill and done separately.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member would comment on the government's attitude, regard, and respect for the House by going ahead with the infrastructure bank before it is authorized by Parliament.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, I totally agree with the member. It comes back to the fact that the government seems to be rushing this through, not only putting it in a large omnibus bill that has many other parts to it, almost 300 pages long, but now advertising for the positions on the board and the CEO before the bill has been passed in the House and before it has gone to the Senate. It will be some time before that happens. The government is being disrespectful of this place by moving ahead with this as if it is a *fait accompli*.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is my first time rising today in the debate, although I have listened to all the speeches. We do need to study the infrastructure bank more fully. There is a potential role for infrastructure and the infrastructure bank if its purpose is to access financing at a lower interest rate than that available, even in municipalities. This is a valid purpose. My concern is that the municipalities want funding, not financing.

I had hoped to ask this question of government members. Could we get some clarity? I do not feel we now have clarity on how much funding is available for infrastructure projects as opposed to financing through the infrastructure bank. These are separate needs and the first is more urgent than the second.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Madam Speaker, what the member just described of providing low-cost funding to municipalities and regions is exactly what the Liberals promised in their election platform. This is not what we would get from a private infrastructure bank. An infrastructure bank is one thing; a private one is a very different animal.

• (1300)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of the motion tabled by my colleague the member for Beloeil—Chambly. This is an important debate. I am pleased that my colleague has chosen to bring this forward, because otherwise we would not have an opportunity to even debate this important legislation, which is included in a major omnibus budget bill.

Business of Supply

Among the 30 laws that would be enacted or amended by the omnibus budget bill is division 18, which if approved would establish the Canada infrastructure bank as a crown corporation. I emphasize “if approved” because none of the myriad measures contained in the budget bill would come into effect until the bill is deliberated at committee, receives final debate and votes, and is reviewed in the other place. The law to establish a Canadian infrastructure bank is not in legal effect.

Our first concern is that the law to establish significant reforms in the allocation of tax dollars was tabled as part of an omnibus budget bill, which is yet another promise broken. The decision to include the bill in the 300-page budget bill clearly diminishes opportunities for its thoughtful and careful review and is a concern raised by KPMG, who the Liberal government hired to advise it on whether it should proceed quickly and expediently to set this up. In fact, the government's own consultant advised to take it slowly. Then there was time allocation on debate, before the majority of members had the opportunity to even share their concerns and ask questions, and a mere one hour for committee review. It is absolutely astounding. This shows a high degree of disregard for the role of Parliament, including our very important duty to scrutinize spending, a responsibility of every member of this place.

Our party has allocated this opposition day to enable this very expanded debate to all members of this place, and we encourage all members to participate.

Second, the government has taken premature and possibly illegal actions to establish the proposed bank before the law enabling its creation is debated and approved by Parliament, let alone declared in legal effect. Bill C-44 has only just been referred to the finance committee for study.

As persuasively raised in a question of privilege presented by the NDP House leader, the member for Victoria, yesterday in this place, the government has already chosen and publicly announced a location for the yet unauthorized bank. It has already initiated a search for the board of directors, its chair, and the CEO. It has also announced on its website that the deadline for appointment is the 23rd of this month, a mere two weeks from today, and yet we are still just debating the law that would establish the bank.

These actions are beyond presumptuous. They could well be considered illegal, certainly based on past Speaker's rulings, as the enabling law is a long way from being enacted. No such actions may even be authorized by order in council. No authorizations have been issued by Parliament to establish the bank or to authorize the spending of funds to take effect. A case has been made that these premature actions may be held to be in contempt of the House and an attack against the authority of Parliament. We await the ruling by the Speaker. This is hardly a great start to the establishment of this institution.

Third, there remains a level of confusion about what is the actual purpose of this proposed bank and whose interests it is intended to serve. The stated purpose of the bank is to seek and attract investment from private sector institutional investors in infrastructure projects in Canada and partly in Canada, which I will speak to in a minute; to generate revenue, by levies and tolls—how else; and finally, to be in the public interest, adding that the definition of what

is in the public interest is fostering economic growth or contributing to the sustainability of infrastructure, presumably developed by these private interests.

This provision alone raises myriad issues. What does “projects... partly in Canada” mean? What are the risks to Canadian investment if projects are partly located in the United States of America? Is the government thinking of export power lines perhaps from coal-fired power in Alberta and Saskatchewan? How does this benefit taxpayers? The law empowers the bank's board to determine what is in the public interest. Do Canadians agree with this? These are public dollars.

● (1305)

Who decides what is in the public interest for Canadians? It is the bank's board of directors? The law specifically precludes that the board would include any federal, provincial, or municipal government representatives. Therefore, clearly, no elected officials would have a say in what is public interest.

What happened to elected officials being held accountable for spending taxpayer monies or deciding on priority projects that serve the public interest? We have to remember that up to \$35 billion of public monies are going to be given either directly to the bank to be accessed by private entities or through loan guarantees.

As *National Post* columnist Andrew Coyne has commented, the government appears to be relying on “the old political euphemism—it's not spending, it's 'investment’”.

It is important to keep in mind that the government has committed \$35 billion of taxpayers' money, including for loan guarantees, and that \$15 billion of those dollars, gifted to this bank for access by private entrepreneurs, are removed from allocation for public infrastructure, including light rapid transit and green infrastructure, which the government speaks of ad nauseam.

Others have queried whether it actually qualifies as a bank. Despite the private investor board, the law mandated considerable role by government. For example, loan guarantees require approval of the minister of finance, and yet there are no clear criteria or requirements for transparency. Second, the cabinet chooses and fires the board and chair. Third, the board reports to the infrastructure minister not the minister of finance. It is not really clear who, in fact, in the government is responsible and accountable for the bank. Perhaps one minister would be accountable when it works and another minister would be held to account when we lose money.

Business of Supply

There is concern that the bank is to be established as a crown corporation, thereby exempting it from access to information requests, so significant to the promises of transparency and accountability. Of course, we can read in the mandate letters over and over again about responsibility to ensure transparency and accountability, except for this bank.

Will it be subject to scrutiny by the PBO? It appears not. That is \$35 billion that the PBO cannot even scrutinize.

Another issue that has been raised by a good number of persons is on conflict of interest. There are already serious concerns with the fact that the government sought advice and had direct guidance in establishing the bank from a number of the very entities that would most likely benefit from the bank and potentially be candidates for the board.

A proper study would include a review of any potential conflicts of interest, the impact of the bank on existing infrastructure programs, and how taxpayers would be affected if a project fails. Therein raises the spectre of bankruptcy. Canada's infrastructure minister is promising that taxpayers will not be left holding the bag should any projects funded through a proposed infrastructure bank go bankrupt. How this assurance can be given by the government is unclear if the board is to be run by its board of directors from the private sector.

The government will be left holding the bag when, under bankruptcy law, creditors have been deemed priority over government seeking recovery of costs for the cleanup of abandoned well sites. We recently had decisions of the court saying that, in the occasion that there is a problem, the creditors go first, so these private entrepreneurs will gain the money first, not the taxpayers.

It is absolutely important that all members participate in this debate on behalf of their constituents and find out what the risks are to their communities and what the projects are that will not proceed if these monies are funnelled through the infrastructure bank.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am curious if my colleague is aware that municipalities currently deal with banks. They borrow money for projects. The City of Kingston, for example, currently deals with the Toronto-Dominion Bank. When cities work on larger projects, quite often there are other provincial resources they can dip into that are just another form of a bank. Where does the province get the money? It goes to a bank.

What makes this particular infrastructure bank unique is that it takes advantage of available capital throughout different parts of the world that can be put into one bank that can specifically be used for infrastructure projects of this nature for municipalities to use.

Municipalities already deal with banks. There is not much of a difference between the infrastructure bank that is being proposed and the banks they already deal with, whether at the private level, by accessing through provincial banking systems, or by actually using large capital available, like this. I am curious if she is aware that municipalities are currently doing this.

• (1310)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I noticed that the member across the way said there is not much difference. If it is exactly the

same as the other banks, why are we going through all this effort? Why are we taking \$35 billion of taxpayers' money that could be spent right now on critical projects in our communities and giving it to a bank and to people who will have no accountability to us in this place who are accountable for the spending of public money?

I would add that the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change states that this bank would be used to finance clean electricity systems. When we think about why people would invest, it raises the question of what kind of clean-energy projects are likely to attract investment. It would not likely be the retrofitting of co-operative housing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, one interesting thing about public-private partnerships is this. Generally speaking, users would have to pay a fee or a toll to get those projects running. As the member mentioned, it is all about revenue and profits.

The other issue is the borrowing rate. For governments, whether provincial or federal, the borrowing rate is usually much lower than what the private sector can get. Therefore, in this instance, with the PPP model, is there anything in the documents that the member has seen to indicate that the borrowing rate through this Canada infrastructure bank would actually be lower than what the federal government can obtain for infrastructure projects?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, that is a good question and one to which I have been wanting the answer. What is the borrowing rate going to be? When we look at the very purpose in the legislation to establish this bank, what does it say? It says that the purpose is to generate revenue for the bank and to attract private investment. Therefore, it will want a good return on its dollars.

I will give members an example. Similar to this was the PPP model. I am a little surprised to see the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities standing and defending this bank, because I know that he, the city councillors, and the mayor of my city were not pleased that the previous government required them to use a PPP to build the LRT they are now building. They got less money from the federal government as a result. Therefore, I think a lot of questions will be raised by constituents across this country as to why we are going to repeat what was a model that actually ended up costing municipalities more than if the federal government had simply done the borrowing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, there is a municipal financing authority in the community I come from where the municipalities can come together and collectively borrow at a lower rate than what a bank would normally charge. If the government wanted to do something useful, perhaps it could coordinate a municipal financing authority for the rest of the country, and particularly for small communities so that they can reduce their costs. Does the member feel that would be far more useful than an infrastructure bank that would line the pockets of insiders?

Business of Supply

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question. I have had representatives of the local governments in my province come to me with a number of proposals. One is in northern Alberta, where they wanted the federal government to allow a number of municipalities with first nations and Métis colonies to come together to build water treatment plants. Unfortunately, right now the system does not allow that.

Also, in Edmonton, there has been a push for the regional governments to work together, but an individual municipality has to take its chances and ask for the money, instead of some kind of a consortium. Those are the kinds of mechanisms the government should be looking at.

• (1315)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Central Nova.

It is a pleasure to participate in the debate today on the government's infrastructure investments and the Canada infrastructure bank. We know that efficient public transit helps Canadians get to and from their jobs faster, that social infrastructure makes for great communities to live in, and that green infrastructure provides clean water to drink and clean air to breathe. Across Canada, infrastructure spending is on the rise, but so too is demand for better neighbourhoods and better communities. As Canadian communities continue to grow, the need for vital infrastructure also grows, and Canadians feel the effects of this growth every single day. Business owners struggle to get their products to customers through congested ports and border crossings. Commutes can be long, buses and trains overcrowded, and getting the kids to hockey practice takes far too long. I think we can all agree that we need more Sidney Crosbys and Connor McDavids in this country.

In budget 2016, the government made a down payment on future growth through investments of \$11.9 billion for phase 1 of its infrastructure plan. These smart, strategic investments are already making a difference in communities across Canada, supporting the repair of our aging pipes and roads, building and refurbishing affordable housing, upgrading public transit, and improving indigenous communities. Building on this historic investment, the fall economic statement added an additional \$81 billion in funding starting in 2017-18, targeting public transit and green and social infrastructure. This funding would also go to projects in northern and rural communities and those that help to facilitate trade. Total federal investments in infrastructure will now exceed \$180 billion over 12 years, a truly historic initiative by this federal government.

This is our opportunity to finally break the gridlock, a call to action for leaders across Canada to work together to plan, to implement, and indeed to deliver transformative infrastructure renewal. With their help, long-term regional transportation plans of Canada's major cities will be funded and transit systems will be built and expanded.

Let me add to that by focusing locally. In my own home city of London, Ontario, I had the pleasure recently of announcing a number of transit projects—54, in fact. I will highlight a few here.

One is the rehabilitation of Dundas Place. Anyone in London knows what that means. That is \$8 million. As well, here are new

and accessible transit paths and sidewalks, for \$1 million; the Kiwanis parks pathway connection, for \$1.05 million; funds to construct new downtown cycle tracks, for \$1.075 million; replacement of all our bus shelters, 380 in total; the purchasing of closed-circuit monitors for 213 buses; and also funds, \$4 million in total, for 14 buses in 2018 and 2019.

These proven investments in infrastructure and transit will boost the economy, not just for today but for years and even decades to come. It is the means by which all countries can build a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable society.

Canada's cities continue to attract people from around the world for their diverse and energetic offerings, but the same things that make these cities desirable can also bring discord. Challenges ranging from traffic congestion that takes time away from families and friends to poor-quality air that can make it difficult to enjoy city life are just some examples. We must find solutions as a country.

To encourage cities to adopt new and innovative approaches to city-building, this government proposes \$300 million over 11 years to launch a smart cities challenge. Through a nationwide merit-based competition led by Infrastructure Canada, participants would be invited to create ambitious plans to improve the quality of life for urban residents. Participants would propose ideas that leverage better city planning and implementation of clean and digitally connected technology. These might include greener buildings, smarter roads and energy systems, and advanced digital connections for homes and businesses.

Winning cities would be selected through a nationwide merit-based competition facilitated by the government's new impact Canada fund. These challenges present opportunities to leverage 21st century innovations and technological advances to strengthen and grow our communities.

• (1320)

However, there is more. I want to focus now on the Canada infrastructure bank.

We know that no level of government can accomplish ambitious goals for infrastructure by itself. We need to work in partnership with other levels of government, with public and private organizations, and with investors from around the world.

It is important to attract investment that will allow more infrastructure projects to get under way, especially infrastructure projects that might not otherwise be built were it not for these important partnerships coming into being.

Business of Supply

Canada is a country with enormous infrastructure needs and a great deal of potential to build world-class infrastructure that will enhance communities, create good jobs, and build a stronger, greener economy. Investors have told us that they want to invest in Canada, but they need specific conditions to exist. That is why the Government of Canada is establishing the new Canada infrastructure bank. Through this new bank, an arm's-length organization, we will work with our provinces and our territories to build world-class infrastructure that will enhance communities, create good jobs, and build a stronger, greener economy, which is something that I hope we all want. Certainly on this side, we want that.

The Canada infrastructure bank would provide innovative funding and financing for large, complex infrastructure projects that improve economic performance. Very simply, it is a new way of funding transformational projects in communities right across this country. The bank will be responsible for investing \$35 billion—federal dollars—through loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments into large infrastructure projects that contribute to economic growth.

By establishing a new organization capable of working with the private sector where it makes sense, we will see public dollars go further and put to smarter use, leading to better projects that create the good, well-paying jobs needed to strengthen the economy over the long term. This is a long-term vision, something that we have to embrace and endorse.

Let me conclude by speaking about the importance of green infrastructure.

We know that provinces and territories are looking at ways to ensure their communities remain healthy and productive places to live. Investments in sustainable infrastructure are needed to support greenhouse gas emission reductions, enable greater climate change adaptation and resilience, and ensure that more communities can provide clean air and safe drinking water for their citizens.

To achieve this, the government is working with all levels of government and with indigenous partners to evaluate, select, and fund green infrastructure projects that would deliver the best outcome for Canadians. Projects that may receive these additional investments include, among others, interprovincial transmission lines that reduce reliance on coal-fired power generation; the development of new low-carbon, renewable power projects; the expansion of smart grids to use power more efficiently and effectively; water treatment projects on reserve; and the construction of infrastructure to help manage the risks associated with floods and wildfires.

This investment builds on those in budget 2016, which are now supporting communities right across this country as they adapt to the challenges of climate change. This includes investments that support electric vehicle and alternative transportation fuel infrastructure, initiatives to foster regional electricity co-operation, and the development of building codes and standards that integrate climate resiliency requirements. These measures support the ongoing transition to a clean growth economy.

To conclude, these investments in infrastructure that we make today will pay dividends for years to come, delivering clean, sustained, economic growth; building stronger, more inclusive

communities; and creating more good, well-paying jobs for Canadians.

We have a plan that will bring hope not only to Canadians, but I hope also to the opposition, who I think all agree that economic growth in this country is of vital significance. It is about how we achieve it, and I am sure we disagree on that—I know we disagree on that—but this is a plan that I truly believe in. It is a plan that we consulted on right across this country.

One of the best ways we believe that we can bring confidence back to the middle class is through such plans. We know that investing in our communities means everyone can contribute to advancing our economic, social, and environmental well-being.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about \$180 billion of infrastructure money from his government. I will just remind him that \$90 billion is from existing Conservative programs.

Second, talking about infrastructure boosting the economy today, I want to remind the member that his government allowed \$1 billion of funding from last year to lapse. It is lapsed funding that will not be reallocated until 2022.

I also want to remind the member that PPP Canada has been in existence since 2006 and has already leveraged billions of dollars in private sector infrastructure.

I would like the member to define “arm's-length”, because according to the legislation, the minister determines who gets the financing, the minister determines which projects are loan guarantees, and the minister also chooses the board and the CEO. Would he please elaborate on “arm's-length”?

● (1325)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question; however, this government will not take lessons from the Conservative Party on how to generate economic growth in this country. It was under Mr. Harper that Canada experienced its most anemic economic growth rates since the Great Depression, so we are not about to take lessons.

Indeed, we are investing in transformational infrastructure projects, not small-scale projects—gazeboes, for example. We have a larger, more long-term vision.

Business of Supply

As for investments and the Canada infrastructure bank being an arm's-length organization, it is indeed an arm's-length organization. Ultimately the infrastructure bank would be accountable to Parliament. Regular audits would be conducted by the Auditor General and a private sector auditor, which I remind the member are the highest standards of accountability required for crown corporations, and there is also a five-year review conducted by Parliament. I am satisfied with what has been proposed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague that private funding could double the cost of infrastructure projects. In the end, it is the population that is going to have to pay, whether because of increased user fees or increased public disbursements.

We are already seeing the evidence in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec. The Quebec auditor general has estimated that the province would have saved \$10.4 billion if we had built the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal based on the conventional public model instead of a public-private partnership. I would like to know what my colleague thinks about this and if he thinks that the argument we are making here today makes sense.

The numbers are clear: the sole purpose of infrastructure banks is to make a profit; they contribute nothing to the population. The government says that the middle class is important and that it is doing all it can to help it, but it is clear that this bank will provide no new infrastructures for communities, that it will not improve services and that it will not benefit the population, since it is going to be too expensive.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Madam Speaker, we are not reinventing the wheel here. Indeed, there are a number of other examples of very successful infrastructure banks around the world. The U.K. has an infrastructure bank focused specifically on facilitating investments in green technology. There is an infrastructure bank in Australia. There is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Similar initiatives have been taken in the United States, and there is also the Nordic Investment Bank.

These are examples of thinking outside the box, of recognizing that infrastructure matters but that the funding of infrastructure needs to be carried out in a creative way. It builds on our existing policies.

I also find it strange to hear these concerns around privatization from the NDP when the NDP's own leader is on record as praising not Tommy Douglas, not David Lewis or Stephen Lewis or Ed Broadbent, but Margaret Thatcher, the champion of privatization. It is a bit perplexing, I have to say.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts: Madam Speaker, I am rising on a point of order. The member alluded to the Auditor General reporting to Parliament. I have the legislation in front of me, and there is no mention in it of the Auditor—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Based on the information that the member is providing, it is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Central Nova.

• (1330)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to address a key portion of the government's plan for economic growth in our country. Investing in infrastructure was a key pillar of the economic platform we ran on in the 2015 election. I am pleased to see, as part of the budget implementation act that introduces serious investments in infrastructure as well as the concept of the infrastructure bank, that we are making good on this commitment. We are going to achieve economic growth across our country.

Over the course of my remarks, I hope to cover a few themes. For example, why are infrastructure investments important, particularly in the economic context we live in today, and why is an infrastructure bank a wise idea? I also want to cover some of the investments in my community so I can demonstrate through examples how meaningful economic growth can happen with strategic investments in our country's infrastructure.

I will begin with the importance of investing in our infrastructure. The economic context is key to understanding why this is a good time to be making such serious and substantial investments. Right now we live in a time that has historically low interest rates. Money has never been cheaper in the history of currency. At the same time, we are coming out of a period of slow economic growth, culminating with the third quarter of 2015 having us on the border of a recession.

When we are trying to spur economic growth when the private sector is going through a difficult time, and when it is cheap to gain access to capital, it makes sense to be making investments in infrastructure. However, it is also important to invest in certain kinds of infrastructure. We want to make sure that the investments we make create jobs in the short term to kick-start the economy but also set the conditions for long-term economic growth. We cannot simply hire people to dig holes in the ground. We need to be investing in projects that will create prosperity in the long term.

There are a handful of key focus areas for the \$180-billion infrastructure plan that have been laid out.

We are investing in public transit, which disproportionately has a positive impact on people living in poverty, people living with disabilities, and seniors, which are key demographics in my riding.

We are investing in social infrastructure, such as housing and child care, to the tune of \$11 billion and \$7 billion, respectively, because we know that the cost of investing in these key parts of social infrastructure is cheaper than the cost of failing to make investments that are much needed.

We are investing in trade and transport infrastructure, because we know that we are competing in a global marketplace, and getting our goods to the global marketplace in a timely manner is essential if we are going to create good-paying, middle-class jobs across Canada.

Business of Supply

We are investing in clean growth and green infrastructure. I have to point out, in light of the flooding in recent days, that I lived in Calgary in 2013 during the massive floods and was evacuated. With investments in flood mitigation infrastructure, we can see economic benefits that do not shut down downtown cores for weeks at a time. With investments in alternative energy, we can become greener, and create good-paying 21st-century jobs at the same time.

The final theme of the infrastructure plan laid out in the budget, which is of key importance to my riding, is an investment in rural Canada. There is \$2 billion set aside for rural and northern infrastructure. This does not prejudice the ability of small towns and rural communities to seek investments from the rest of the infrastructure funding envelope. However, to see that there is actually a carve-out for rural infrastructure makes me incredibly proud, because it is something that I and a number of my rural colleagues have been advocating for. To see that recognition says to me that the Government of Canada is interested not just in the biggest urban centres but in the small towns and rural communities that make up the vast majority of our geography.

The great news is that the plan is already starting to work. We have seen, over a six-month period, over a quarter of a million jobs added to the Canadian economy, most of which are full-time. Unemployment has crept down. The plan is starting to work. While the private sector is seeing some improvement, public investments in infrastructure are also paying dividends early on.

I do not want to talk just in generalities. I hope that some examples from my own riding will be illustrative of the difference our investments are going to make.

With 32 Atlantic Canadian MPs on the government side of the House, we have had an opportunity to inform the policy-making process in a manner we have never had before. The government has responded to the advocacy of Atlantic Canadian MPs by coming up with the Atlantic growth strategy, under which infrastructure is one of the key pillars that is going to drive economic growth. There have been investments in infrastructure in my riding that not only play to our strengths but seek to mitigate some of our weaknesses as well.

We saw recently at St. Francis Xavier University, of which I am a proud graduate, as are my five sisters and both of my parents, an investment to the tune of \$30 million to establish the institute of government and the centre for innovation in health.

• (1335)

The Brian Mulroney institute of government—Brian Mulroney is also a graduate of this fine institution—is going to focus on things like Canada-U.S. relations and international trade, the politics of environment and climate change, and women in leadership, among other things.

Each of these programs is going to not only contribute to long-term economic growth by promoting women to senior leadership roles and by understanding what policies we can adopt to enhance trade with our largest trading partner but is also going to create 600 jobs, for four years, in my backyard, in a community of only 4,500 people. This is a phenomenal investment in small-town Canada that I am incredibly proud of.

At the same time, another portion of this project is going to the centre for innovation and health. In Nova Scotia we have the highest proportion of seniors of any province in Canada. We need to come up with innovative solutions if we are going to succeed in the 21st century. Investing in a facility that is going to create jobs in the short term and help us solve our long-term demographic problems is essential and smart, and I am very proud of it.

Keeping with the theme of post-secondary education infrastructure, we have seen a tremendous investment, a combined federal and provincial investment of over \$15 million, in the Nova Scotia Community College Pictou Campus that is going to see a new trades innovation centre. This educational hub for the skilled trades is what keeps many of our good-paying jobs in our community today. Without an institution that is keeping our machine shops filled with employees, I do not know where my county would be. To know that we are investing to make sure that we are not just protecting the jobs we have now but are educating a workforce for the jobs of the next 10 or 20 years, or more, is something I am incredibly proud of.

When we talk about infrastructure, we often limit ourselves to the envelopes of funding that fall under the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, but in fact, in my community, there is all kinds of infrastructure that matters.

I have two coasts in my riding, the Northumberland Strait and the eastern shore of Nova Scotia. That is why I was so proud to see investments in small craft harbours to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. In my riding alone, to protect the fishery, to provide our fishermen with a safe place to work, we have seen investments to the tune of \$10.8 million. A lot of this work is under way or complete today, and fishermen who are achieving an all-time high in terms of the price of lobster are able to know they have a place to bring in their product.

We are seeing investments in major highways, such as the Aerotech connector, which is going to connect some of the residents of my neighbour, the hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, to the key economic hub outside the Halifax Stanfield International Airport, which is the Aerotech business park. This is an innovation hub in the aerotech sector that is key to the future of the Nova Scotia economy.

We are seeing investments in the connect to innovate program that are going to extend access to rural Internet to places that do not have it today. The importance of this investment cannot be overstated. I have talked to business owners who closed their storefront in a tourist community because they did not have reliable access to the Internet and their debit machine worked only 50% of the time. Tourists do not carry cash like they used to, and the owners have to operate their business in a community a little way down the road, where they have a reliable connection.

Business of Supply

I have talked to tourism operators who cannot attract people to come to stay at their facilities because these people cannot achieve a wireless connection while they are there. I have talked to property owners who have been on the verge of a sale of their home, and when a person went to make a phone call and could not connect, they backed out of the deal. The investment in connectivity in rural communities is essential, and I look forward to the results. I know that it will serve Nova Scotia well.

I could go on about a number of other municipal infrastructure investments, including long-term commitments to the ferry service, but I want to turn my mind to the infrastructure bank, which is the specific subject of the motion today.

There is a unique opportunity to create more jobs in our communities and improve the strength of our communities. Currently, the global context is perfect for an investment like this. There is approximately \$16 trillion in negative yield bonds around the world. What this means is that there is \$16 trillion sitting waiting and looking for a better home. We can provide that home by putting up \$35 billion of our own to create an infrastructure bank that will attract investments from international companies in Canadian communities to create jobs.

We have an infrastructure deficit in our country of about \$1 trillion. We cannot do this solely through public financing if we do not want it to take three generations. The infrastructure bank is going to help cut into that deficit and make a meaningful difference in the communities I represent.

• (1340)

I support the infrastructure bank. It is a great idea. The time is right. I am so pleased to offer a few thoughts on this investment for my community.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate sitting on the justice committee with my colleague across the way.

I want to ask him specifically about the time frame that has been allocated to the committee to study this particular bill. We have looked at many private members' bills in justice committee, and sometimes those meetings have gone over several days and have called forth many witnesses.

Is the member honestly going to stand in the House and agree that two hours is enough time for the people's elected representatives to give this bank the proper examination it deserves? I would like to hear his honest answer.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Madam Speaker, I share my colleague's excitement about the opportunity to work with one another after my experience with him on the justice committee. I sit on the transport and infrastructure committee, and I am looking forward to seeing my colleague there.

I would like to point out that some of my colleagues who sit on that committee have put forward motions, because we have known about the infrastructure bank for a significant period of time. There was a motion in November of last year about the infrastructure bank that sought to bring the minister before the committee. We agreed, and it was approved. There was a motion put forward by one of the

hon. member's colleagues from the NDP to conduct a study on the infrastructure bank. It was tabled, but it never advanced.

The fact is that at this late stage in the game, after we have known about the infrastructure bank really from the time of the election campaign, this is difficult to swallow.

My hope is that this will get significant attention in the public. Although there is a certain time constraint because we have put forward a budget we need to implement and Canadians expect the government to make the investments it campaigned on, I would not suggest that the one hour my colleague is suggesting is the only opportunity we will have to look at the infrastructure bank in committee, although it may be, in the very short term.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would remind the member that the legislation has just been tabled.

My comments are on the time frame. I will say, again, that one hour has been allotted, and time allocation has been invoked, shutting down debate.

The internal report from KPMG, which the government commissioned, said to slow down and get it right. Meetings between the Prime Minister, ministers, and BlackRock are significant conflicts of interest. The reports have all been redacted. When we look at members of the committee, who are now trying to seek \$103 billion for their own projects, it is again a significant conflict of interest. With respect to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Canadians are on the hook for \$1.3 billion in loan guarantees.

Why the rush? There are conflicts of interest. There are redacted reports. There are internal reports that are redacted as well. Why the rush? What is the government trying to hide?

Mr. Sean Fraser: Through you, Madam Speaker, I would like to address the handful of concerns the hon. member opposite has raised.

With respect to things like time allocation, I find this to be a difficult pill to swallow after I have been forced to leave committee to vote on at least three, maybe four, occasions on issues such as who stood up first, on issues about adjourning debate and shutting down the House when we are seeking to move forward a legislative agenda and bring these issues to the light of day. I cannot accept in good faith an argument about the use of time allocation and that we are trying to rush on that basis.

With respect to the involvement of groups like BlackRock, a number of issues have come up in the House. We have been the subject of allegations of conflict of interest any time there has been a member of an industry we are seeking investments from, whose involvement is in providing expertise. The alternative would be to exclude industry players who have knowledge that could be useful.

With respect to the comments on the Asian infrastructure bank, that is not something I actually raised in my remarks, although there are a number of different infrastructure banks my hon. colleague from London raised previously, such as in the U.K. and Australia.

This is going to provide an opportunity for different groups to invest. It is going to see money from different countries come into my community. I am proud to support it.

Business of Supply

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House to address an extremely important subject, that being the Liberals' infrastructure privatization bank. I will explain why it is absolutely necessary that it be withdrawn from the omnibus bill C-44. We must be able to debate it and to hold a vote specifically on this infrastructure privatization bank, which is completely unacceptable. The people of Drummond do not accept it. They are shocked, and even furious, to know that the Liberal government wants to privatize our infrastructures.

Before going any further, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with my excellent colleague, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Before taking the debate any further, I would like to read the motion that my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly has moved in the House of Commons. It is an extremely important motion. It is not something that is easy for the layperson to grasp, but when we look at it in detail, the Liberals' plan is quite clear. It is a plan that aims to support their cronies the private investors, and not the Canadian people, the middle class and those working hard to join it.

The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House: (a) public infrastructure should serve the interests of Canadians, not work to make private investors rich; (b) during the election, the Liberals did not reveal to voters their plans to privatize investment in public infrastructure; (c) infrastructure built by private investors will cost more than public infrastructure; (d) it is a conflict of interest to allow private corporations, who will be the largest beneficiaries of the Canada Infrastructure Bank, to participate in the planning and development of the Bank; (e) the Bank will leave taxpayers with an unacceptable burden of fees, tolls, and privatization that will only make private investors wealthy, to the detriment of the public interest; and (f) the clauses concerning the Canada Infrastructure Bank's creation should be removed from Bill C-44, Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 1, so they can be studied as a stand-alone bill.

As I was saying, the part that is totally unacceptable, scandalous even, is that the Liberal government has broken yet another promise. It promised not to draft omnibus bills like the Conservatives did. Omnibus bills are undemocratic. They prevent MPs from doing their work properly, from analyzing all of the bills up for amendment, and from sending them to the proper committees for thorough analysis.

By including the infrastructure bank in this bill, the government is preventing MPs—preventing lawmakers—from doing a proper analysis and from sending the bill to a committee where expert testimony would enable them to pick apart all the ins and outs of the proposed infrastructure privatization bank legislation and reveal all of its possible negative impacts.

By putting all of this in a mammoth omnibus bill and breaking the Liberal promise to put an end to omnibus bills, they are making it impossible for this bill to receive proper analysis. They are depriving not only the members, but also the Canadian people, of the right to have full knowledge of and properly analyze the bills to be amended here. This is extremely serious. This is another broken promise of the Liberals, in addition to their broken promise to stop the constant tabling of time allocation motions.

What are we seeing? We are seeing the very opposite. The Liberals are well on their way to matching the Conservatives' record

for time allocation motions and gag orders, the same Conservatives who broke the all-time record, the worst record ever in the Canadian history. The Liberals, who had been so critical of that, are on their way to doing the same thing. It is truly deplorable.

What is more, they recently told us to get ready, because they are going to pass even more time allocation motions. I hope that the Liberal members will tell the government Leader in the House of Commons that the time allocations must stop, that they have fought their fight and promised to be much more reasonable about this. However, that is not the case at all at the moment.

• (1350)

What is an infrastructure privatization bank, and what is its main consequence? First of all, the profits are given to private investors, while the government assumes all the risk and all the downside. The government is not just the Liberals. It is Canadians who are going to pay for all this, including the people in the riding of Drummond, which I represent. They are the ones who will have to pay for this ill-considered infrastructure bank.

Another consequence of creating such a bank is that the regions are forgotten, since private investors, who are looking to make profits, will invest only in projects located in the big cities, where there is far more opportunity to make a profit and where there are enough people to make it worthwhile.

Regions like Drummond have no infrastructure that can generate a big return; the infrastructure there exists to serve the population. Therefore, cities and regions like Drummond are not going to benefit from an infrastructure privatization bank. The money generated by Drummond and other regions of Canada will be taken and they will be told that it is not going to be invested locally. It is a shame.

The regions that will be able to benefit from this bank will be charged tolls and other fees. More tax pressure is going to be put on the middle class and those aspiring to join it. It really makes no sense.

The money they are going to invest in the infrastructure privatization bank could have been invested more wisely. Right now, Canadians all over Quebec and Ontario are suffering as a result of the flooding, because there has been no planning to adapt our infrastructures. We must ensure that we are resilient and can adapt to the effects of climate change, since there are going to be more and more extreme weather events.

The 2017 Green Budget Coalition has made some very important recommendations regarding investment in natural infrastructures and ecosystems. The following is an excerpt from one of the recommendations:

The Green Budget Coalition recommends that in Budget 2017 the Government of Canada allocate 30% of planned phase-2 Green Infrastructure funding for investments to protect and enhance Canada's vital natural infrastructure...

Rather than investing that money in an infrastructure privatization bank, which will not serve Canadians or the Drummond region, it could have been invested in green infrastructure and in climate resilience and adaptation for existing infrastructure. That is of the utmost importance, given what is happening to our regions.

Statements by Members

For instance, near Yamachiche and near Gatineau, right here, people are suffering because of flooding, and yet no planning is being done to adapt to climate change. That is in the green budget, which the Liberals unfortunately did not read. What a shame.

In closing, the part of Bill C-44 that deals with the privatization of infrastructure must absolutely be taken out, so that we may debate it properly and study all the ins and outs at the appropriate committee, where experts could show that the bank is in no way good for the Drummond region. That is why we will be opposing the bill.

• (1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this seems to be an issue where ideology trumps common sense.

First, I could point out for the hon. member major infrastructure projects in metro Vancouver that could only have taken place with the participation of the private sector: rapid transit line, a bridge, and others.

Second, given that we knew the debate and the discussion on the infrastructure bank was coming, rather than burn up a whole week of time on a question of privilege, where we heard the same argument again and again, did the hon. member approach his House leader to say that maybe the members should use that time a bit more productively and talk about something that really mattered to Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I am really glad that the hon. member asked me that question.

I wonder if he approached his House leader and reminded her that the Liberals campaigned on a promise not to introduce omnibus bills. The Liberals broke that promise and introduced an omnibus bill. The Liberals also promised not to use time allocation motions at the drop of a hat. That is yet another broken promise, and we have been told to expect even more. There are going to be even more time allocation motions than there were under the Conservatives. The Liberals are breaking the Conservatives' record.

I appreciate that there are some great projects in Vancouver, but Drummond is not a big urban centre and the infrastructure bank will do nothing for regions like Drummond. That is what we take issue with.

Why not use this money to adapt infrastructure to climate change?

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I think he hit the nail on the head. We know that \$15 billion should have gone to every municipality in Canada, including Drummondville and other municipalities in my colleague's riding, and that this money will instead be transferred to the infrastructure bank, whose only purpose is to make foreign investors, billionaires, even richer.

How does the hon. member feel about that? Does he really think the biggest city in his riding, Drummondville, stands a chance of

getting any of this money? Has Drummondville ever undertake a project worth over \$100 million that was federally funded?

We have already been told that projects under \$100 million will not be accepted. There is even talk about a \$500 million minimum.

Does the hon. member really think that Drummondville could have access to this program, this bank, for help?

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska for his question.

We are in the same position. Our ridings are next to one another in the region. This infrastructure bank will never be of help to us. In fact, our constituents, our cities, and those living in outlying areas are telling us that this infrastructure bank will only benefit private investors. Unfortunately, the Liberals' friends are going to benefit.

This is not good for Canadians. It is not good for regions such as Drummond and Richmond—Arthabaska, and it is certainly not good for Canada's middle class and those trying to join it.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

LUSO CHARITABLE SOCIETY

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the true measure of a country and its communities is how we treat our most vulnerable citizens. Adults living with developmental and physical disabilities are among those most vulnerable.

This past Sunday, I had the pleasure, with a few of my Mississauga and Brampton colleagues and hundreds of supporters, to assist in raising precious funds through a bikeathon and walkathon for the Luso Charitable Society. All proceeds raised go toward funding the just-opened Luso Peel region home, which provides supports, programs, and services in a nurturing environment to those most in need.

Hearing from caregivers and family members about what this home meant to them and their loved ones just filled the hearts of all those in attendance.

This is the third Luso home to open. The others service the areas of Toronto and Hamilton. Like those in the bikeathon, they are on a roll. We will be the wind at their back along this highway of caring.

* * *

• (1400)

FREE ENTERPRISE AWARDS

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and recognize the St. Thomas & District Chamber of Commerce Free Enterprise Award winners.

Statements by Members

The 2017 Chair's Award recognized Janet Baker for her work and service to the chamber and our community. This award recognizes Janet's dedication and over 16 years as both a chamber and safe communities volunteer.

The Chamber Awards of Merit went to Jamie Quai of Quai du Vin Estate Winery, who was named the 2016 Grape King. Jamie is only the second recipient in 60 years to be named the Grape King or Grape Grower of the Year from outside the traditional Niagara growing area.

Chris Streib began Talbot Trail Physiotherapy in 2002 with one clinic in Aylmer, and has grown the enterprise to six locations with 35 employees serving every part of Elgin County and into Chatham-Kent and Middlesex.

The 2017 Free Enterprise Master Awards included Buckland Customs Brokerage, Gary Coutts of RBC Royal Bank, and the Elgin Business Resource Centre.

I congratulate all the award winners at last night's Free Enterprise Awards.

* * *

MANITOBA DAY

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, May 12, is Manitoba Day.

[*Translation*]

Tomorrow, the province will celebrate its 147th anniversary as well as the 51st anniversary of Manitoba's flag.

[*English*]

From the Ojibway "Manito-bau" and the Cree "Manitowapow", our keystone province is a remarkable place to live.

[*Translation*]

I invite all Canadians to celebrate our history at Fort Gibraltar, to take their family to Manitoba's Children's Museum, and to pay tribute to Louis Riel, the father of Manitoba, at Le Musée de Saint-Boniface.

[*English*]

They can take in the migratory bird season at Fort Whyte Alive or check out the world's largest mating dens for red-sided garter snakes in Narcisse.

[*Translation*]

I also invite them to visit St. Vital Park, Assiniboine Park or Riding Mountain National Park, and to spend the day at Lake Winnipeg or Lake Manitoba.

[*English*]

They can go out to Little Limestone Lake, the world's largest marl lake, a lake that changes colour with the temperature. The choices abound.

I wish friendly Manitoba a happy birthday.

NEIGHBOURHOOD HOUSE WEEK

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where can we go and find a place that is the heartbeat of the community, a place where it is the touchstone of social life, a place to help people to connect, combat isolation, and build both personal and community capacities?

It is in our friendly Neighbourhood Houses, the living room of our communities where people connect, engage, foster a sense of belonging, and take part in civic life.

Canada's first Neighbourhood House opened in Toronto in 1899. In the Lower Mainland, four of 10 Neighbourhood Houses are in East Van, and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses BC to boot.

Like all Neighbourhood Houses, Van East's very own Kiwassa, Frog Hollow, Mt. Pleasant, and Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood Houses do invaluable work.

The 2017 Leadership Forum report details this important research.

As we celebrate the third annual Neighbourhood House Week, I call on the federal government to go beyond short-term program funding. It is time we become a true partner and support their work with stable core funding.

* * *

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker I rise today to honour my long-time staff members, Greg and Julie McClinchey, who will be leaving Parliament Hill after a long tenure in my office and on the Hill.

Greg has served members of Parliament since the young age of 16, first for MP Paul Steckle, then coming to work for me eight years ago. Julie has served three members of Parliament: Brenda Chamberlain, Rose-Marie Ur, and myself.

Over the years, both Julie and Greg have become advisers, confidants, and friends to many on Parliament Hill, lending a hand to anyone, even when it meant putting in extra hours in a day.

While I am sad to lose such valuable staff members, I am happy that Greg and Julie will be moving closer to home and their family in southwestern Ontario.

I rise to honour Greg and Julie McClinchey in the House today. It has been a privilege to work with each of them, and I am proud now to call them friends. I wish them and their family success and happiness in the future, and much love from all of us.

* * *

2017 SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Sara McKelvie, from my riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, is no stranger to athletic success. Just this past month, this talented and passionate young woman from Cayuga performed a flawless figure skating routine at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games in Austria, bringing home a gold medal.

Statements by Members

This is not the first time she has felt the gold rush. In 2013, Sara participated in her first-ever Special Olympic Games and brought home not one but two gold medals. It is said that gold medals are not really made of gold. They are made of sweat, determination, and a hard-to-find alloy called guts.

On behalf of everyone in Haldimand—Norfolk, I want to express how very proud we are of Sara. We thank her for her hard work and for sharing her talent with the rest of the world.

* * *

•(1405)

[*Translation*]

COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN LAVAL

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like many cities in Quebec, Laval has been hard hit by the flooding. At this difficult time, I have seen people come together to work on various community initiatives, such as building makeshift breakwaters and organizing aid for flood victims.

I want to say how proud I am to represent the people of Alfred-Pellan and Laval, who are standing in solidarity with their neighbours. I also want to acknowledge the remarkable and tireless efforts of Laval's police officers and firefighters.

I thank Mayor Marc Demers, Deputy Mayor David De Cotis, and all the municipal councillors who are there on the ground helping flood victims and coordinating aid. I also want to thank the minister responsible for Laval, Francine Charbonneau.

Residents of Laval, my colleagues and I stand in solidarity with you, and we will continue to do so when the flood waters recede and it is time to clean up. We wish you well.

* * *

[*English*]

IRAN

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Iranian regime poses a danger to the world. Through its sponsorship of terrorist organizations, its support for the brutal Assad regime, and its calls for the destruction of Israel, Iran's actions are of grave concern to all Canadians. During this Iran Accountability Week, I want to speak of the deplorable human rights violations within Iran.

[*Translation*]

Iranian authorities executed over 200 people this year alone. The regime violates the human rights of its own people. The way it treats the LGBTQ community and religious minorities, such as the Baha'i, is particularly appalling.

[*English*]

Iran's jails are full of political prisoners. Those who dare to speak out against the government continue to be punished unjustly, often without charges or trial.

I ask all my colleagues to join me in telling the victims of the Iranian regime that Canada stands with them and that we are committed to holding this regime accountable.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are three facts: one, thanks be to God, state-sanctioned persecution in the name of Christianity is nearly extinct worldwide; two, religious persecution by officially Muslim states, and even more by officially atheist regimes, is alive and well; and, three, over 200 million Christians live in the states that are the worst offenders.

As a result, more Christians face in their home countries what the Pew Research Center forum calls "religious restrictions" than does any other faith group. This includes thousands arrested for their beliefs, some executed for spreading the gospel, and in some countries, although this is without state sanction, many are slaughtered by death squads and terrorists.

Now of course this does not reflect the situation of Christians in Canada. However, our domestic situation should not blind Canadians to the way things are elsewhere or keep us from speaking out on behalf of persecuted Christians worldwide.

* * *

JAMES DYNEROWICZ

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the life of Sergeant Robert James Dyerowicz, a member of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, who passed away last month during the exercise Rugged Bear, while preparing to defend our country.

In life, Sergeant Dyerowicz was a hero who served our country in two deployments to Afghanistan. However, he was more than a soldier. He was an outdoorsman, a compassionate family member and friend, and a man who is remembered for his leadership, his mentorship, and his kindness. His loss will be felt by the entire community.

I would ask my colleagues to join me in extending our sincerest sympathies and deepest condolences to his family, friends, and loved ones at this extremely difficult time.

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SPEECH AND HEARING MONTH

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Vaughan—Woodbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

[*Member spoke in sign language*]

May is Speech and Hearing Month. As the husband of a speech-language pathologist, it is a great honour to rise today to recognize Canada's outstanding speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and communication health assistants.

Throughout the month of May, Speech-Language & Audiology Canada, or SAC, and its more than 6,200 members and associates will be highlighting the importance of early detection and intervention of speech, language, swallowing, hearing, and balance disorders.

Many of us take for granted our ability to communicate, yet the ability to speak, hear, and be heard is vital to our everyday lives.

Statements by Members

On behalf of members of the House, I thank the communication health professionals for all they do to help Canadians reach their communication potential.

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●(1410)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are sneaking a new gun registry in by stealth, tabling it on the same day as their pot legislation. They are not fooling gun owners across Canada, though, that this is not just a gun registry by another name.

Bill C-47 requires any Canadian company importing firearms or firearm technology to keep records electronically. What agency will hold and administer this new electronic registry, and who will have access to it?

On June 1, the United Nations Firearm Marking scheme also comes in to effect, targeting responsible gun owners and legitimate firearm businesses, saddling them with an annual \$60-million dollar bill. Rather than protect us, this marking scheme will increase the cost of each legitimately purchased firearm by some \$200.

Criminals do not follow law and they are not going to register their guns. International arms dealers will never be compliant with the UN and they will not be registering any of their contact information.

The Liberals again put a target on recreational sports shooters, hunters, and small family-run businesses. Instead of wasting time and money on a new gun registry, how about the Liberals really tackle the criminals?

* * *

BRITISH COLUMBIA FLOODS

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week, residents across the Okanagan are on alert, facing the uncertainty of rising flood waters. Unfortunately, the worst may be yet to come with saturated ground, a melting snow pack, and more rain in the forecast. Uncertainty and loss are causing stress and hardship for many families in my communities as we all prepare to deal with the days ahead.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the City of Kelowna, the District of Lake Country, the local fire departments, and the many citizen volunteers who have come together to deal with this perilous and unpredictable situation. I am also grateful the Government of Canada is both aware and prepared to provide assistance in the event that a federal response to this crisis is requested by the Province of British Columbia.

* * *

ROYAL CANADIAN NAVY

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the wonderful opportunity of accepting an invitation from the Royal Canadian Navy to Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt, home of Canada's Pacific naval fleet. There I joined with several other members of Parliament to go aboard Her Majesty's Canadian ship *Vancouver*.

Once we were aboard, *Vancouver's* courteous, welcoming, and professional officers and crew gave us a complete tour of this Halifax-class frigate's capabilities and incredibly complex systems, from the bridge to the engine room and everything in between. I had the opportunity to participate in several exercises, including damage control, firefighting, and even steering the ship.

My riding is home to many naval veterans and to the civilians, naval reserve, and regular force members who work at CFB Esquimalt. I sincerely appreciated the opportunity to experience the amazing job the sailors of the Royal Canadian Navy do on our behalf every day, and who very much live up to the motto "Ready, Aye Ready".

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TAIWAN

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Taiwan, after eight years of participating at the World Health Assembly, was not invited by the WHO to attend this year's assembly.

Taiwan's participation at the WHA has enabled Taiwan to contribute to global public health and disease prevention initiatives. Indeed, Taiwan is a leader in areas of global health and disease prevention and has contributed more than \$6 billion to medical and humanitarian aid since 1996.

Canada has consistently supported Taiwan's participation at the WHA. Now that the WHO has bowed to political pressure to exclude Taiwan, I urge the government to call upon the WHO to reverse this decision and extend an invitation to Taiwan.

* * *

NATIONAL NURSING WEEK

Ms. Kamal Khera (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud registered nurse, it is my distinct honour to recognize the dedication of my fellow outstanding nurses during National Nursing Week. Working on the front lines in our hospitals or in our communities advocating for better health care across our country, nurses are the backbone of our health care system.

Our health care system would not be where it is today if it were not for the efforts of the mother of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale. Known as the lady with the lamp, Florence Nightingale single-handedly helped nurses gain recognition for their tireless efforts.

This spirit of dedication and service is echoed by the nurses serving us every day. I very much thank all our dedicated, compassionate, and hard-working nurses in Brampton West, across Canada, and all over the world.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

● (1415)

*[English]***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have warned the Prime Minister that his infrastructure bank will be a cocktail of waste, duplication, and bureaucracy, all to pad the bank accounts of the wealthy elite. We do not expect him to listen to us, but he should at least listen to the experts he hired who told him the same thing. In fact, a KPMG report has given the government a stark warning about the pitfalls of this tax-funded bank.

If the Prime Minister really believes in evidence-based policy-making, then why is he ignoring his own experts and rushing through with this bank?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a decade of an inconsistent and ad hoc approach to supporting municipalities and provinces, we are putting in long-term, sustainable, and predictable funding of \$180 billion over 12 years, which will help grow the economy, create jobs, and help those Canadians who work hard each and every day to be part of the middle class. That is what our communities expect from us. That is exactly what we are delivering. We are proud that the bank will help deliver more infrastructure than is needed in communities from coast to coast.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker, for 10 long years, we did not give billions of dollars to billionaire bankers.

This infrastructure bank could force tolls on Canadian bridges and roads. It may also force Canadians to actually pay new fees on basic services, such as water. It all adds up to what experts are saying would be “public relations disasters and embarrassment” for the Prime Minister.

When is the Prime Minister going to do the right thing and put the brakes on this terrible idea?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with our stakeholders for the last year. We have consulted with municipalities, provinces, trade unions, building councils, municipal leaders, and mayors. They all understand that we have put forward an ambitious plan to build infrastructure that their communities need. They are the ones who select the projects. They are the ones who prioritize which projects to fund. We are so proud that we are mobilizing private capital to build more infrastructure that communities need and deserve.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is going to turn out to be the ultimate cash-for-access project. The experts do not like it. His officials do not like it. Taxpayers do not like it. I do not think the Prime Minister's members even like it.

This bank is not in the public interest, so why is he pushing ahead with it? This is \$35 billion that belongs to Canadians. Why will the Prime Minister not put this money to better use instead of helping out a group of wealthy bankers?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, out of the \$186 billion that we are investing in Canadian communities, only 8% will be delivered through the bank. The rest of the money will go to provinces and municipalities through the traditional funding that is available to build more housing, to build more shelters so that women fleeing domestic violence have a decent place to live, to reduce commuter time for communities, to reduce the gridlock that people in urban centres are facing. That is what our communities expect us to do. That is exactly what we are delivering.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now, “Liberal government” seems to be synonymous with “conflict of interest”: BlackRock’s questionable involvement in designing this bank, bankers chosen in secret by the Liberals even before the bank is created, \$15 billion diverted from small and medium-sized municipalities to rich foreign bankers. All this was done behind closed doors without meaningful consultation in the House of Commons.

Is this the start of sponsorship scandal 2.0?

● (1420)

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud to say that under our transit plan, more mid-sized communities have received more funding than they ever did under the Harper plan. We have dedicated \$2 billion for small communities only so we can help build the infrastructure those communities need. Our plan is focused on all communities, regardless of their size.

Canadians expect us to treat them fairly. That is exactly what we are doing.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will now talk about BlackRock.

The minister has said that all the information about the bank is available. However, through an access to information request, we obtained a document about a meeting arranged by BlackRock for its clients and attended by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, and several other government ministers.

Strangely, we are unable to see the list of attendees or the subjects discussed, because they were simply blacked out.

Is that transparency? What are the Liberals hiding now?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the presentation we made to investors is available to the public and the hon. member is welcome to read it. I hope he has read it, because there is nothing dubious about it.

We are very proud that we are attracting international capital to invest in our Canadian infrastructure. We are encouraging our own pension plans, such as CPPIB and the Caisse de dépôt, that invest in foreign countries to invest in our own country, to create jobs for the middle class and build the necessary infrastructure that our communities need. We are doing better, and will continue to do better, than the previous government.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister is really rushing ahead with this privatization bank to please his Bay Street friends. However, there are still many unanswered questions about a bank that will cost taxpayers \$35 billion.

With that in mind, will the minister agree to our proposal to withdraw the bank legislation from the omnibus bill—an omnibus bill they promised to no longer introduce in the House—and to conduct a thorough study of an issue that truly deserves one?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can say as a former municipal councillor that one of the things our municipalities need is consistent, sustainable, and long-term funding, which did not happen with the previous government.

We have been consulting with our partners for the last year to establish the Canada infrastructure bank. We talked to unions, talked to provinces and territories, talked to investors. We talked to all sorts of Canadians, many people. As a matter of fact, the hon. member was with me in Washington when we consulted with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the creation of the Canada infrastructure bank.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, then the government should separate it from the omnibus bill.

The priority of corporations is not to provide infrastructure; it is to make profit. I know. It is breaking news. The Liberals secretly plan to develop their privatization bank with corporations behind closed doors. That is as transparent as, say, a black rock.

If the Liberals actually want to put Canadians ahead of corporate interests, will they simply commit that there will be no tolls or user fees as a result of this bank?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we always put Canadians ahead of anything else. We approved 11 projects in the member's own riding, with a combined investment of \$34 million this year. That is putting Canadians first. That did not happen under the previous government and that would not happen if her party were in power, because New Democrats have no plan for infrastructure.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Let us make this clear, Mr. Speaker. It is not just the NDP that is raising red flags. KPMG, that old socialist firm, provided a report to the

government that said this so-called infrastructure bank could lead to “public relations disasters and embarrassment”, embarrassment because of the potential to slow down projects, lack of clear details, and Canadians' aversion to user fees.

Will the Liberals reconsider this corporate welfare bank? We are just trying to save them from some embarrassment.

• (1425)

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have some investment funds in Canada that are known worldwide. CPPIB is one of them. OMERS is one of them. These are funds that would like to invest in Canadian infrastructure to grow our economy and create jobs for the middle class. That would benefit Canadians from coast to coast. That is exactly what our plan talks about. We will continue to invest in our traditional funding models. We will continue to engage with the private sector, because that sector is the one that delivers infrastructure on behalf of Canadians now.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that same report my colleague just mentioned also states that the bank would be a bureaucratic disaster. It would mean more red tape for municipalities, further delays, and greater costs for everyone. Taxpayers are the ones who will be paying for this bank.

There are urgent infrastructure needs. Everyone can agree on that. However, the money is taking a long time to get out the door now, even for public investments by the government, and things will only get worse with the new privatization bank.

Why has the minister decided to put the interests of private investors behind closed doors ahead of the municipalities that so badly need this help?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely incorrect when he says money is slow in flowing.

We approved 2,200 projects with a combined investment of \$20 billion with provinces and municipalities. Almost 50% of those projects are under way. They are allowing us to create a transit system that is accessible for people with disabilities. We are allowing them to buy 1,000 buses that will improve transit services. We are improving drinking water in our communities. We are delivering on what we promised to Canadians, and we will continue to do so.

Oral Questions

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, BlackRock billionaires met the Prime Minister in Davos, then again in New York, and then at the Shangri-La summit, and they have had unfettered access to staff, officials, and ministers ever since, all to discuss how they will use 35 billion tax dollars in the new infrastructure bank.

Taxpayers have had a whole two hours of consultation in a parliamentary committee. Why does the Prime Minister have two years for the billionaires who have everything to gain, and only two hours for the taxpayers who have everything to lose?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of projects being funded in the member's own riding as well, through the other government.

We are not ignoring the needs of Canadians, obviously. We want to work with all stakeholders. We want to work with unions. We want to work with the building trades. We want to work with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. We want to work with the private sector.

We believe that the private sector can deliver more infrastructure that our communities need. If we can leverage public dollars, what is wrong with that? The member may have something against the private sector; we—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

* * *

AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, moving on to another group of billionaires, the Bombardier Beaudoin family has super-voting shares in the company, which give it a slim 53% control of the company.

They cannot raise desperately needed cash by issuing new shares, because they would lose their majority and along with it the privileges to shower themselves in money and hire family members onto the executive. Therefore, they get taxpayers' money instead from Liberal governments here and in Quebec.

The Prime Minister has used 400 million tax dollars to protect these feudal privileges. Will he now join with other investors and ask them to step aside?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on the long-term viability and success of the Canadian aerospace sector.

Our investment in research and development at Bombardier will help secure thousands of high-quality jobs in that sector across Canada. Canadians and shareholders have expressed their concerns with the remuneration package for senior executives at Bombardier. Shareholders are now taking their action; they are responding.

We are watching that situation carefully, but our investment in science and technology is sound.

• (1430)

ETHICS

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has expensed a \$14,000 television, over \$20,000 on Snapchat filters, and \$30,000 on Broadway tickets.

I have one simple question for the Prime Minister. What was he thinking?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister and our government have made it very clear to the world that Canada is back.

When it comes to leadership on progressive values, on climate change, on human rights, for 10 years—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I know the hon. members are enjoying the comments of the hon. President of the Treasury Board, but I cannot hear them. I cannot hear myself.

Order. I am glad somebody can hear me. The hon. President of the Treasury Board has a few moments.

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to human rights, when it comes to progressive leadership on climate change, when it comes to the kind of leadership that the world needs today, our Prime Minister and our government are providing that leadership.

After 10 years of Canada creating a vacuum in terms of progressive values in the world, our government is stepping up and doing the right thing.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is Canada is back in debt.

While Canadians are struggling to make ends meet, in typical Liberal fashion the Prime Minister and these Liberals have absolutely no respect for Canadian taxpayers. The Prime Minister wasted nearly \$2,000 on cardboard cut-outs of himself, then he spent \$30,000 on Broadway tickets for his rich friends, and then he charged Canadian taxpayers over \$291,000 for his lavish vacations on billionaire island and St. Kitts.

How can the Prime Minister justify subsidizing his lavish lifestyle on the backs of struggling Canadians?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 10 years, the Harper government added \$150 billion to the national debt, and what we ended up with were maybe a fake lake and maybe a few gazebos, but we did not get the kind of investments in communities that we are making today. We are investing unprecedented amounts in infrastructure, we are building stronger communities, we are building a stronger middle class, and we will continue to do that. That is why we have had, in the last six months, the best job creation in 10 years in Canada.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now more than ever, we are seeing how the government has become an expert at frivolous, outlandish spending. When the Prime Minister isn't ordering \$2,000 life-sized cut-outs of himself or spending \$30,000 on tickets to Broadway shows for his billionaire friends, the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs is buying a \$14,000 big screen TV, and the Minister of Canadian Heritage is spending \$20,000 on customized Snapchat filters.

Is there a single minister or member of this government who can stand up and give us a good explanation for this outlandish, frivolous spending?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Speaker: I would ask this side of the House to quiet down.

The hon. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government was elected on the promise to grow the economy in order to grow the middle class and help more people join it.

If the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent is looking for good news, then I can tell him this. We introduced the Canada child benefit, which is helping nine out of 10 Canadian families. In my colleague's riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, the families of 21,560 children are now receiving \$200 more a month than they were from the previous government, and that money is tax free.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it pains me to see such an honourable man stand up for the architect of the monumentally stupid and ridiculous expenditures we have been talking about.

The minister just said, "We were elected." Sure they were elected. They were elected because they promised a wee little \$10-billion deficit, but now that deficit is up to \$30 billion.

The example comes from the top. Can the minister, the MP for Québec, honestly say he is proud of that, or will he stand up and say that enough is enough and the government must get spending under control because that is what Canadians want?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is very proud of everything it has accomplished so far. We have made smart and responsible investments to grow the economy and help the middle class. Our plan is working. In the past year, more than 250,000 new jobs were created, and the unemployment rate fell from 7.1% to 6.5%.

Our plan is working, and we will stay on track.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix fiasco has been dragging on for a year and a half now, and thousands of workers still do not see any light at the end of the tunnel. This week the Public Service Alliance of Canada had to file a grievance for the 60,000 employees it represents.

Why? Because the longer this fiasco drags on, the fewer answers they get from the Liberals. All of these hard-working public service employees need to know when their nightmare is finally going to end.

Does the government at least have a date to give them, or has it simply given up?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to reassure public servants that we are working hard to fix the problems with the Phoenix pay system. We have been working on it for quite some time, in order to provide the necessary human and financial resources. I can reassure my hon. colleague that we are working with our partners in public sector labour unions in this country.

What we will not do, as the Conservatives did, is lay off the very people we need to fix the pay problems we inherited from the Conservatives.

* * *

[English]

PENSIONS

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Bill C-27 is an attack on stable and secure workplace pensions and it would let employers back away from commitments to workers and pensioners. There have been no consultations, and we are seeing the private sector salivate at the profits associated with the bill, including a CEO who talked about how the changes would directly benefit his company. One might ask which company. Well, it is Morneau Shepell, of course.

Speaking of which, will the finance minister admit that his promise to consult was just a sham? Will he immediately withdraw this anti-labour bill that attacks workers' pensions?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government wants to help Canadians achieve a safe and dignified retirement. It is key to our plan to help middle-class Canadians.

Bill C-27 aims to broaden the scope of retirement saving opportunities available to Canadians. Under our legislation, individuals have a choice. Those who do not consent maintain their benefits in their current form.

Oral Questions

We are willing to take all the necessary time to give all parties the opportunity to share their suggestions regarding this process.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, “transparency”, “openness”, and “integrity” are words the Liberals opposite keep bandying about, but they never walk the talk.

The first officer of Parliament appointment is a partisan one. Donating to Liberal Party coffers or helping our famous Prime Minister during his election campaign is a path to becoming the commissioner of official languages.

Will the Prime Minister put partisanship aside and protect official languages ahead of his personal interests?

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both our official languages are an important part of our history and our Canadian identity and they are important to us.

As far as appointments are concerned, our government is firmly committed to having a strong, open, and transparent appointment process and finding the best candidate for each position. The role of commissioner of official languages is very important and we are sure that the person recommended will have all the required qualifications. An announcement will be made in due course.

[English]

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the Prime Minister plans to appoint a recently retired provincial Liberal minister as the new official languages watchdog. The Prime Minister promised a new appointments process and, while this is certainly new, appointing a clear partisan to be an officer of Parliament, an officer of this place, is unprecedented.

Will the Prime Minister withdraw this nomination before he completely undermines the impartiality and the independence of the Commissioner of Official Languages?

• (1440)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to provide the same response in our second official language, English. Our two official languages are at the heart of who we are as Canadians.

Our government is firmly committed to a rigorous, open, and transparent process for all public appointments. The Commissioner of Official Languages is a critically important role. We will ensure that the recommended person is highly qualified. Our announcement will be made in due course.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week at committee Professor Irwin Cotler lamented the ongoing suffering of Baha'is at the hands of the tyrannical Iranian regime. His assertion is that the wrongful imprisonment of seven of

their leaders by the Iranian regime should be viewed as a litmus test of its commitment to human rights and regional security.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs heed the advice of this former Liberal cabinet minister and demand the release of the seven Baha'i leaders before deploying any permanent diplomatic mission to Iran?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the former government's policy of isolation was not in the best interests of Canada nor was it in the best interests of Iranians. The best way to advance human rights and consular issues in Iran is by speaking directly with the regime.

Let me be clear. We oppose Iran's support for terrorist organizations, its threats toward Israel, its ballistic missile program, and its support for the murderous Assad regime in Syria.

By raising these issues directly, we are holding Iran to account. The minister has done that. We will continue to do that in the best interests of all Canadians.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our subcommittee heard that the Iranian government has created a cesspool of corruption and violence: massive numbers of public executions; deliberate destruction of religious minorities such as the Baha'i; the violation of international treaties; expanded state-sponsored terrorism; a governance system that crushes dissent; and numerous departments under the direct control of President Rouhani that directly and routinely violate domestic law.

Why is the Liberal government more interested in sitting at the table with Rouhani than listening to international human rights defenders like Irwin Cotler?

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I just said, the best way to advance human rights and consular issues in Iran is by speaking directly with the regime.

We will continue to oppose Iran's support for terrorist organizations, its threats towards Israel, and its ballistic missile program. By raising these issues directly, we are holding Iran to account. The former government's policy of isolation did not work. We will continue to defend the interests of Canadians and promote human rights.

* * *

[English]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Prime Minister what he was doing about the three international drug treaties that keep marijuana illegal. It was not a trick question, yet the Prime Minister responded with talking points and refused to address the subject.

If we do nothing about these treaties by the deadline of July 1, which I remind all hon. members is seven weeks away, we could be in breach of our international accords.

Could the Liberals just put down the talking points and tell the House what they are doing about those treaties before the July 1 deadline?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as our Prime Minister iterated yesterday, we are taking a regulatory approach to the legalization and regulation of cannabis that puts the health and safety of Canadians at the forefront. We are currently examining a range of issues that include our international commitments.

As the member opposite should know, in the U.S. eight states have legalized marijuana and Uruguay has also legalized marijuana, and they are among the countries that have international treaties with Canada.

We are committed to working with our global partners to best promote public health and to combat the illicit trafficking of drugs.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, following the Volkswagen diesel engine scandal, the U.S. government had Volkswagen agree, as part of the settlement, to inject \$2 billion into charging stations for electric vehicles.

In Canada, we are still waiting for the results of Environment and Climate Change Canada's investigation.

My question is very simple. Can the minister undertake to have Volkswagen invest some money in Canada's networks of charging stations?

•(1445)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Environment and Climate Change Canada's investigation of Volkswagen is ongoing, and I cannot comment further.

* * *

[English]

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2010, the former government closed prison farms throughout the country. It did this based on ideology, not sound evidence.

In my riding of Kingston and the Islands, two prison farms were closed. To this day, community members continue to rally for their reopening as a productive form of rehabilitation.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the re-establishment of prison farms, in particular in the Kingston area.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Correctional Service of Canada is establishing an expert panel to help with re-establishing penitentiary farms in the Kingston area. The panel's eight volunteer

Oral Questions

members have expertise in business, agriculture, employment, and the rehabilitation of offenders.

Last summer, more than 6,000 people participated in consultations on this issue. We will continue working with the community to implement evidence-based policies that promote effective rehabilitation and public safety.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have dragged their feet since the election on expanding Canada's sanctions laws. This week, there is powerful new evidence that Canada's laws governing criminal financial activity are dysfunctional. Revelations of elaborate Russian money-laundering schemes involving millions of dollars through Canadian shell companies only came to light because of details hand-delivered to the RCMP and journalists by anti-Putin crusader Bill Browder.

Just how long will the Liberals procrastinate on the foreign affairs committee's unanimous Magnitsky recommendations to get tough on corruption?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that our position when it comes to Russia is clear and that it was our government that increased sanctions against Russia in addition to supporting the sanctions of the former government.

The question of how to effectively apply sanctions for human rights abuses and for foreign corruption was among the issues the member and the committee examined, and we welcome the release of the standing committee's unanimous recommendations. We are carefully considering those, including the recommendations around Magnitsky and about sanctions measures for human rights violations and foreign corruption.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the foreign affairs committee study of Canada's sanctions regimes revealed shocking dysfunction and incapacity among government departments and agencies tasked with detecting and prosecuting international financial fraud. The data provided by Mr. Browder to the Mounties reveals undetected money laundering in Canada of a sort more often associated with shady tax havens in Europe and the Caribbean.

The unanimous committee recommendations to stiffen Canada's sanctions laws are direct and uncomplicated. When will the government act to crack down on international fraudsters using Canada as a safe haven?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question of how to effectively apply sanctions for human rights abuses and for foreign corruption was among the issues examined by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, in which the member opposite served.

We welcome the committee's report and recommendations, including the recommendations pursuant to Magnitsky concerning sanctions for human rights violations. However, our position on Russia is clear. We have implemented more sanctions than the previous government.

* * *

[English]

ETHICS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, records show that one of the sets of Broadway tickets that the Prime Minister bought for wealthy bankers and diplomats was for the permanent mission of Venezuela to the UN. The head of the permanent representative of this mission is a man who was, among other things, the longest-serving cabinet minister under despot ruler Hugo Chavez and then served as foreign affairs minister to the ruthless Nicolás Maduro.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that the Liberals used Canadian tax dollars to wine and dine this man while Venezuelans starved?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Canada-U.S. Relations), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are glad to have welcomed guests from Newfoundland and Labrador to the *Come From Away* production. This was to help our American friends, and we were focused on the economy.

Speaking of the economy and American friends, we know how to get trade deals done. We have done—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Answer the question.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: The cabinet spot is not going to be yours with that kind of answer.

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the member for Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, and others who are excited and feel strongly about these matters, including the member for York—Simcoe, to come to order.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

● (1450)

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I will continue. We have overturned discriminatory COOL legislation in the U.S.. We have completed CETA negotiations. We have persuaded Mexico and China to end their bans.

Trade negotiations with the U.S. have not yet begun, but if and when they do, we will be ready.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Venezuelans have taken to the street en masse to demand an end to

the authoritarian rule that is destroying their country. President Maduro responded by launching tear gas at them.

The Americans have already imposed targeted sanctions against certain Venezuelans. By contrast, the Liberals use Canadian tax dollars to buy Broadway tickets for a Venezuelan mission that is led by a former Maduro cabinet minister.

The Prime Minister waxes eloquent about protecting human rights, so when will he announce targeted sanctions against Venezuelan human rights abusers?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the situation in Venezuela is rapidly deteriorating and we are deeply concerned with its intention to withdraw from the OAS.

On April 3, Canada took a leadership role in co-sponsoring an OAS resolution to reiterate our call on Venezuela to restore constitutional order and respect democratic rights. We call on Venezuela to release all political prisoners and set an electoral calendar without delay.

We are working extensively with our partners through the OAS and colleagues on this important issue. That is because Canada takes its role in the world seriously.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day, thousands of cyclists and pedestrians cross railroad tracks at unprotected locations to avoid long detours. They have been asking for years for safe crossings. The act clearly gives the minister the authority to order the closure or modification of a railway crossing, but it is unclear as to whether he has the authority to open a new one. I have heard different interpretations of this legislation from different government members.

Bill C-322 seeks to remedy that situation. Will the minister support my bill and take on the authority needed to keep Canadians safe?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure everyone that the government is aware of the importance of rail safety and we remind all those who cross railway tracks illegally by going under or over fences that they are doing something illegal and dangerous. Last year, there were 46 rail fatalities and 19 people lost their lives at railway crossings. It is a very dangerous thing to do.

There are already mechanisms in place to consider the need for railway crossings.

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[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were thrilled to learn that Franklin's ship HMS *Erebus* had been found, thanks to the work of the Kitikmeot Inuit, whose oral history helped to pinpoint its location.

Oral Questions

Canada spent millions recovering artifacts from the *Erebus*. A memorandum of understanding with Britain says any artifacts will be given to the Canadian people, but Britain is claiming ownership and the artifacts are being sent to the U.K. for public exhibition.

Will the minister ensure Britain acknowledges joint ownership for the Kitikmeot and Canada before she releases the artifacts?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for working so collaboratively on parks issues.

Our government is committed to reconciliation with indigenous peoples, and we value our relationship with the Inuit of Nunavut and the Nunavut government.

The wrecks of HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, including the artifacts found on the wrecks, are officially the property of the U.K. government.

As we celebrate the discovery of HMS *Terror* and HMS *Erebus*, as the member noted, found with the help of traditional knowledge, Parks Canada is working with the Inuit Heritage Trust to establish joint ownership of the artifacts.

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RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberals are over-promising and under-delivering, with prairie farmers being their latest casualty. When asked if farmers' shipping rights will be protected under the law, the minister dismissed them by saying "no comment". If they expire or if the Liberals refuse to make these protections permanent, farmers will be railroaded.

When will the Minister of Transport end his obvious uninterest in the concerns of our western Canadian farmers and introduce legislation that protects their shipping rights?

• (1455)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been working very hard with the Minister of Agriculture in the past year with respect to our grain farmers. They represent an important part of our economy, and I want to thank them for it.

I have been meeting with them and with the shippers and the railways in order to modernize our great rail legislation. Grain represents 10% of what our railways transport. It is extremely important, and we will be coming forward shortly with modern freight rail legislation.

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TAXATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spring seeding is a busy time for farmers. They do not have time to worry about Liberal politicians in Ottawa who are working arduously to make their lives less profitable. Tucked away in the fine print of the Liberal budget is a plan to eliminate farmers being able to use deferred cash tickets. This could be financially disastrous for many farmers.

Will the Minister of Agriculture commit to dropping this destructive plan and stop threatening the livelihoods of hard-working farm families?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a former farmer and the Minister of Agriculture, I was certainly pleased with the last budget. I find that the government certainly became aware.

We have announced \$70 million to science research to add onto the \$30 million originally in the previous budget. There is \$1.26 billion to the innovation fund, \$950 million in innovation super-clusters, and the list goes on and on.

This government understands the importance of agriculture and will continue to make sure that the agricultural sector remains strong in this country.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada needs the inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women to be successful. There is no excuse for it to take over a year before it even begins to hear from families.

As *Maclean's* noted this week, it is falling apart before it even begins. A communications director was fired, and another senior adviser has resigned. It appears to be in complete disarray.

If this inquiry fails, the minister is responsible. If it takes years for the families to be heard, she has failed. What immediate action will the minister take to get this inquiry back on track?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to ending the ongoing national tragedy that has surrounded women and girls in this country. We are confident that the commission has the tools, the resources, and the networks to ensure that the voices of families are heard and that they have the support they need.

Under the terms of reference, we have authorized the commission to examine and report on the root causes of all forms of violence that indigenous women and girls experience, and their great vulnerability to that violence.

In addition to that, we will continue to invest in the root causes that impact this issue.

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[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that a modern, efficient infrastructure network is important to our economy and to all Canadians. Canada has never seen the likes of our government's infrastructure investments in the 2016 and 2017 budgets.

Oral Questions

The port of Trois-Rivières is essential to the local economy and to that of the entire Mauricie region.

Can the Minister of Transport tell us how our government is upgrading this key piece of infrastructure for Trois-Rivières and the Mauricie region?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Shefford for that important question.

I would like to take a moment to express our deepest sympathy to all of the flood victims in the Mauricie region.

I had the pleasure of visiting the port of Trois-Rivières last summer for an update on this vitally important St. Lawrence River port. As members know, \$3.6 million was earmarked in 2015 to extend pier 10 and upgrade a storage area in a multipurpose zone of the port. This is a good—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

* * *

[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a new CIBC study clearly indicates that hard-working Canadians are forced to take time off and are stuck paying \$33 billion a year in out-of-pocket expenses to take care of aging loved ones. The Prime Minister does not care. He has refused to appoint a minister for seniors and he has failed to deliver a comprehensive national strategy for senior care in Canada.

Canadian seniors are suffering as a result of the Prime Minister's blatant inaction. When will the Prime Minister finally stop ignoring the needs of Canadian seniors?

• (1500)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to our colleague for giving me the opportunity to speak about our record in supporting our seniors, in particular in supporting our most vulnerable seniors. We have reintroduced 65 years as the age of eligibility to receive old age security, which means that 100,000 vulnerable seniors will not need to enter into severe poverty. We have increased the guaranteed income supplement by up to \$1,000, which means that 900,000 Canadian seniors are now living in a more dignified and secure retirement.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this weekend, because the government has failed to act, volunteers, tired of waiting, will clean up 16 abandoned vessels in Oak Bay on Vancouver Island. So far, there is no legislation, no regulation, and no money for abandoned vessels in the 2017 budget, and the government has even failed to meet its own self-imposed six-month deadline.

When will the government take the load off coastal communities and take the action that it promised?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we did make that promise in the oceans protection plan, an unprecedented investment in ensuring greater security of our maritime waters. Our Prime Minister announced it last November. We are extremely proud of it. It is an extremely ambitious plan that is going to make our maritime waters safer for future generations. Part of that includes a plan to address the question of abandoned and derelict vessels, something which has never been done before. We are taking that in charge, and we will do it.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that aquatic invasive species pose a significant threat to our waterways. My riding of Oakville North—Burlington's close proximity to Lake Ontario enhances our quality of life and provides many economic opportunities, but the intrusion of invasive species in our Great Lakes is having a profound impact on our natural ecosystems and economic activities.

Could the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard share what actions the government is taking to combat aquatic invasive species?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Oakville North—Burlington for her important work in defence of the Great Lakes.

Canada is committed to protecting Canada's waters. Budget 2017 proposes \$43.8 million over five years for a national aquatic invasive species initiative. These funds would be used to prevent, detect, and eradicate high-risk aquatic invasive species using, obviously, innovative science and advice. This significant commitment would allow us not only to protect Canadian waters like the Great Lakes from invasive species, but also to continue the important fight against Asian carp and sea lamprey in the Great Lakes, something that I know concerns my colleague from Burlington very much.

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[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Red Cross has mobilized to assist Canadian flood victims. It is important that people be as generous as they were towards Lac-Mégantic in 2013.

Speaking of Lac-Mégantic, for nearly four years now, the residents have been suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder because passing trains cause them to relive the tragedy every day.

After signing a petition in favour of the bypass, after building hope during a meeting with the mayor of Lac-Mégantic, can the Prime Minister commit today to building a bypass for Lac-Mégantic as quickly as possible?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, a few months ago, the Prime Minister committed to trying to speed up the process. That is why I had the opportunity to speak with Premier Couillard recently. I am also in talks with Minister Coiteux, and I speak regularly with the mayor of Lac-Mégantic, Mr. Cloutier.

We are determining whether we can speed up the process. We just announced a BAPE study that will begin on May 23 and will last two months. We want to do everything we can to improve the process. The federal, municipal, and provincial governments are working together.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Court of Appeal has come to the same conclusion as the Bloc Québécois, namely that Ottawa's plan for a securities regulator is unconstitutional.

At this point we are no longer talking about interference so much as invasion. Ottawa is attacking Quebec's jurisdictions and threatening the sovereignty of the National Assembly. It is serious. Ottawa is also dismantling Montreal's entire economic system and economic ecosystem.

Where did the 40 Liberal members from Quebec go and how do they justify allowing their party to attack the authority of the National Assembly?

• (1505)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Our government received the ruling from the Quebec Court of Appeal and we are going over it carefully. The Supreme Court has already said that the federal government had a role to play in managing the systemic risks on capital markets. We are fulfilling that responsibility in a collaborative spirit that is respectful of provincial and territorial jurisdictions.

* * *

INTERESTS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, speaking about the National Assembly, yesterday the members of Quebec's National Assembly unanimously passed the following motion: "That the National Assembly deplore the federal government's decision to establish the Canada Infrastructure Bank in Toronto rather than in Montreal."

Everyone in Quebec deplores this decision, except for those 40 phantom Liberal members from Quebec.

When exactly are these phantom members going to start working for Quebec instead of undermining it?

[English]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were very pleased to see the interest of a number of municipalities to headquarter the Canada infrastructure

Privilege

bank. We feel that regardless of the location, every municipality will benefit from the creation of the infrastructure bank, because they can undertake projects and mobilize the private sector as well as public dollars to build the infrastructure their communities need. We hear that from municipalities all the time. That is why we have put forward an ambitious plan to help them build the infrastructure they need, grow our economy, create jobs for the middle class and those working hard to be part of it.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Hamilton Centre have a point of order?

* * *

PRIVILEGE

FREE MOVEMENT OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WITHIN THE PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCT

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is actually a question of privilege.

Once again I find myself joining others who are rising to raise an issue of my rights being infringed. I rise, believe me, much more in sorrow than in anger, because the incident that happened occurred within less than an hour of my being at a PROC meeting where we were dealing with exactly this issue, privilege being denied in terms of access to the Hill.

I want to say at the outset that I would ask for just a couple of moments to describe what happened. In the interest of time and in fairness, because we are dealing with this at PROC, I will not be asking you, Mr. Speaker, to rule on whether this is a prima facie case, but I will be asking my colleagues at PROC to accept this as one more example of a challenge that we have to overcome.

Very briefly, I left my office in the Justice Building on my way over here. I did not lose a vote nor did I lose a chance to speak, but I did have a side meeting set up at the request of the Minister of Democratic Institutions, and I did miss that. There were implications for this.

I came out of Justice Building. I went to get on the green bus, and the driver said something to the effect that there was hardly any point getting on because the bus could not get up on the Hill because of demonstrators. I said that we should get on the bus and see how far we could go, and we would take it from there. There was one other colleague on the bus.

We got as far as the "car wash", the vehicle security area, and we were stopped again. Another bus was in front us. After a few minutes, the driver had no idea when things were going to be freed up, so I got off the bus. I went over and talked to the immediate staff, the person who was doing traffic control. He did not know but said that it could be a delay of five to 10 minutes.

The driver had mentioned that all the people were walking up where the bus goes, and it was only just as we were arriving that security was putting up the fencing so that people could walk along on the Hill parallel to Wellington Street, but still leave room for the bus to go. Once that was in place, once we went through a bit of traffic management, we did finally get under way.

Business of Supply

My point is this. Over and over, ad nauseam, we have raised the issue of the lack of planning. Once again, had that fence already been in place to accommodate the Canadians who are entitled to be on their Parliament Hill, there would not have been any stoppage. It again speaks to making the planning of member of Parliament's access to Parliament Hill a priority. We really are getting tired of saying this over and over again.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude now, but I just want to say to my colleagues on PROC, by virtue of my not taking a lot of time to make this a big issue here, that I hope they will allow me to make this part of our review so that when we are looking at recommendations for change, it is both the case that you referred to us and this incident that has happened to me here today.

• (1510)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Hamilton Centre very much for raising this issue. He is of course familiar with the ruling that I made on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Beauce and the hon. member for Milton some time ago, which of course is before PROC, also known as the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I thank him very much for raising this, and I look forward to the report of the committee in due course.

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In a moment I will request unanimous consent to propose a motion, but would like to give a minimum amount of context for the folks watching at home.

Bill C-4 that this House has debated and sent to the Senate is a bill that reversed an ideological attack on some of the fundamentals of unions from the previous government. I want to call to people's attention that the House has already passed the bill, and now the Senate has delayed and tried to gut this important legislation. I really feel it is time to finish the job.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I hope you would find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion: "That a message be sent to the Senate to acquaint their honours that the House disagrees with the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-4, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act, the Public Service Labour Relations Act and the Income Tax Act."

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the government tell us what its plans are for the rest of this week and next week?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue with the debate on the NDP opposition motion. Tomorrow morning the House will begin consideration of Senate amendments to Bill C-37, the opioids legislation. Following question period, we will proceed to Bill C-7, the RCMP labour bill.

On Monday and Tuesday next week, we will return to debate on the bills just listed. On Wednesday we will resume debate on Bill C-4, respecting unions. In the evening, the House will consider the estimates for the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in committee of the whole.

Next Thursday, May 18, shall be an allocated day.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION — THE CANADA INFRASTRUCTURE BANK**

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

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House in order to demonstrate to many of my colleagues how important this motion is to the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, and certainly to the vast majority of the ridings we represent. This motion is important because the Liberals are creating an infrastructure privatization program that will not meet the needs of the communities we represent.

The priority of the corporations within the infrastructure privatization bank is not to build infrastructure, but to make a profit. Furthermore, the government has handed over control of planning and implementing the privatization bank to private investors and multinationals. During the election campaign, the Liberals promised infrastructure investment that would benefit all Canadians. Now we are in a situation where the government has just put the interests of big corporations first.

I represent 25 municipalities that believed the Liberals' promises about infrastructure investment. In the riding I represent, the largest municipality, the major city, is the 18th largest in Quebec. The next one has almost 10 times fewer residents, as does the third. After that we have villages with populations ranging from 3,000 to 500. Even for the largest municipality in the riding I represent, the infrastructure privatization bank will not be there. In fact, projects over \$100 million that provide long-term returns of 10% to 12% do not exist in my riding and do not exist in the vast majority of ridings that we represent in the House.

It is understandable that, for electoral reasons, the focus would be on the major urban centres, where most Canadians are concentrated, but our country is being developed keeping land use in mind. We occupy, through our different ridings, a vast country outside the major urban centres. The very large majority of the municipalities we represent will therefore not have access to this infrastructure bank.

Business of Supply

I can say that these communities have certain needs. Before becoming a member of Parliament, I was a municipal councillor for six years. The district I represented faced numerous infrastructure needs. Part of the sewer system of the district was 100 years old. Part of it was still made of brick. The year after I was elected, there was a great deal of rainfall. This is indeed the time to talk about this, now that so many communities are experiencing this flooding. After an abundant rainfall, many houses had backed-up sewers.

At that time, the city manager told me not to worry, that it was an exceptional situation that did not happen often, maybe every 10 years. However, there was a problem, because in the following year there were more heavy rains; the whole thing started over again, as it did the year after that. Today we are in a situation where events like this are happening more and more regularly, like the one we are now facing. All the experts and scientists agree that we are going to experience situations like this with increasing frequency.

Our municipalities have major infrastructure needs, as old infrastructures are in need of upgrading. The district I represented had a combined sewer system, that is, the same system had sanitary sewers and storm sewers. We know that today this is no longer the norm. At one time, the goal was to send the water to the river as quickly as possible, in both urban centres and rural communities.

• (1515)

In the 1980s in Quebec, we had a vast land drainage program. There are great benefits to land drainage, but it also takes the water to our rivers very quickly, and in communities like mine, 10 or 12 hours after a rainfall, the river level rises substantially, causing a lot of problems.

All municipalities are grappling with these kinds of infrastructure issues. The needs are great, and not all of the smaller communities can meet them. As I was saying earlier, the infrastructure bank targets projects of over \$100 million. However, there is a problem with respect to all the other programs as well.

This government does not seem to realize that not all the municipalities have thousands of employees. The largest municipality I represent has 250 employees, the second-largest 10 times fewer, and 22 of the 25 municipalities I represent average two and a half employees. We are then asking two and a half employees to deal with these issues and these infrastructure programs, which are in no way adapted to their reality. What is more, I am going to have to tell them that the billions of dollars the government will be investing in an infrastructure bank are not for them.

Regarding the waste-water treatment program I was talking about earlier, I was not surprised to find that the projects approved in my riding were those of the only three cities. The mayors of the towns told me that when they could have been ready to submit their project, they were told that they might just as well forget about it, that there was nothing more available, that it was “first come, first served” and their turn had come and gone. These communities have to be kept in mind.

When it comes to infrastructure, most of the communities I represent are barely keeping their heads above water financially, and this is certainly the week for that imagery. The tiniest wave can make them go under, because they do not have the resources to maintain

roads or their drinking water and waste-water treatment systems. This is important.

When I was a municipal councillor, I represented an urban district, and in my last year in office I had to go door to door to explain to the citizens of my district that the sidewalks would be removed from their street when the street was redone. At one time, when a street was built, a sidewalk would be built too, but we no longer have the resources to maintain this kind of infrastructure. It is important for the government to understand that it cannot go off in this direction. It is better to stop working with these private investors, whose only aim is to make big profits.

Ottawa has the capacity to reduce costs for Canadians by financing projects at far lower rates. If the Liberals think that their privatization program offers real benefits for Canadians, they should not be afraid to support today’s motion and withdraw their legislative measures for the infrastructure bank from the omnibus budget bill, so that those measures can be studied and given genuine debate.

I have just explained the needs of the riding I represent. We must take the time to talk about issues concerning the infrastructure of all of our communities. The infrastructure bank must be removed from the omnibus bill so that time can be taken to discuss it. We must explain to the government what the communities we represent are experiencing.

I represent 25 mayors who are counting on me to support them on the infrastructure issue. I must be up to that challenge. To do so, I must have the opportunity to discuss this. The Liberals have to abandon this infrastructure bank, stop rushing through the issues in their omnibus bill, and allow us the time to discuss them.

• (1520)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has made some very significant points.

As we know, all of our communities need infrastructure. If this infrastructure bank had merit, we would be hearing about it, but even the government's own expert, KPMG, said this is going to be a disaster. We have had years of the Liberal government courting billionaires in order to get information on how to set this up so that billionaires, basically, are going to be having the profit but Canadian taxpayers are going to be having all the risk.

Quite rightly, in question period, we heard today that Canadian taxpayers have only had two hours to discuss this. I do commend her and her party for bringing this forward because we need to address this, to debate it.

Why does she think the Liberal government is putting the needs and wants of billionaires ahead of the needs and wants of Canadians and their communities?

Business of Supply

• (1525)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear and obvious that the Liberals have had this bank project in mind since the election campaign. They have already advertised the board of directors positions of the infrastructure bank. They have already begun filling those positions, and they already know the friends from private corporations they want to place on the board; there are no representatives of public companies.

To me, it shows a total lack of respect for the House to move forward even before the House has voted on this infrastructure bank. The government is showing great arrogance and a total lack of respect for the parliamentarians in the House.

It is clear that there are crony corporations that have a huge amount of money to make with this bank.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have tremendous respect for my hon. colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. We share the same interests on a number of subjects, especially those relating to our constituents in small towns.

My colleague has concerns about the municipalities' access to funding. The infrastructure bank is a funding tool, but it is just one in a whole array of funding tools that will be available to the municipalities.

To multiply the leverage of the money we have, does my colleague agree that the funding that can be generated through the infrastructure bank should be generated as planned, and that the municipalities that need funding will be able to find it through traditional methods? Would that not be a good thing?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, we already have tools to assist municipalities without diverting public money to a private bank that is totally outside the decision-making power of elected officials. Let us be clear: it is the bank that will have the power to decide on priorities, even for projects of \$100 million and more. The big cities will not even be well served by this model, since it does not meet the needs of municipalities of any kind.

We have to adopt genuine programs that provide assistance to municipalities, but above all we must allow the communities the power to decide on their priorities themselves.

At present, we have a model in Quebec that ensures that it is the province, in collaboration with the municipalities, that prioritizes projects, and that is how we must continue to operate.

With this tool, we are giving the opportunity to set priorities to those who want to make the profits. It is they who will decide which projects will be most cost-effective, even if the communities have not prioritized those projects. That is unacceptable.

Mr. Rémi Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle.

I want to say how delighted I am to be able to tell the House today about the government's achievements and plans for infrastructure in our country. The Government of Canada knows that investing in

strategic infrastructure is vital for the success of communities where Canadians live.

My colleague, the hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, spoke passionately and eloquently about the difference that infrastructure made in his life since becoming a member of cabinet. As it has been frequently pointed out, we hear the same story everywhere. Infrastructure creates new opportunities for Canadians. Public transit allows people to commute between their home and their workplace; child care facilities are safe and nurturing places where children can learn and play; modern water supply and sewage treatment systems make it possible for homes and businesses across the country to have safe drinking water.

Through investments in these vital sectors and other areas, the Government of Canada clearly shows its commitment to the health, well-being, and quality of life of Canadians across the country.

I would like to elaborate on this. As my colleagues know, the Government of Canada first presented its infrastructure investment plan in budget 2016. This plan targeted three sectors: public transit, green infrastructure, and social infrastructure.

To jump-start the work and to respond in the short term to urgent needs, the first phase of the plan addressed the repair and rehabilitation of current systems. Across Canada, the provinces and territories applied to the \$3.4 billion public transit infrastructure fund program to purchase new buses, expand vehicle maintenance garages, and install bus shelters. Although this work is not impressive, it is important and even necessary. Bus shelters are important. Public transit users like to use them as they wait for the bus when it is raining or snowing. Modern and reliable buses are important. They need fewer repairs, which means that public transit services are more regular and Canadians can get to work or school on time. It is important to have the space needed to do required maintenance and repairs in order for the buses to quickly get back on the road.

We have also invested \$2 billion in water and wastewater facilities across the country under the clean water and wastewater fund. To date, we have supported over 900 projects under this funding program, which means that Canadians are benefiting from improved access to quality drinking water and that our rivers and lakes are now less polluted.

Finally, over 2,000 projects to retrofit and renovate social housing have been approved to date. That means that nearly 900 existing social housing units have been made more energy efficient and now have improved access to water.

We also simplified and broadened the eligibility criteria for projects under previous programs so that the necessary funding could be quickly distributed to communities. As a result, we have approved funding of over \$800 million for projects across the country.

Business of Supply

In Quebec, this funding has been used to support various projects, such as those involving the Le Diamant theatre, Saint Joseph's Oratory, and the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal. I have also had the opportunity to announce many water and waste-water projects in my own riding, which will help the communities and municipalities in my region.

Last November, we tabled our fall economic statement, which set out the financial framework for the next steps of our infrastructure plan. We made those commitments official in budget 2017. We increased our commitment to infrastructure by providing for investments of over \$180 billion. I want to emphasize that because it is a historic investment of \$180 billion over 12 years. We increased our investments in social infrastructure, green infrastructure, and public transit infrastructure, and we are making investments in trade and transportation infrastructure and rural and northern communities infrastructure.

● (1530)

Today I am pleased to welcome to Parliament representatives from Matane who have come to talk about the importance of infrastructure in our communities. I am proud that we have the financial means to invest in key pieces of infrastructure going forward.

We have boosted our investment in social infrastructure, and we have also released details about two new initiatives, the smart cities challenge and the Canada infrastructure bank. As my colleagues have explained, the Canada infrastructure bank will invest \$35 billion in loans, loan guarantees, and capital investment, and will also attract private capital for public infrastructure.

Mobilizing private capital will enable us to optimize federal infrastructure dollars. People have expressed concern that the bank will invest only in major projects in big cities, and we want to address those concerns.

I just want to reiterate that the Government of Canada is determined to finance infrastructure in rural and northern communities through its invest in Canada program. Those communities will also get money under other funding programs in our plan.

Many of the needs of small communities are the same as those of big cities, and the purpose of the bank is to offer support for these investment sectors. Small communities need facilities to generate clean electricity, and have to deliver strategic projects to transport energy and connect to other networks, just like big cities. Small communities also use interprovincial networks to transport electricity, which is just one of the sectors where the bank will be able to intervene.

The bank will examine projects with revenue-generating potential, and it is possible that large-scale projects will also be undertaken in our small communities or rural regions. Some of these sectors might benefit from the advantages of the major projects also delivered in the regions in collaboration with other communities.

In addition, we are happy to prepare for the challenge of smart cities, which is another way to rethink the way we invest in infrastructure by presenting our cities with the challenge of engaging in innovation. Our cities have to be at their best to handle international competition and meet the needs of their citizens.

By creating smart cities, we will promote innovation and positive change for our cities, and that positive change will mean benefits for the Canadians who live in those cities. We believe that small cities will contribute to improving the quality of life of residents, and we are sure that our cities will seize this opportunity and will find new initiatives that will take advantage of innovation and technology to effectively meet the needs of their citizens. In the end, the challenge of smart cities is another tool that will help support long-term change all across Canada.

In closing, we understand that change must lead to growth that will benefit all Canadians at every stage of their life, whether they are young, newcomers, working, retired, veterans or indigenous people.

We have made major progress this past year by investing in projects to establish communities that are healthier and more economically viable. The investing in Canada plan outlines the way we will be investing in the future in Canada by putting qualified, talented, and creative Canadians at the heart of an economy of the future that is more focused on innovation.

● (1535)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am flabbergasted to hear what the member just said in his speech.

He says that the bank will help smaller municipalities in funding their infrastructure projects. Does he know that the minimum for projects to be eligible to funding from the infrastructure bank will be \$100 million?

In my riding, the municipality of Elgin has 600 people and Dundee has fewer than 1,000 residents. It will be impossible for them to launch \$100-million projects, which means that smaller municipalities will never get any funding from the government or from that private investment bank to improve their infrastructure. As a result, inequality will grow everywhere in Canada, and I am not even talking about the user fees people will have to pay.

Again, we see a double standard. We will be giving money to investors who are already very wealthy and who will invest in projects that will be profitable to them. It is one of the criteria of the investment bank. I cannot believe that the member said smaller municipalities will benefit. I would like to hear him explain why.

● (1540)

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, it is always surprising to hear NDP members criticize our investments in infrastructure, which are historical investments worth \$180 billion over 12 years. If NDP members were sitting on this side of the House, we would be going through a period of fiscal restraint, and smaller communities would be suffering from budget cuts.

The Government of Canada will invest in smaller communities, and we have set aside \$2 billion to be able to do that.

Business of Supply

In my riding, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, we invested \$40 million in infrastructure since the beginning of our term. These are concrete examples of our investments in smaller communities. Thanks to the infrastructure bank, there will be more investments like these.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech, and throughout the first part, I was shocked. I was thinking that it is absolutely extraordinary what can be done with public financing. Why do they need to turn to the private sector?

The question remains, but the more relevant question I have for my colleague is very simple. Where will the government get the \$35 billion that it plans to throw into that infrastructure bank to serve as a financial lever?

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. I know he heard my speech.

In an important part of my speech, I said that the infrastructure bank will make it possible to go after private investments that will be added to our public investments, in order to generate more investments and more support for the creation and development of projects. That will be the key to success with this infrastructure bank. Indeed, it can serve as an economic lever to attract investments and develop more projects across Canada.

We are confident that this is the best way to take action and develop Canada's economy. I am very proud of the investments we will make in the Canada infrastructure bank.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand the exasperation of my colleague from Quebec, who is trying to explain economics to the NDP. What he brought to light is that during the election campaign, we promised to invest in infrastructure and stimulate growth in Canada, in every region of Quebec and Canada.

The NDP on the other hand, promised to balance the budget at any cost. That would have led to cuts and austerity, meaning that we would not have been able to invest in infrastructure in the regions of Quebec and Canada.

I hope that my hon. colleague can explain to us the types of projects communities can expect from our increased investment in infrastructure through the infrastructure bank and the investments we are making outside this bank.

Mr. Rémi Massé: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary. That is an excellent question.

I have dozens of examples. However, as I said earlier, in my riding, Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, more than \$40 million will be invested in infrastructure, namely drinking water, waste-water treatment, and an arena renovation in Mont-Joli. We also have investments in Sayabec and throughout my riding, in fact. If the NDP members, for whom I have the utmost respect, were on this side of the House we would not be able to invest in infrastructure because we would be dealing with budget cuts, which would make it impossible to stimulate the economy in my region.

We are proud of what the Government of Canada has done. I am proud to represent my riding as we pursue a strategy to stimulate the economy of Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

• (1545)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity I have been given to talk about some of the statements in today's motion.

[English]

I think Canadians deserve to know the facts, and they are not going to find them in this motion. In particular, I will take issue with the hon. member's claim that private corporations will be the largest beneficiaries of the Canada infrastructure bank, because reality is that Canadians will benefit the most.

The investments we make in infrastructure today will pay dividends for years to come. They will build stronger, more inclusive communities; they will deliver clean, sustained economic growth; and they will create jobs for middle-class Canadians and for those working hard to join it. That is why our government, as part of our bold plan to put Canadians first and grow the economy, is investing more than \$180 billion in infrastructure over 12 years, which is a historic amount.

[Translation]

This amount includes \$28 billion for public transit, which is sure to appeal to the people of Châteauguay—Lacolle. We live on the south shore, a bridge away from Montreal, and we are strong supporters of public transit, not only to improve traffic conditions, but also to help the environment and mitigate the impact of climate change.

It also includes \$10 billion for trade corridors. Châteauguay—Lacolle is home to one of the country's busiest border crossings with the United States. It is of the utmost importance that this corridor stay open to all and that it promote efficient communications between our businesses, our fruit and vegetable industries and their American clients.

It also includes \$9 billion for bilateral agreements with the provinces and territories on green infrastructure. These are essential, as they promote healthy communities and environmental conservation, which is in the interest of our businesses and our families alike.

[English]

What is more, in the creation of the Canada infrastructure bank, we are introducing innovation into these very communities that are built, so that Canadians get a greater return on their investment. I repeat that. It is Canadians who are getting the return on their investment.

Business of Supply

In short, the Canada infrastructure bank is an arm's-length organization that will work with provincial, territorial, municipal, indigenous, and private sector investment partners to transform the way infrastructure is planned, funded, and delivered in Canada. It is important to put the emphasis on the fact that it is all these partners that are part of the economic ecosystem that is important to developing and to building good infrastructure.

The Canada infrastructure bank will be responsible for investing at least \$35 billion in revenue-generating infrastructure projects that are in the public interest, and attracting private sector capital to those projects so that more infrastructure can be built across Canada, not just what we have now that is available with public funding, but more infrastructure that will benefit Canadians.

As a result, more projects will be built, more jobs will be created, and more sustainable economic activity and growth will be unlocked. That is the leverage effect that we are looking for.

Our government has already introduced legislation in the House establishing the Canada infrastructure bank with the goal of having the bank operational in late 2017. Yes, it will be this year. We need this bank now. We need it yesterday, in fact.

Once up and running, the Canada infrastructure bank will attract new investment to infrastructure by using innovative approaches to how infrastructure deals are structured and paid for. It is all about the financing. We want to increase the number and the volume of financing instruments that are available for the huge amount of deferred maintenance and infrastructure that we do not have, that we are missing today in Canada.

It will bring expertise and its own funding to the table, as a partner with other governments and institutional investors; it will build a pipeline of investment-grade projects that Canadians need; and it will work with its partners to provide better data on the state of infrastructure in Canada.

● (1550)

That is very key because, as someone who has worked in many areas of financing and in public institutions, I know it is important to be proactive when we are dealing with issues of infrastructure and the decaying of facilities that we need to have a healthy and innovative economy.

Most of the government's \$180 billion infrastructure plan would continue to be delivered through traditional infrastructure funding models. Therefore, we are recognizing that, yes, those traditional models work, but we just need to have that additional bang for our buck. The bank would offer a new innovative and effective tool and other financial instruments that provincial, territorial, municipal, and indigenous partners could choose to use and to build more public infrastructure projects.

The advantages of this option are clear. By bringing in additional funding via partnerships with the private sector, governments can reduce—that is the key word—their upfront capital contribution as well as those funds that would normally be dedicated to long-term operating costs. These long-term costs are a major component for projects, including public transit, where municipalities now bear the majority of the operating costs. This sharing of capital and operating

costs with the private sector can be of particular benefit to provinces and municipalities that may face borrowing constraints.

The Canada infrastructure bank would also leverage and increase investment in infrastructure. To attract private and institutional capital, the bank would be focused not on all projects but on the kinds of revenue-generating projects that can demonstrate sufficient demand to cover a significant portion of capital and life-cycle operating costs through prices paid by users. This approach would provide a number of benefits, particularly the efficient allocation of capital. Capital does not know ideology. When we look at our resources, we must use them in the most efficient way possible. The use of pricing will help optimize the scale of infrastructure projects, keeping total costs in line with the need of a given project. Infrastructure pricing, applied broadly, also has the potential to ease traffic congestion, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce the consumption of vital resources by supporting the efficient use of infrastructure assets.

I would add that the bank would only make investments in infrastructure projects that generate revenue and are in the public interest. A key consideration for the bank would be whether the project attracts private sector capital that would not have otherwise been invested in public infrastructure. The bank's investments would be made strategically with a focus on large, transformative projects. These are not for small, municipal projects. These are for large, transformative projects such as regional transit plans, transportation networks, and electricity grid interconnections.

With all of these positive attributes, the Canada infrastructure bank would allow us to more effectively invest in infrastructure, and that is what it is all about: looking at our resources, how can we best invest? Doing so would strengthen and grow the middle class and make Canada an even better place to call home. I cannot think of a better reason for our hon. colleagues not only to reject today's motion but to lend their support to the timely passage of our government's budget implementation act, which would help make the bank a reality for the benefit of Canadians.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in one of my previous lives, I was the mayor of a community of about 20,000 people, and I sat on the B.C. mayors leadership council, representing communities with populations from 20,000 to about 70,000. In terms of taxation across Canada, 8% of taxes get paid to municipalities, 42% to provincial governments, and 50% to the federal government. Therefore, by far the majority of the money goes to the federal government, and yet municipalities on any of these projects are required to come up with a third of the cost of their particular project: a third municipal, a third provincial, and a third federal.

Business of Supply

When I look at this \$35 billion being taken away from the majority of the municipalities in Canada to go into this fund and I think of some of the other ways that money might have been used to benefit the majority of municipalities—for example, decreasing the amount of money that municipalities have to come up with for infrastructure projects and increasing the federal portion—I see that this \$35 billion of our money is really not being used as effectively as it possibly can be.

What does taking \$35 billion away from the majority of municipalities really do to benefit the majority of Canadians?

• (1555)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, of the \$35 billion, \$15 billion is coming from infrastructure that is already dedicated to green public transit and social infrastructure, and the other \$20 billion is coming from investments the government will be making in purchasing assets. This is not taking away from municipalities. This is actually providing, with a small proportion of the overall investment, an ability to leverage that amount and make more money available to municipalities.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned that the bank would be revenue generating, in the public interest, and an alternative method of growing infrastructure in large projects. Since this is an alternative method for those larger projects, which are situated mostly in our cities, why is the government's own infrastructure spending not then being reallocated more toward our rural communities where our agriculture and agrifood people are trying to continue to work with the big green combines? They are so huge now they are not fitting on our roads or access ways, and our country depends on the export of our agriculture and agrifood products.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, we have specifically carved out \$2 billion of infrastructure money for small communities. That is not in any way preventing those communities from also applying and receiving other infrastructure money. In fact, it is really opening up the envelope of accessibility.

In my riding of Châteauguay—Lacolle, municipalities are very excited about contemplating projects that they could only dream of in the past. Now they are actively planning and working toward making these projects a reality.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her candour. The more candid the Liberals get about what the infrastructure bank really means, the more clear it is that it is a bad idea.

She talks about leveraging. That was one of the major themes of her speech. I wonder if she knows that leveraging investment is not like leveraging donations. If people donate, say, to the Red Cross or something, sometimes the government will offer to match their donations dollar for dollar, or \$1 for \$2, or something like that. That is not a zero sum game. It is actually creating more investment in the cause. However, the infrastructure bank does not work that way. Canadians, at the end of the day, are going to pay back the investments that were made.

I worry that the hon. member thinks the model is the same as when the government matches donations to charities, and does not realize that BlackRock is not acting like a charity, and it does not

deserve to be treated like a charity by the government, which is what the infrastructure bank would do. I wonder if she could explain to us how it is that BlackRock is going to be giving money to infrastructure projects and not expecting to get all of its initial investment back, plus the return it wants to get of 7%, 9%, 10%, or 12%.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, I fail to understand where the giving and the charity come in. We are talking about private investment and public investment, the only difference being where it comes from. We are talking about, on both sides, that it could be a variety of financial instruments, be it loans, loan guarantees, or equity investment. This is where Canadians would indeed have ownership in these assets and see their investments returned, specifically in the long-term effect of having the infrastructure built, building a better economy, and creating jobs that all Canadians will benefit from.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start off by saying that, given the importance of the issue at hand and what little time we have to tackle it, I will be sharing my time with the member for Elmwood—Transcona.

Since I know that 10 minutes will not be enough for me to make my case, I looked for ways to sum up my speech in a single sentence, which then reminded me of that old saying that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, or, in this case, cover up your big mistakes in assessing a project.

I was also prompted to raise a very basic question: what is “public infrastructure”, anyway? I am clear on the “infrastructure” part; we are talking bridges, roads, water systems, arenas and cultural centres. Everyone knows what infrastructure is. There is not much to say about the word “public”, either. Not only does it mean something is public, but also that it belongs to everyone. Something that is public is paid for with our tax dollars for the benefit of all, and no one expects it to turn a profit once it has been paid for.

In light of all this, I would like to speak out in the strongest possible terms against the Liberals' absolutely outrageous misinformation campaign around the infrastructure bank.

I would like to back up a little. I am not a tax expert, and neither are most of my constituents. However, we all manage a budget and we understand the basic principles. In 2015, during the election campaign, the Liberals explained a relatively simple principle to everyone: if one must borrow, best to do it when rates are low rather than high. We all understood that. I have to admit that it made sense at the time. The Liberals also said that in light of the very low interest rates at the time, they would take advantage and run up a small deficit. I think that Canadians bought into that. The proof is that the Liberals are in government. Let us take advantage and invest in the infrastructure needs of voters while interest rates are at their lowest because it will cost less for all Canadians. The principle is easily understood.

Business of Supply

Now, they are introducing an infrastructure bank that does the exact opposite. Instead of taking advantage of low interest rates, the Liberals are going to hand it over to the private sector, which only has one objective. This is not a criticism. The objective of any private corporation is to make the highest possible profit for its shareholders.

Now that this has been established, I would like someone to explain to me why, instead of investing at 2%, the approximate rate the government gets right now for borrowing, Canadians would all agree to pay 7% to 10% returns to shareholders who would be investing instead of us. I am finding this hard to follow.

As if that was not bad enough, the government is saying that we need to do our part to get this bank off the ground and attract private capital. The government is therefore going to inject \$35 billion into this bank to show that we are serious and invite the private sector to join us.

I am going to repeat the same question I asked earlier, since I did not get an answer. Where is that \$35 billion going to come from? There are not 50,000 possible options. There are three. The first option is that the government could increase the deficit by \$35 billion. The second, and this may be a wiser solution, is that it could take \$35 billion of the money that it promised for infrastructure over 10 years—since no one has seen any of it yet anyway—and add it to the bank, thereby depriving all those communities of that money. The third option is even more interesting. The government could sell shares. It could sell the infrastructure that Canadians already collectively built and paid for to the private sector.

• (1605)

For one, our airports will be up for sale. The billions of dollars in proceeds from their sale will go into the fund. Our airports have already been paid for by all taxpayers, who are now expected to hand them over to the private sector so it can turn a profit. In exchange, instead of getting free Internet access when I go to the airport, I will probably have to pay a fee. Every time I have to drive over a small segment of a new highway to get to that airport, I will have to pay up, either in the form of a fare or a toll. I will certainly have fees to pay, because private enterprise requires that investments made in infrastructure be profitable. Forget about breaking even; private investment will require a return of 7% to 10%. As anyone looking to invest will know, projects with a 7% to 10% return on investment are quite rare.

This debate is not really on plans for an infrastructure bank. It is about legislation hidden deep within an omnibus bill. The Liberals themselves are not convinced of its merits, which is why they are refusing to allow for a proper study by the appropriate committee, in this case, the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. They would rather try to sneak them into their budget and keep telling themselves it is solid and that it will go through.

The fact that they are unable to defend this idea already sets off alarm bells in my head. As we are still debating this, people are already applying for positions at the bank. Oddly enough, of all the positions offered, none of them will represent the public's interest. All the positions at the bank will be filled by private investors, for infrastructure that is now private. I am even beginning to think that

we are dealing with a private government and not a public government.

In its reflection on whether to privatize airports, the government is asking for advice from Credit Suisse, which, among other things, invests in purchasing airports. That is rather odd. Then the government will be surprised when the report concludes that it might be a good idea to privatize our airports. Come on.

The Canada infrastructure bank called upon BlackRock, another totally objective source that can provide a neutral perspective on a decision we have to make for our collective future. It is laughable. There is no other word for it.

One way parliamentarians get the clearest possible picture of the country's finances is through the parliamentary budget officer. By setting up a private infrastructure bank outside of government, the Liberals are arranging things so the parliamentary budget officer cannot ask any questions or conduct any studies or investigations to do with the infrastructure bank because that will not be part of the mandate. That is strange and incomprehensible.

This will create a two-tier system or even a three-tier system. For one thing, only projects worth over \$100 million, which we all know is out of reach for most Canadian cities, will qualify for infrastructure bank support, and for another, the private sector will be in a position to create demand itself and back what it thinks will be profitable infrastructure projects that people need.

Which projects will the bank support—those that people really need or those that will give investors the best returns? The answer is self-evident.

I will stop there because my time is up and I have to move on to questions. I still have a lot of points I would like to make. I hope that members who speak after me will be able to further explain the downsides of creating this private infrastructure bank.

• (1610)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): I thank my colleague for his speech, Mr. Speaker.

New Democrats claim to have many unanswered questions, but the information is out there.

My colleague is from Quebec, just as I am. We are talking about a major project. By way of example, I would like to explain to the member how infrastructure like this works. In Montreal, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec put forward a proposal. It involves a fund that is like a nest egg for the workers of Quebec, a cause the NDP sporadically defends.

Just like every other public transit system in the world, the Réseau électrique métropolitain requires the payment of user fees, which then serve to pay down the debt on the project. The rest of the proceeds then go into this common fund for Quebecers.

Business of Supply

With the support of the Government of Quebec and of the federal government—which I believe was forthcoming, or at least I hope it was, since I support Quebec's largest city—this major project will strengthen pension funds and serve to shore up this fund, which is the nest egg of the workers of Quebec and which my colleague intends and claims to defend.

Does the member have a better grasp of the issue now?

Mr. Robert Aubin: Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. The member's example is somewhat flawed.

About the proposed REM project in Montreal that the member spoke of, electrifying public transit and expanding the network are certainly worthwhile goals. That said, concerns about the project have multiplied since its announcement, and answers are becoming less and less obvious and call for a much more in-depth analysis.

Again, this same system, paid for by the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, will require rates of return higher than the rates at which the government can borrow. If we were to invest part of the billions of dollars the government has announced into the REM, we could then invest in another project that is truly under federal jurisdiction. I am talking about VIA Rail's high-frequency train project, about which we have been unable to get an answer for at least the past two years and that remains very close to our hearts.

With all that said, I urge the member to keep at it.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, several issues that came up in the KPMG report on the infrastructure bank, which the government originally tried to hide, have come to light. Some of the items are governance worries, jurisdictional issues, duplicate work of provinces, new layers of bureaucracy, and the fact that the bank will slow down infrastructure projects. However, one of the biggest concerns is possible private equity investment controlling public water and public water utilities.

Could the member give some feedback on how his constituents might feel if foreign hedge fund owners manage their local water supply?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: I do not know how many of my fellow citizens are following our debate today, but I do know that their ears perked up when they heard the word “KPMG” in my hon. colleague's question. We know that this company does not pay its fair share in taxes; if it did, we would have the means to finance our infrastructure. I do believe that to ask the question is to answer it.

I say again that public infrastructure, which we all pay for, belongs to each and every one of us, citizens as well as corporations; everyone wins when we all pay our fair share of taxes.

Businesses are the first to benefit from our infrastructure. In fact, one of the first things they look for when they are considering setting up shop somewhere is whether regional infrastructure is adapted to their needs and whether it is in a condition to serve their best interests.

• (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would say I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion, but I am not. The motion ought never to have graced the floor of the House. It is about separating out an important legislative initiative of the government from an omnibus bill. The Liberals were very clear in the last campaign that they would not use omnibus bills, particularly omnibus budget bills. It is a shame to have to rise to speak to the motion, but it is required. It is also a shame that the Liberals did not keep their promise of not using omnibus bills to advance significant legislative changes.

We have heard from Liberal members all day and previously in the budget debate. In their own view, the infrastructure bank is a new, significant, and different way of delivering infrastructure projects. Whether we think that is positive or negative, the point is that it is new, it is different, and it is significant. There seems to be consensus on that. If that is the case, then it should never have been done as an add-on to the budget bill. It should have been done in separate legislation. That is why it is a shame we have to discuss this today.

I will now speak to the other parts of the motion, which have to do with the virtues of the infrastructure bank, or lack thereof.

I want to focus particularly on the aspect of cost. A lot of work has been done to assess the payback or value to the public of public-private partnerships and the kinds of schemes that are being promoted under the infrastructure bank. This is really P3s on steroids. For supporters of P3s, this is kind of the logical conclusion of the public-private partnership model.

Academics like John Loxley have written about the added cost to taxpayers through P3 models and also the extra costs that we will pay because of the infrastructure bank scheme. The Auditor General of Ontario determined that P3s cost taxpayers an additional \$8 billion. The Auditor General of British Columbia estimated the government lost \$81 million in additional interest on P3s. It paid 7.5% instead of what its own lending rate was.

I would like to put this in context. It might help to get a sense of the magnitude of the rip-off we are about to embark on with the Liberal government.

If someone were looking to renovate his or her kitchen, a job that would cost about \$30,000, was going to borrow \$22,500 to do it, putting \$7,500 down and borrowing the other 75%, at 2% interest over 20 years, the cost over the life of that loan would be \$27,296. The specific numbers are not that important; it is really the orders of magnitude. The person would pay a little over \$27,000 to borrow that \$22,500.

Business of Supply

Let us say a contractor knocks on the person's door and says he has a deal for the homeowner. Knowing the homeowner only has \$7,500, the contractor will give the individual the other \$22,500 required. The conditions are that the contractor will own the kitchen and a turnstile will be installed. Every time the homeowner goes into the kitchen, a toll will be paid and the contractor will get a 10% return, cumulative over years. If we pop that into the loan calculator, it means that over the life of project, instead of paying \$27,000, more or less, the homeowner will \$51,000 to the contractor. How will the homeowner pay it? It will not be paid through what we call a mortgage payment, but through the tolls paid every time the homeowner goes through the turnstile in the kitchen.

If the homeowner goes into the kitchen three times a day to get a snack, the cost will be \$2.35, which adds up to \$7.05 a day to go into the kitchen to prepare food. If we take that as the fixed cost for the homeowner to go into the kitchen, which the person should own, to eat food, it means the amount owed, if the homeowner had borrowed the money at 2%, will be paid in 10.6 years. Instead, the homeowner will pay the same toll every day for 20 years. For people at home, I hope that helps put this in perspective, that this is the biggest corporate heist of the century that the Liberals are engineering. This is about using taxpayer money to line the pockets of private investors, not even Canadian private investors, from Saudi Arabia, China, and all over the world.

● (1620)

That is the magnitude of what we are talking about with respect to the rip-off. When people at home hear that, I think they might think I must be wrong because it is outrageous, who would ever go for that deal, that is a stupid deal, that my math must be wrong. However, that is not so, and I wish I were wrong about that.

We have heard from other authorities that this model risks doubling or tripling the costs of the project. That lines up exactly with these numbers. It is a bad deal, and one wonders why the Liberals are willing to contemplate it. I do not know. I can make some guesses, but even the most charitable guesses are not that favourable.

If we leave aside some reasonable guesses that the evidence suggests with respect to cash for access fundraisers and a cozy relationship between the members of the Liberal leadership and Canada's corporate tycoons and look at what the benefit would be if those guys were not their friends, they could start more infrastructure projects now, and we have heard Liberal members talk about that today, and keep the real costs of those projects off the books so it looks like they are balancing the budget when they are not balancing it. That is all well and good if it is a game of fun with numbers and an exercise in how to make their political party look good.

Canadians want investments in infrastructure. That is one of the reasons they voted for the Liberals. I do not think they are getting what they asked for. However, it is fair to say that it was one of the reasons people felt compelled to vote for the Liberal Party. The enthusiasm and the support is there for investments in infrastructure. However, Canadians did not say that the Liberals should invest in infrastructure but not be honest with them about the costs. They did not say that they should invest in it and pretend that we would not pay as much as we really are for those investments. In fact, they said

that they were willing to pay and were even willing to run a bit of a deficit to do that. That is not what they are getting here. They did not ask to be fooled about the real costs of those investments and they did not ask to pay a premium to be fooled. That is what is going on here.

The Liberals will artificially inflate the costs of these projects potentially to the tune of two or three times in some cases. Maybe it is not that much. We would know better if we knew what the rules of this game were, except we do not. We will not have time to study it. Instead of putting it in its own bill and giving it its proper due, not just with respect to debate in the House but study at committee, and time for civil society, economists, academics, and everyone else to study the bill as it goes through the House, they will ram it through in an omnibus budget bill. Maybe if we had the time it would not be so bad, I do not know.

However, the numbers so far, and in some of the expert opinion so far, suggest that we are talking about a doubling of some of the costs. What is the reason? To allow the Liberals to hide the real costs of these projects from Canadians because they want to make their books look better. Better books is a good thing. It is always better when the revenue is closer to what the costs are. However, for them to have better books because they are dealing with another ledger, not recording some of the substantial costs, and causing Canadians to pay more money over the long term is not better. That is political smoke and mirrors.

To ask Canadians to pay billions of dollars more to line the pockets of corporate CEOs just for the sake of the Liberals having better speaking notes is an offence. It is an offence to the intelligence of Canadians and an offence to their wallets. I do not know if the Liberals have been out talking to people, but they ought to know that the wallets of Canadians are not particularly padded these days. These are difficult times. Therefore, to inflate the costs of these projects, maybe for the sake of their buddies or for better speaking points, is completely wrong-headed.

I have not even had time to get into the problems of what the Liberals did when they were setting it up, and Canadians have real cause to worry. People in Winnipeg saw what happened when people in the public sector hired out people in the private sector on the P3 model and did not take the time to do the proper due diligence and provide the right kind of scrutiny for those deals. It is clear that we end up with a bunch of wasteful spending and projects costs escalate far beyond what they are supposed to be in the first place.

● (1625)

If there is any lesson we have learned in Winnipeg, and I would like to share that with the country, it is that if we are going to partner with private people to do infrastructure, and I am really not convinced that it is a good idea, and the evidence says it is not, then we definitely need to spend the time to have the appropriate scrutiny and oversight to make sure that taxpayers are not being ripped off. It is the exact opposite of what the Liberals are doing by ramming the bill through in an omnibus budget bill. It is why we need to carve it off so we can take the proper amount of time to study it.

Business of Supply

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would have to disagree with my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona on a number of points.

It sounds as if NDP members have actually convinced the Conservatives on this issue. It is a bit of a surprise. They are saying that the only investors are huge corporations, and it is those corporations that are going to take dividends away from Canadians.

Some of the most significant investors today are the CPP and teachers' federations. They are looking for ways to invest. Billions of dollars leave Canada every year, because investors are looking for investment banks so they can invest in infrastructure programs. Canadian dollars, union dollars, and other dollars are leaving Canada to invest in infrastructure outside of Canada.

We are setting a framework now that would enable some of those pension funds to invest here in Canada. Why does the member so adamantly oppose having this option? That is all it is. It is an option for some of these organizations to invest those Canadian dollars here in Canada in our infrastructure.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, according to the press, it is not unions and pension funds that are reviewing the speaking notes of Liberal ministers. It is the BlackRock group.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member for Elmwood—Transcona and his explanation using the kitchen. I can really relate to that.

He spoke a bit about P3s and said that if proper scrutiny was done, it could be done well.

For my kitchen, which I am paying to use, when it needs repair, how is that taken care of?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, part of the problem with this scheme is that we do not even know yet, and that is one of the questions. Part of the problem with P3s is that often, at the end of the useful life of the asset, at the end of those 20 years, when the stove is not working quite right, and it is time to replace the fridge, and the floor is scuffed up and it is time to invest again, that is when the ownership of the asset reverts back to the government, or back to the homeowner. Then the contractor is back at the door, saying that he will cut the homeowners a deal again, that it was a great deal.

The really offensive part of this scheme—and I am glad the member mentioned it, because I wanted to get this in—is that the contractor is suggesting to the homeowners in this case that if they do not have the \$7,500, they can sell him the washroom, sell him the airport. That is how they can capitalize the \$7,500 they need for the contractor to come in and rip them off on their kitchen.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it always strikes me when I hear New Democrats taking umbrage at the fact that hard-working Canadians, with their pension money, money they need to grow, money they need to earn returns on to ensure a healthy pension for themselves and their families, can take that money today, and they do, and invest around the world. Pension funds like the CPPIB, la Caisse de dépôt, OMERS, and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan invest in Australian highways. They invest in British airports. They invest in energy infrastructure all over the

world, and they garner those returns that secure the pensions and the future of Canadian workers.

We want those pension funds to be able to take that money and invest it here at home and garner those returns for Canadian families and Canadian pensioners. Why does that member not recognize that?

• (1630)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I just think this is an obvious conflation of issues. The fact of the matter is that the Prime Minister is not meeting with pension funds in Toronto hotel rooms behind closed doors. They are not the ones that are writing the rules for this infrastructure bank.

If the Liberals want to have an open and transparent vehicle by which pension funds can actually do some of that investment, and it makes sense, and the revenue is not just about charging Canadians user fees and tolls, that is something to discuss. It is something I would hope they would bring in a separate bill to the House with the time it would need for study.

The process is broken. The Liberals are trying to use pension funds as a screen for helping their buddies. Even if it were the case that it was all just pension funds, we still need appropriate scrutiny. We still need good parliamentary process.

Get with the program, guys.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge, Government Appointments; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Health; and the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable, Air Transportation.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Whenever the government creates an expensive new program, the burden of proof for its necessity falls on that government. In other words, it is not the responsibility of the opposition to prove that the program is unnecessary; it is the duty of the government to prove that it is necessary.

Business of Supply

What arguments has it made today to exhibit the necessity of this \$35-billion bank? Most recently, the parliamentary secretary across the way has said that this bank is necessary to help pension funds earn a return. He points to the Canada pension plan, teachers' pension plans, and other pension plans that invest in infrastructure to produce returns for future retirees. He is right. They do, and they have, all around the world and right here at home. In fact, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec is a large shareholder, currently, in the Canada Line, which is the largest infrastructure project in British Columbian history. It is a large rapid transit train project funded one-third by private investors who formed a consortium that included Quebec pensioners.

There is Pensionfund Realty, which built a public transit station in Coquitlam with the money of its future pensioners because they wanted to bring more traffic to their shopping centre. They said, "We'll build the station in our own shopping centre; then the people getting off the train and walking around will buy stuff from our tenants, and we'll make more money."

The Canada pension plan was at one time, and may still well be, the largest shareholder in the privately owned Highway 407 in the greater Toronto area, an investment that produced for it very large dividends that support the retirement of Canadian pensioners.

The member is right. Pension funds do buy, own, and even manage infrastructure, and do so well. They have been doing it across Canada for many years, which raises a question: why do we need an infrastructure bank to have them do it? They are already doing it. That cannot be the reason for the bank.

Second, the Liberals suggest in their budget document that there is \$2 trillion of potential worldwide investment looking for projects. "Global capitalists have money for projects," they say, "and Canada has projects that need money, so let's connect the dots."

Wait a second here. If the dilemma is that there is too much money in the world looking for infrastructure projects, how could the solution to that dilemma be another \$35 billion of money? I thought the premise of the program was that there is already a lot of money out there and that we would not need taxpayers' money to build infrastructure, because these global investors would build it for us with their money. That cannot be the reason either.

What is the reason? One needs to look at division 18 of the budget implementation act to find out, because the overwhelming preponderance of money in the infrastructure bank will be delivered in the form of something called loan guarantees.

What are loan guarantees? I can tell members that they are a fantastic instrument for the person being guaranteed. They mean that a person can make risky investments that could produce profits for him or her, but that if money is lost, the investor is guaranteed against those losses.

Be careful. That does not take the risk out of the project. It takes the risk out of the hands of the person who invested in it.

• (1635)

Where does it go? It does not vanish. It has to be somewhere. If a global investor builds a bridge and goes over budget or has a revenue shortfall, that risk is materialized in serious losses. Someone has to

pay for it. Who is holding the bag? The answer is right there in the budget, division 18, clause 23: \$35 billion Canadian tax dollars would backstop the losses of these international investors. Therein lies the real function of this bank: to backstop the profits of investors in large and sometimes risky infrastructure projects.

That does violence to the basic free market principle that risk and reward go together. When we sever those two things, we have something called moral hazard. Moral hazard is when someone is encouraged to take risky behaviour because they can transfer that risk to someone else. That is exactly what the bank does. It is a gigantic insurance fund to backstop the profits of the wealthiest people on earth.

If anyone has any doubt about this, the Prime Minister got the idea for the establishment of the bank at Davos, a congress of billionaires, from the head of the biggest asset managing firm in the world, BlackRock, which controls over a trillion dollars of wealth. He then met again with the same billionaire firm in New York. He then allowed that firm to organize an entire planning session for the establishment of the bank at the swanky Shangri-La Hotel in Toronto, at which his own minister's remarks were vetted by these millionaire pension fund and investment fund managers.

After two years of consulting the billionaires on how they could use \$35 billion in tax dollars, he is allowing a parliamentary committee two hours to represent taxpayers. That is right. The billionaires, who have everything to gain, get two years of consultation. The taxpayers, who have everything to lose, get two hours of consultation.

This is a growing phenomenon, whereby powerful financial interests are increasingly looking for ways to put the risk of their investments onto the shoulders of taxpayers.

There is something called "rocking chair money". It is money that comes to people as they sit back in their rocking chairs. It used to be that institutional investors would get it by buying government bonds. It was risk-free money. However, bonds only pay 2.5% now. They are too low, so these investors are looking for higher rates of risk-free returns. They persuaded the Liberal government in Ontario to pay thousands of percentage points of markup in price on electricity for so-called wind and solar power electricity, which has bankrupted families and driven 60,000 people to food banks across the province. It gave Ontario the highest poverty rate of any of the 10 provinces in the country in order to backstop the profits of wealthy so-called green energy entrepreneurs.

Business of Supply

We see it with Bombardier, where, instead of issuing new shares to raise money to pay for their cash shortfalls, the billionaire Bombardier Beaudoin family protected its feudal privileges to control a majority of the company with a minority of the shares by getting money from Canadian taxpayers, handed to them by Liberal governments in Quebec and here in Ottawa.

We see this phenomenon of crony capitalism spreading far and wide, seeking to put the burden of risk on the shoulders of the hard-working middle class through government backstops while giving all the profit to the wealthy elite who can afford the lobbyists, the donations, and the influence to control the levers of government.

The greatest concentration of wealth there, of course, is government, and those with the most power to influence government always attempt to unlock that vault to their own benefit.

● (1640)

Therefore, today we stand in opposition to this naked attempt to undermine Canadian taxpayers by taking \$35 billion from their hands and using it to backstop the profits of the wealthiest elite, and we reaffirm our commitment to true free enterprise on the side of those who work hard, pay their taxes, and play by the rules.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.) Mr. Speaker, I read the member's speech as being more a lament for the decline into populism and Trumpism of the Conservative Party. When the member uses words like "billionaires", what he really means is it could be the bus drivers' union in Rio de Janeiro, or it could be teachers in Alabama, or it could be municipal employees in Alberta. These are pension funds. These are sources of capital. Yes, there is \$2 trillion or maybe more of capital looking for returns to ensure the futures of those very people. We can put that money to work right here in Canada creating jobs, creating construction jobs, building strategic trade-enabling infrastructure, and having Canada be open for business so we can sell our grain, open our ports, and keep this country moving forward economically and in every other way.

These are things the Conservatives used to talk about, but they do not talk about them anymore. They just descend into buzzwords and snap phrases, and now here we have the evidence of the decline of conservatism in Canada. I think it is a sad day.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the member said that the Liberals are doing this for bus drivers and teachers. How many bus drivers and teachers were invited to the Shangri-La Hotel to talk with the Prime Minister about this 35-billion-tax-dollar corporate welfare bank that the Liberals want to set up? Were there any bus drivers there or were there simply those trying to harvest the biggest return with no risk to themselves whatsoever by offloading that risk onto taxpayers? That is not populism. That is basic free market economics. People do not get rich by shuffling off their risk onto someone else. If they want to make an investment to earn a profit, that is great and we stand beside them, but we will not allow them to force other people to take the risk of that investment.

● (1645)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I were not sitting in my place watching the member, I might have thought it was the interim leader of the New Democratic

Party who was speaking at times. I understand and appreciate that the Conservatives have really lost touch with this particular issue.

When we think about it, the member said that his problem is that the government would be contributing to the bank. By doing that it would be enabling other stakeholders such as, let us say, the City of Edmonton, or the City of Calgary, some of those great western cities, to look at it and say that maybe if they could get some assistance they could pool in some money, and yes, there might be a component for some private investment. As my colleague pointed out, much of that money that would go in there would be from pension funds. Some of those pension funds, if they were not going to be invested, let us say, in this future bank, would in fact continue to leave Canada. Many Canadians would benefit by this investment bank and the member needs to acknowledge that.

The member is wrong in trying to imply that there is no role for government to play when it comes to leveraging additional private dollars in order to get a project up and running. The Conservative Party might want to rethink its position, because I would have thought it would be supportive of a policy of this nature.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party does not believe in welfare for the wealthy. That is exactly what this program is. This is designed to allow a private sector for-profit enterprise to come in and build something to profit, but in the event it all goes wrong, to turn the risk over to taxpayers.

We have no problem if somebody wants to come in and build something great and profit from it; in fact, we encourage it. We cut taxes for people like that. We remove red tape. Those are called entrepreneurs, but what are entrepreneurs known for? They are known for taking risks. This is not entrepreneurship. This is corporate welfare. This is an attempt to take the risk off the balance sheet of the wealthy interests who have control over the Liberal government and put that risk on the shoulders of Canadian taxpayers. We will never stand for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): As always, Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take the floor today, even despite the fact that we would much rather not have had to debate this issue here, in the House of Commons.

Indeed, from our perspective, the current government is making a big mistake with this infrastructure investment bank, which we do not even need since we already have at our disposal a similar mechanism that is better regulated, more appropriate and efficient. I am talking about PPP Canada.

Business of Supply

The truth is this new scheme concocted by the Liberals will come with all sorts of roadblocks and red tape. Since its very inception, the infrastructure investment bank has shown potential as the future theme of Gomery 2.0, as the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska so skilfully put it during question period.

Any way you cut it, this infrastructure investment bank is a terrible idea. Let us not forget that a parliamentary committee is currently studying Bill C-44. This is the bill to implement the budget, but it is an omnibus bill that also contains non-budgetary measures. It bears all the hallmarks of an omnibus bill designed to conceal certain measures not included in the budget.

Do I need to remind my friends across the way that, nearly two years ago now, alas, they were elected on certain promises? On page 30 of their platform, they said, “We will not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny.”

However, that is exactly what they are resorting to with this infrastructure investment bank. They are attempting to avoid the issue being debated in Parliament by steamrolling it through, even though we believe that this scheme is fundamentally wrongheaded and should be shut down. If they want to go ahead with their plans, more power to them, but they will have to submit to Parliament's thorough scrutiny, just as they had committed to do. This is just another of the government's many broken promises.

That is unacceptable because it is in an omnibus bill, which means that this important part of Bill C-44 will get barely two hours of debate in committee. This is a big deal. This is \$35 billion of taxpayers' money, and the government is talking about attracting foreign investment. The fact is that parliamentarians, who represent the people who are going to pay for all this, will be rushing this thing through. Two hours, wrap it up, thank you, good night.

We know that the Prime Minister, as usual, is holding quick little secret meetings with people in the private sector who are interested in this idea and maybe with foreign investors too. Once again, instead of doing things out in the open and having an honest debate with the people who represent Canadian taxpayers, the Prime Minister is meeting these investors in hotel rooms behind closed doors. Nobody knows what is going on, and everything is worked out in secret, thank you, good night.

That is not the right approach. Perhaps that is the Liberal approach, but it smacks of what led to the Gomery commission. We are warning the Liberals. They are on a path towards having another huge problem on their hands. If they do this, unfortunately, it will be Canadians who pay for this bad decision once again.

It is important to understand that everything must be done properly. While the ambition to create an investment bank is being hidden in a cowardly and hypocritical way as part of an omnibus bill—and I say it is cowardly and hypocritical because they are the ones who said they would not do what they are doing—and despite the fact that this bill has not even passed the House of Commons, people are already acting as though it is a done deal. They are deciding on the location, they are appointing organizers, they are appointing officials, they are appointing managers, and they are appointing executives. Enough already.

Could they at least have the decency to respect the work of parliamentarians? No, they are already proud to announce that it will be located in Toronto, which has raised the ire of many in Quebec.

I want to clarify something here. For us, it was never about whether it was located in Toronto or Montreal. We oppose the investment bank altogether. Whether they have it Montreal or anywhere else, we think it is just a bad idea. That is why the Conservative members from Quebec are not up in arms, saying that it makes no sense for it to be located in Toronto. The whole thing makes no sense, period. There should be no infrastructure bank to begin with.

• (1650)

This is bad form. The government introduced an omnibus bill, there was no debate in Parliament, the Prime Minister had secret meetings with people he barely mentioned in the House, and the government made its decision when the bill has not even passed yet.

Let us talk about the substance. The government crows about fine principles and says that this will help fund infrastructure. The Liberals say that they are being nice and are investing heavily in infrastructure. Need I remind hon. members that when we were in power, under the leadership of the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Jean, we put in place the largest infrastructure program in Canada's history, an investment of \$80 billion over 10 years? Only, unlike the current government, we did this and still managed to balance the budget.

It is easy to hand out billions of dollars left and right when you run annual deficits of \$30 billion and cannot even say when we will return to a balanced budget. It is not right to increase the debt and run big deficits after getting elected on a promise to run small deficits. Life is grand. There is a limit to taking people for idiots.

Unlike the current government, we introduced our infrastructure program as part of a balanced budget. It goes without saying that we support investments in infrastructure, but we believe they must be made within our means, in other words, in the context of a balanced budget.

Furthermore, we already have a mechanism similar to the one the government is promoting to further the Liberal Party's crass commercial interests; it is totally legal and above board, and notably, it does not rely on foreign investment or require billions of taxpayer dollars to be frozen. I am talking, of course, about P3 Canada, public-private partnership. This tool, introduced by our government in 2009, allows interested private investors to invest in infrastructure programs. The member mentioned some successful projects, just as the member for South Surrey—White Rock did. The tool works as intended, I am happy to say.

To illustrate my point, with a core budget of \$1.3 billion, when our government set it up in 2009, P3 Canada managed to attract investments worth \$6 billion. Has anyone heard of it being involved any scandals? Did it lose money? Did it do a bad job of serving Canadians? No. The Conservative government established this crown corporation in 2009, and it is working fine.

Business of Supply

We do not have to move forward with the Liberals' new scheme, the investment bank. We are all for private investment when it is done right and goes through PPP Canada. We also do not object to foreign investment as long as it benefits Canadians and does not just line investors' pockets.

Just a few minutes ago, my colleague clearly illustrated in a pertinent, clear, and obvious way that all the risks associated with the government's investment bank will be assumed by Canadian taxpayers and any problems will be paid for by taxpayers and not the foreign investors. This is not a reasonable approach for those who have the taxpayers' interests at heart.

The government continues to repeat that it is investing in many infrastructure projects. Need I remind members that 94% of these projects have not gotten off the ground? The Liberals can talk all they want.

Unfortunately, we cannot rewrite history. However, had Canadians once more placed their trust in us 18 months ago, billions of dollars could have been invested in our infrastructure program established under the guidance of the member for Lac-Saint-Jean. All we are doing right now is listening to the Liberals talk. Need I remind members that 94% of their projects have not materialized?

I would remind members that in order to create this bank, the Liberals are going to hold on to \$15 billion in taxpayers' money, plus another \$20 billion, for five years. These billions of dollars will not be available to immediately respond to the needs and requests of small municipalities.

Another thing that does not make sense is that this bank will only fund major investments of more than \$100 million. This morning, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska said that Canadian infrastructure projects cost \$6.6 million on average.

• (1655)

What cities do we think of when that \$100-million figure comes up? Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto, of course. I have nothing against them, but what of every other Canadian municipality?

The government proposes to take \$15 billion that should go directly to Canada's cities and towns and put it in a bank so it can cater to foreign investors, who will certainly not want to take any risks; taxpayers are the ones who will have to take the risk. It is not right.

That is why, in its current proposed form, the bank should not see the light of day. As KPMG, the firm originally commissioned by the government to assess the project, so scathingly put it, this is a disaster waiting to happen. The government must not go forward with its hare-brained, ill-conceived scheme.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, my Quebec colleague across the way has a case of proceduritis. He said that members had only two hours to talk about this issue, when we have been discussing it here in the House today for six or seven hours, which is entirely appropriate.

Earlier, I asked our Quebec colleague from Trois-Rivières a question, and I am going to ask this member the same question. We will not talk about Gatineau, Quebec City, or Trois-Rivières. We will

talk about a project in our largest city, Montreal, and that project is the Réseau électrique métropolitain. There is a proposal on the table by the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, our nest egg, which invests in infrastructure projects and companies all around the world.

This is a major, economically viable infrastructure project in Montreal, where an investor, our nest egg, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, is going to take our retirees' money and invest it with, I hope, the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec to make sure that we have sound infrastructure. That is the type of project that could be undertaken by the infrastructure bank: a public asset where users pay. They pay to lower the debt of the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec and make a profit that will go in the nest eggs of Quebecers.

Is the member against implementing this type of infrastructure project in Montreal, in our province, and likely all across Canada?

• (1700)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I will not linger over the member's insipid comments about how we have just spent six hours talking about it. What we are talking about here is the NDP motion to call the Liberals to order. This has absolutely nothing to do with the substance of the matter. This is unbelievable because the member is smarter than that, so he should show it.

He brought up the project in Montreal. We have nothing against that. Do we really need a bank, a new Liberal scheme, to make that happen? No way. If the federal government wants to get involved, that is what PPP Canada is for. We do not need a new scheme to do that.

This is actually a provincial matter, but since the member went there, I am happy to revisit my old passions. If the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec does the analysis and decides that this is a good move for the Caisse and Quebec taxpayers, that is up to them. That is a private undertaking, and it is fine. That is what PPP Canada is for. Why set up a whole other Liberal scheme? We already have PPP Canada.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his speech, but also for his passion. I know he loves numbers, so I have a question for him. Perhaps he will have an answer or a rough answer.

For the past few hours, I have to admit that I have started to look forward to retirement, because to hear the Liberals tell it, pension funds are going to be overflowing.

I have two questions. First of all, does anyone know how many workers are not covered by a pension plan, people for whom the Liberals' arguments simply do not hold water? Also, what proportion of earnings can I look forward to in retirement, relative to the extra costs that I will have to incur, from the moment the plan is set in motion until I die? It would be interesting to study that in committee, if this part of the bill could be sent to committee.

Business of Supply

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, that is why we should not rush through such a project, such a study and the creation of an institution like the infrastructure bank. We need to take our time and review the project properly. It is not just the NDP and the Conservative Party saying so. KPMG said so in a scathing report ordered by the government to determine how their plans measured up. KPMG told the government to be careful because this will cause big problems and result in a lot of questions.

If perchance the government wants to move forward, which we think is a very bad idea, then let it at least follow the rules of the game. Putting this in a 300-page bill and rushing it through is pure hypocrisy.

Canadians deserve a thorough debate on the subject. My NDP colleague's questions are on the mark. Unfortunately, I do not have the answers, but this shows the importance of having a thorough debate instead of rushing this through to please Liberal Party cronies.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I believe the NDP's motion today is very important; it calls on the government to split its mammoth Bill C-44. The budget implementation bill amends 30 statutes, is over 300 pages long, and was only allotted four days of debate.

Of those four days, one was a Wednesday, when we debated for an hour and a quarter, and another was a Friday, when we had one single hour of debate. Just seven of my NDP colleagues have been able to speak to budget Bill C-44.

This bill is of capital importance and we cannot even debate it. The fact is that, the shorter the debate, the less informed the Canadian public will be about all the measures being proposed that will hit them square in the wallet. This mammoth omnibus bill, this statutory juggernaut, is undemocratic.

The Liberal Party even bragged during the campaign that it would never introduce omnibus budget bills and that it would never resort to tactics to withhold information. In fact, that is precisely what the Liberals are doing.

We are talking about the infrastructure bank, which is really the privatization bank, because that is what this is about and what it is turning into. No members of the public were consulted.

Only members of private companies, billionaire companies, were consulted. They were some of the advisers to the Minister of Finance and they came up with a scheme to ensure that these companies would reap the profits generated by these infrastructure investment projects. It is clear that there is scheming involved. They discussed it behind closed doors. No one had access to these conversations.

We are asking that this part be taken out of the bill so it can be studied separately, allowing experts to study it, and so we can study it and let Canadians know what it is all about.

In fact, \$35 billion in public money will be invested in this infrastructure bank. It is really important that we be able to debate this. I hope that the government will listen to reason and support this motion. If the government has nothing to hide, the infrastructure bank project should be studied in detail in committee.

Since they started in November 2016, discussions on the infrastructure bank have been dogged by controversy. This omnibus budget bill only confirms the fears we have had from the outset. The bank will certainly not serve the public interest. My colleague from Trois-Rivières said that public infrastructure must serve the common good and the public interest, that of all Canadians.

What we now understand is that the projects submitted to the bank will have to be profitable to the companies looking to invest. That will not be in the public interest.

When my other colleague spoke, he talked about renovating a kitchen that would be used by the owner. In order to fund the project, he would have to rely on private investors and thus have to pay a fee every time he wanted to use the kitchen. That simply makes no sense, and it certainly is not in the public interest.

What does this investment bank have going for it? How come the Liberals have such a hard time telling us how it might benefit small towns and ordinary Canadians?

All we know is that this bank will benefit wealthy businesspeople. The Liberals, however, were elected on their commitment to start investing in infrastructure and communities again. That is not at all what we are seeing in this mammoth Bill C-44, where the legislation setting up this infrastructure bank was sneakily included.

What is more, we do not know what the criteria for the projects will be. The private investors' criteria should meet the needs of Canadians, but instead, they will meet the needs of the investors.

● (1705)

This bank was created by the private sector for the private sector. We cannot blame businesses. They want to make money. That is their whole reason for being. However, we are wondering why the government chose to get companies to build our public infrastructure, which should be permanent, sustainable, and properly used. The money spent on infrastructure should be money well spent. I would like to remind members that \$35 billion in taxpayer money is going to be used for this infrastructure investment bank.

An advisory council was created by and for the Minister of Finance. Its official title is the advisory council on economic growth, not the advisory council on the development of public infrastructure.

BlackRock, an investment fund specializing in the acquisition of infrastructure, is part of that council. It is important to remember that name. BlackRock is the world's largest private asset manager, and it examined and commented on a briefing on the infrastructure bank prepared by the Minister of Infrastructure before he presented it to private clients. This company worked with the government for three months to try to promote the bank to investors in Toronto. BlackRock had three months to discuss this bank, while the House had one day, thanks to the efforts of the NDP. How is it that the government discussed this project with private investors for three months? That does not make any sense.

Business of Supply

Internal government files show that large multinationals like BlackRock were given unprecedented control over the development of the Liberals' so-called infrastructure bank. That is another troubling fact. That is serious. There are so many conflicts of interest here. Where is the public share? What role do members play? We cannot discuss it. We are asking that an independent committee be allowed to examine this issue.

Also on that council is Goldman Sachs, one of the investment banks that contributed to the financial crisis of 2008. Other notable mentions are oil companies, including Alberta's Cenovus, one of the country's largest oil companies.

Who will sit on this infrastructure bank's board of directors? There will only be private sector appointments. Not a single representative of federal, provincial or municipal governments will get to sit on the board, which is meant to be working in communities' interests. Not a single public voice will be heard. Great job!

It also seems as though the bank will have to ensure that all information relating to developers, private companies and institutional investors remains confidential. Anyone who dares disclose any public information would be subject to prosecution. This is scary stuff. It stinks.

Mr. Speaker, I forgot to mention that, if I have any left, I will be sharing my time with the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Regarding this infrastructure bank's aims, the bill states:

The purpose of the Bank is to invest, and seek to attract investment from private sector investors and institutional investors, in infrastructure projects in Canada or partly in Canada that will generate revenue [profits, in other words] and that will be in the public interest by, for example, supporting conditions that foster economic growth...

Basically, profit comes before Canadians' interests. Nowhere does the government explain where, how, and to what specific ends investment projects will be approved.

We know that highways, toll bridges, and physical infrastructure such as airports and even pipelines will be funded with public money and managed by the private sector.

Who is on this advisory council? Brian Ferguson, CEO of Cenovus, one of the biggest oil companies, as I mentioned earlier.

I do not have much time left, but we have plenty of examples of how private financing can double infrastructure project costs. I am thinking of three big ones. The Auditor General of Ontario found that public-private partnerships cost taxpayers an extra \$8 billion. The Auditor General of Quebec figured out that the province would have saved \$10.4 billion had it built the CHUM with public money instead of turning to a public-private partnership.

● (1710)

I am out of time, but I hope the Liberals will agree to split the omnibus bill and have an independent committee do a thorough study of the infrastructure bank.

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for one intervention and one answer.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member at the very least recognize that many of the individuals or groups that would be investing in the infrastructure bank would be Canadians throughout the country? They would be doing that through, for example, pension funds.

I wonder if my colleague across the way believes that having some of those funds invested in Canada is healthy for our Canadian economy, given that today we see many of those funds leaving the country because we do not have an investment bank such as the one we are proposing. Those funds are financing infrastructure programs outside of Canada. Would it not be good to provide the option to have them here in Canada?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, that is the Liberals' only line of defence and they have no figures to back their claims.

I have figures. The investment bank's eligibility threshold is \$100 million. In my riding, the municipality of Sainte-Barbe needs a new fire station. How are small municipalities like that one going to be able to ask this investment bank to invest in their community to help fund their project?

Some small municipalities want to work on water and sewer projects. That is the case in Elgin, for example. How are those municipalities going to be able to submit any projects? It is impossible. The small communities will never get any help from this investment bank.

What is more, there are going to be tolls and user fees. These extra fees will be monumental. According to the auditors general from British Columbia, Quebec, and Ontario, the private financing costs for infrastructure are twice as much. We have to look at the details. This type of project needs to be studied independently. It should not be buried in an omnibus bill.

● (1715)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Tuesday, May 16, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find it the will of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m. and we could begin private members' hour.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

JOURNALISTIC SOURCES PROTECTION ACT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC) moved that Bill S-231, An Act to amend the Canada Evidence Act and the Criminal Code (protection of journalistic sources), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as a former journalist, it is with sincere emotion that I rise today to speak to the second reading of Bill S-231, which pertains to the protection of journalistic sources.

It is a wonderful story. It gets off to a bad start, but we hope that it will end well. It gets off to a bad start because, just a few months ago, we learned that terrible situations were happening in Quebec, where the police were wiretapping journalists in order to flush out their sources. That is shameful in a democracy.

Senator Claude Carignan from the upper chamber picked up on that and worked quickly, yet in an appropriate and effective manner, to draft Bill S-231, which seeks to protect journalistic sources. This bill was unanimously passed by Canada's upper house. It is therefore a great honour and privilege for me to sponsor this bill, because it is a key component of Canada's democracy that we are going to talk about.

Bill S-231 includes four key points that make it a good bill. First of all, it protects the source and not the journalist. Second, it clearly defines who is considered a journalist, to prevent people from suddenly claiming to be a journalist and committing irrelevant acts.

In addition, moving forward, the only people who can authorize police officers to investigate journalists will be superior court justices and not justices of the peace. Lastly, the bill changes the burden of proof. Police officers will have to prove that their last possible recourse for properly conducting their investigation is to get permission from a judge to investigate a journalist.

The most important distinction in this bill is that it protects the source and not the journalist. Simply put, it is similar to the first laws passed in this place regarding whistle-blowers, those who discover wrongdoings and call journalists to tell them when something fishy is going on.

When I was a journalist, it was crucial for me to be able to speak directly to people who had information and wanted to get it out to others. Anyone who has ever been a journalist knows how important this is. However, sources need to feel that they are protected. If journalists are wiretapped and this allows the police to uncover their sources and then track them, the journalists' sources dry up. That is the worst thing that can happen. Therefore, the bill seeks to protect the source and not the journalist. That is an important distinction.

Second, the bill sets out a clear definition of a journalist. Many people can easily write a blog or anything else in their basement in the evening and call themselves journalists. However, the bill provides a clear and precise definition of a journalist.

In that regard, I would like to point out the remarkable contribution, that has not gone unnoticed, of Senator André Pratte, a career journalist and a former manager, editor-in-chief, and

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distinguished columnist at *La Presse*. It is a major benefit for democracy to have him in the upper chamber.

Senator Pratte moved an amendment. Senator Carignan, with his good will and desire to move things along, agreed, and that is how we came to have a clear definition of a journalist in the bill. Not just anyone is a journalist. Ultimately, the judge decides whether or not the target of a police investigation is a journalist.

Third, going forward, only Superior Court judges will be able to authorize police investigations.

Right now in Quebec, justices of the peace are the ones with the power to authorize investigations. I know it is the same thing in other Canadian jurisdictions, but I will limit my comments to my own personal experience. In the case of the Montreal police service, 98% of such requests were granted. That number was a tad high. Perhaps an investigation, or at the very least further analysis, was required.

That is why, with his usual efficiency and great skill, Senator Carignan suggested that we leave those decisions to Superior Court judges rather than justices of the peace. Without wanting to disparage justices of the peace, such sensitive situations require the attention of an experienced jurist.

● (1720)

Indeed, Superior Court judges have the necessary training to deal with just such circumstances.

The last point is rather tricky. It deals with reversing the burden of proof. In other words, the police officers seeking to investigate a journalist or identify a source are the ones who will have to make an application to a judge and offer supporting arguments; only those that succeed in convincing the judge of the merits of their arguments will see their applications granted. This is a major change to operational procedure. Even with the burden of proof reversed, no one will be able to prevent the police from investigating if they believe they have very good reasons to do so. Nevertheless, they will first have to undertake a rigorous analysis and make a solid argument. Then, they will have to convince a Superior Court judge.

This bill is well put together and well-intentioned. If by chance it passes, journalists will be able to do their work with even more confidence. Thanks to this bill, sources will not dry up or be scared off. It just so happens that I talked to Patrick Lagacé when he was being wiretapped. I got a kick out of saying, "Hi, police officer." When we found out just a few months ago that he was being wiretapped, that struck us all as unacceptable. We have to fix it.

Senator Carignan's bill fixes the problem. It has gone through a Department of Justice analysis, where it was tweaked. It has also been vetted by police services to make sure they can continue to do their work. We have no desire to handicap them in the work they do. We want to give them even more tools to help them do an even better job. That is what Senator Carignan's bill does. This bill is well written and will get the job done.

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Unfortunately, Canada has been at the back of the pack because many countries like ours have laws that protect journalistic sources. That includes Australia, Germany, France, and Great Britain, which have laws about this. Let us hope that a majority of parliamentarians will support this bill so we can go forward.

Editors, executives, and journalists' associations alike enthusiastically applauded Senator Carignan's bill in both English and French. That hardly ever happens. I would like to read some of their comments. "Sources are scared", said Éric Trottier, deputy editor of *La Presse*. "They want us to find safer ways for them to communicate with our journalists." This bill will fix that.

• (1725)

[English]

Other opinions came from Michael Cooke, editor-in-chief of the *Toronto Star*, as well as editor-in-chief of *The Globe and Mail* David Walmsley, who said:

We're here because [confidential sources] are facing enormous threats....

At a Senate committee, Mr. Walmsley pointed out that the *Globe* spent nearly \$1 million in legal fees in 2009 and 2010 to protect the identity of a source whose revelations concluded in good and great articles.

[Translation]

As everyone knows, the entire press praised Senator Carignan's bill, which was passed unanimously by the Senate. Professionals were even called in to amend the bill and make it as relevant as possible. The Department of Justice carefully vetted it and acknowledged it was good piece of legislation.

Among other things, the bill clearly defines the journalistic profession, protects journalistic sources, and ensures that police officers will still be able to do their job. The burden of proof will be reversed, which will only strengthen their authority when they conduct an investigation, especially since Superior Court judges will be the ones authorizing them, when required.

This is an excellent bill. Today is a good day for democracy. It is a good day for freedom of the press. I hope that my colleagues will all agree on this bill.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a Quebecker, I share my colleague's concerns regarding the inappropriate surveillance our media have long been debating. Fortunately, we have had the freedom to debate it. In many countries, people do not have that freedom. I join my colleague and share his concerns regarding the protection of sources and the best way to ensure that journalists can do their jobs and report the facts fully and freely.

The journalism profession is in transition. This issue is certainly worth debating. I am pleased that we can debate it here in this place.

That said, I have a question that my colleague might not like. It is a bit of a paradigm shift for the Conservative Party. The member was not here, so he can be forgiven, but for 10 years, cabinet meetings were held in secret, only a small number of journalists were allowed to ask questions, and scientists were forbidden from communicating with journalists.

Does the member think that this bill is somehow a way to win back the journalistic profession?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, though I find it thoroughly disappointing, I cannot say that I am surprised by just how low the Liberal Party can go on this otherwise fine day for democracy and freedom of the press.

Need I remind the House that the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent used to be a reporter, that the member for Foothills used to be a reporter, that the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles is a magazine editor, of which there are many among us, and that the member for Thornhill is a distinguished journalist who, among other things, witnessed the election of Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1968? I am sorry, but this is too much; I am so utterly disappointed by this clumsy, amateurish, and oh so Liberal display of partisanship.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the comments of my colleague across the way.

One of the things I have witnessed over the years is the significant way in which media have actually evolved. That is one of the things I believe we also need to take into consideration. I can recall when I was first elected—and like the member opposite, I too have served in a provincial legislatures—there was a great deal more media attention, at that point, at the local legislature levels. At least, that is what I found.

I wonder if my colleague across the way has anything he would like to add, in terms of the modernization or the changes we have witnessed. Are there some other things that maybe we should be taking into consideration when we talk about legislation such as the member opposite is proposing today?

• (1730)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. I do appreciate it. The point is that, for sure, this is a very evolving situation. When I was a journalist just eight years ago, one of my last reports was about Facebook. Believe it or not, Facebook was not permitted in the national assembly. It was considered social media, just for the fun of it. It is crazy to see how important it is. Can members believe that politicians did not have the right to have their Facebook page in the national assembly in 2008? That was the reality of the time. It is moving so fast.

Yes, for sure, journalists shall address new issues day after day.

Nothing is perfect, for sure, but I think in that case, we cover so many areas to protect journalists' sources that today, it is correct. Maybe in two years from now, we will have to refresh this piece of legislation; we will welcome that kind of work.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to speak to Bill S-231, an act to amend the Canada Evidence Act and the Criminal Code (protection of journalistic sources).

Private Members' Business

Before I begin my speech, and in light of the little exchange we just heard, I still feel compelled to congratulate the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. On the whole, I believe he and I agree on the issue of the protection of journalistic sources. Regarding the past 10 years, I am sure we will have other opportunities to discuss the issue, as we do when other subjects come up, but I still tend to agree with the member for Gatineau.

That being said, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Claude Carignan, who did truly phenomenal work, for his diligence in this file and for all the work he did on Bill S-231. I think that is worth mentioning.

[*English*]

The overall objective of the bill is laudable, which is to ensure that the protection of journalistic sources is given due consideration whenever they are at issue in Canadian courts. As we all know, this bill was tabled in response to recent events involving the use of investigative tools targeting journalists; in particular, revelations that police in Quebec had obtained warrants to monitor the cellphones of several journalists.

Let me be perfectly clear. Freedom of the press is a fundamental Canadian value, critical to Canadians and to Canadian democracy. I think we can all agree on that. That is why it is enshrined in our Constitution under our freedom of expression rights in section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our government is firmly committed to defending it assiduously.

[*Translation*]

Last week, the Prime Minister himself acknowledged the importance of protecting journalistic sources to Canada's democracy, saying:

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, now in its 35th year, established the freedom of the press as a fundamental freedom. Journalists start conversations, shine light on stories that would otherwise not be told, and give Canadians the facts they need to engage in public debate and shape events around them. A free and open press is crucial to an informed and engaged citizenry, which is at the heart of a healthy democracy.

We can find many examples of the importance of freedom of the press in Canadian society. Just last week, the 68th National Newspaper Awards honoured the best and brightest in the field in Canada.

[*English*]

The awards honoured, for example, reportage on the deadly opioid crisis across Canada, the tragedy of soldiers and veterans who died by suicide after serving in Afghanistan, an exposé of unsavoury practices fuelling the Lower Mainland real estate boom in B.C., the 50 years of mercury leaching in northwestern Ontario, the miscarriage of justice that resulted in a mentally ill Canadian ending up in one of America's most notorious prisons, and the investigation into the death of a four-year-old first nations foster child.

[*Translation*]

These fine examples of journalism provided citizens the information they needed to fully participate in democracy.

There is no doubt that some of them likely used confidential sources.

[*English*]

On that note, Bill S-231 proposes changes to the Canada Evidence Act and the Criminal Code, by creating special regimes to protect confidential journalistic sources. The Canada Evidence Act proposals would create a unique regime applicable any time the media wish to protect a journalistic source. This new regime attempts to codify the common law developed and interpreted through several Supreme Court of Canada cases. The bill effectively elevates journalistic source protection to a class privilege. It would also place the onus on the person who seeks disclosure of the information instead of the person seeking to protect the information, which is currently the case.

• (1735)

[*Translation*]

The Criminal Code proposals address the way in which investigative tools, such as search warrants and production orders can be obtained or executed when they involve a journalist.

Although the purpose of these proposals is to protect journalistic sources, the procedure would apply every time a journalist is the subject of an investigative tool. The bill also proposes a triage procedure that requires the gathered evidence to be sealed and a court review before the information can be disclosed to police.

The bill proposes that only a superior court judge shall authorize the use of an investigative tool on a journalist.

[*English*]

Many of these proposals seem like excellent improvements to the protection of journalistic sources, and our government is currently studying them closely. In doing so, there are several issues that I think we must closely consider.

We must look at how it seeks to codify the robust common law protections in this area. We should also consider that the regime would apply equally even in cases where the journalists themselves are suspected of criminal activity.

Additionally, I have some questions about the bill's provisions that would provide that the new procedures override all other laws in Canada, including those that relate to privacy and national security. We should ask whether override clauses are an appropriate tool here, as they necessarily create conflicts between statutes and can have unintended consequences as a result.

[*Translation*]

As some of my colleagues already know, the protection of journalistic sources afforded by common law and the Constitution are rigorous. For that reason, we should try to ensure that this bill follows common law as much as possible in order to avoid unintended consequences.

Private Members' Business

We must ensure that we do not unintentionally undermine these protections and that changes to the law adequately strengthen the protection of journalistic sources.

As for the protection of journalistic sources in courtrooms, the Supreme Court of Canada, in *Globe and Mail v. Canada* and *R. v. National Post*, applied the criteria test established by Wigmore to determine whether a specific journalistic source should be protected.

The Wigmore test is applied on a case-by-case basis to determine whether a source of confidential information should be protected.

[English]

Under the Wigmore test, the courts will protect the confidential source when the following conditions are met, as I am sure most members know.

First, the communications must have originated in a confidence that they will not be disclosed; second, the element of confidentiality must be essential to the full and satisfactory maintenance of the relationship between the parties; third, the relationship must be one that, in the opinion of the community, ought to be carefully and continuously fostered; and fourth, the injury that would be caused to the relationship by the disclosure of the communications must be greater than the benefit it would provide for the correct disposal of the litigation.

This differs from a traditional class privilege such as solicitor-client privilege, which is a presumed privilege recognized by the courts. In a class privilege, once individuals have established that they are members of the class, the privilege automatically protects against disclosure of certain information, and exceptions are extremely narrow and limited.

[Translation]

The intent of Bill S-231 is to codify the rules that apply to journalists and their confidential sources. However, as members, and especially as members of the government, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that Bill S-231 does so appropriately. In other words, we must ensure that these new rules, once codified, will apply in pertinent cases.

[English]

I would now like to go back to the amendments proposed by Bill S-231, which relate to how investigative tools are issued and executed when they relate to journalists.

This aspect of the bill is most relevant to the circumstances emanating from Quebec that gave rise to the introduction of Bill S-231. Like journalistic source privilege in the courtroom context, the issue of investigative tools targeting journalists has also been reviewed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

In *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. Lessard* and *Canadian Broadcasting Corp. v. New Brunswick*, the court set out a number of factors to be considered any time an investigative tool is sought against a journalist, and these include whether or not the evidence can be obtained through any other means, whether or not the information was already public and whether the execution of the tool can be tailored so as to minimize its impact on the media.

However, the court also stated that factors that may be vital in assessing the reasonableness of one search may be irrelevant in another.

[Translation]

We must bear in mind these words of wisdom while we debate and study this bill, and we must also ask ourselves whether the courts have the flexibility to adequately respond to these pressing issues.

[English]

To conclude, I believe it is important that we look to ensure that journalists and their sources are provided appropriate protection, but we must ensure that any reforms enacted in this area do so in a way that builds on the common law and does not adversely undermine other important societal interests.

• (1740)

[Translation]

To close on a more pragmatic note, in the end, with regard to the protection of sources, the objective of the bill is quite commendable. However, the government continues to study the different amendments and the bill before us today.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the Liberals' obsession with living in the past, we need to remember that, last week, on World Press Freedom Day, Reporters Without Borders reminded us that Canada dropped 14 points in the World Press Freedom Index. I would like to remind members that this happened in the past two years. Those who do the math will figure out that we are coming up on this government's two year anniversary. Before resorting to petty partisanship, the government needs to realize that the status quo is unacceptable for democracy and journalism.

It goes without saying that Bill S-231 is a response to high profile cases, in particular, the surveillance of journalist Patrick Lagacé by the Montreal police. Contrary to what we heard in the government member's speech, the federal government is not safe, here in Ottawa, from these same traps and actions that threaten the freedom of the press and, consequently, our democracy.

Take for example, *Vice* reporter Ben Makuch who is currently in court trying to protect a source within the RCMP. He could go to prison for it.

He is facing prison because the RCMP is trying to obtain information that will not help it at all in its investigation. On the contrary, all the information the RCMP needs is already in the public domain, in articles published by the journalist in question. I think this is a very striking example.

It does not stop there. The response provided by the RCMP and CSIS over the past weeks, months, and even years on the various incidents that have taken place are rather unconvincing. Consider the example of Joël-Denis Bellavance of *La Presse*, who was followed and spied on by the RCMP. I reiterate that the status quo is no longer working, and that is why we are pleased to support this bill. Indeed, we must move this forward.

Although the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent is sponsoring this bill in the House of Commons, I am sure he would agree that it is nice to have a private member's bill, but it is high time that this government introduced something even more robust. Much bigger reforms are needed. I am not criticizing what this bill does; on the contrary, it is a first step in the right direction. However, I think a lot of work remains to be done to bring our legislation in line with the 21st century.

As the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent pointed out, social networks and ubiquitous cellphones have changed how journalists and police officers operate, and are still changing things almost every day. We have a lot of catching up to do if we want a system that works the way we want it to.

People have explained what the bill will do, but I just want to go over that again. In a situation like what happened with the *VICE* reporter, that means reverse onus for protecting sources. This is very important because it does provide a way to ensure public safety if the police can prove, say, that this is the only way it can get information that would save lives. We know that option exists.

I think it is appropriate for the bill to place the onus on the police, not on journalists, who would have to prove that their sources need to be protected. I think this is essential. In addition, warrants are issued by Superior Court judges, not justices of the peace. That is a very important element that strengthens and tightens up the system a lot to make sure that journalistic sources are properly protected.

I am going to read some quotes that I found that illustrate my point. I am not sure if it is against the rules to comment on one's own absence in the House. Unfortunately, I arrived a bit late because I had other commitments. I apologize if I am repeating what my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent said.

I am going to read a few comments, which are quite interesting to me and illustrate the culture that is unfortunately starting to grip journalists and their desire to do their job. Being afraid to do one's job obviously has an adverse effect on the result and, accordingly, democracy.

• (1745)

I will start with a quote by Tom Henheffer from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression. Speaking about the case of the *Vice* journalist, he said:

[*English*]

He said, "Every civil society organization with ties to free expression in the country are supporting him and condemning the fact that the government is violating press freedom in such an aggressive way. We feel this is a serious blight on Canada's international reputation, and a major mistake on behalf of the RCMP."

[*Translation*]

I have another interesting quote, this one from Denis Lessard, parliamentary bureau chief for *La Presse* in Quebec City. He may have since changed positions. I do not always follow what is happening in Quebec City because I have enough on my plate. He was talking about the police surveillance scandal in Montreal and the SQ. He said:

Private Members' Business

I have covered politics for almost 40 years, [I am not going to state my age, but let us just say that we are talking about a seasoned professional] and have often reported on politically sensitive topics. You tell yourself that it is always possible that you are being spied on by police, but you are also convinced that they would never dare go that far. Well, it seems we were wrong.

This illustrates the point I was making to show that a journalist starts to change his attitude toward police work even after 40 years of experience with sensitive topics. Let us just say that it has a dampening effect on the work that is done.

I have another quote, this one from Marie-Maude Denis from Radio-Canada:

I have always been extremely careful with regard to my confidential sources, but of course when 'fighting' against the police you are always outgunned, as they have access to this kind of investigative tool. The future will tell us or maybe we will never know everything they have discovered about me.

Once again, this perfectly illustrates the change in culture. Journalists would indeed like to know, but they remain in the dark. They wonder what information police departments or other national security agencies, such as CSIS, have on them. That is very worrisome.

I will deviate a little from the matter before us, specifically the bill. I just want to make a general comment. Earlier, I said that there is much work to be done. For the NDP, it goes without saying that the reforms are a good example of that. Our position is that Bill C-51 should be rescinded. We heard groups of journalists express concerns about certain provisions on criminalization and terrorist propaganda. These are very important concerns for the journalists covering these stories or those that infiltrate terrorist cells in order to report facts of public interest. Mainly, we are talking about journalists working for smaller media outlets that have neither the financial nor the legal resources that larger organizations have to give their employees greater and more robust legal protection during court proceedings. That is a very important consideration to bear in mind.

I want to end with a problem that we have with the bill and that we hope to fix in committee. We do not agree with the amendment adopted by the Senate regarding the definition of a journalist. After talking to some journalist groups working in the field and on this issue, we believe that the definition is too narrow and could cause problems for bloggers or journalists who work in non-traditional media.

The member for Louis-Saint-Laurent acknowledged it once again in his remarks. Social media and the Internet, among other things, are changing the field of journalism significantly. We therefore believe that judges should be given the discretion to decide whether someone is a journalist and works in the field of journalism. That would give judges enough discretion to ensure the integrity of what the bill is proposing, while also making sure that journalists working in new media or non-traditional media are not unfairly punished.

That is what we are going to propose in committee. That being said, this bill is an excellent step in the right direction. As the public safety critic, I am very pleased to recommend that my colleagues support the bill, just as I intend to do.

Private Members' Business

Of course, I would like to thank Senator Carignan and the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for their efforts. The bill could not have been introduced at a better time, as May 3 was World Press Freedom Day. This is an issue that we should all be concerned about.

• (1750)

As politicians, we have all had our run-ins with journalists, but I believe that our democracy will always be better served by freedom of expression and freedom of the press, and the NDP will join all those who are working toward those goals.

[English]

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to Bill S-231 and speak in support of my colleague, the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. Like the member, I was a journalist prior to this career. I was a print journalist for close to 25 years. In fact, I think I still have some ink in my veins. Once people have that, they never lose it.

There are two things I want to focus on as part of the discussion tonight. I know it has been touched on a bit before, but there are two elements of the bill that are vitally important as we move forward. I like to think that my career as a journalist really helped get me where I am right now, which is representing my constituents of Foothills here in the House of Commons. I talked to a lot of the community members. I knew the issues. I knew who the councillors were, and those types of things, but the fundamental reason why the residents of Foothills elected me in 2014, and again in 2015, was that over the years as a journalist I had earned their respect. I had earned their trust, and I believe I earned their faith. Those are so fundamentally important for a journalist, and they transfer well into being an elected official as well.

That is something we are losing in the journalism industry, that respect factor and trust. Part of that is because in this day and age of social media, alternate facts, fake news, and whatever we want to call these things that are happening right now, people are having a difficult time trusting the media that is out there now.

One of the aspects of the bill that is a great step forward is to define journalism and who a journalist is. We are seeing that the focus of journalism has certainly changed over the 20-plus years I was in the industry. Now it is who can get the information out there first, not necessarily who gets it right. That is really the core issue when it comes to Canadians losing faith in journalism.

That is why we have to take those steps to define what journalism is and who a journalist is. That can be discussed further at committee. Certainly, there are many more media to get that information out there, but Canadians have to have faith in who the journalist is and whether they trust the facts he or she is bringing forward.

The other aspect I wanted to touch on especially was the fact about protecting our sources. Carl Bernstein said:

The lowest form of popular culture—lack of information, misinformation, disinformation, and a contempt for the truth or the reality of most people's lives—has overrun real journalism.

That touches on what I was saying about the lack of trust we have in journalism today. That is something the bill will help to address a great deal.

On protecting sources, in my years as a journalist, one of the big issues I dealt with was a magnesium plant that is in my constituency. It was in the circulation area of our newspaper. I was making phone calls from High River to New Orleans, to Dallas, Texas, and to Los Angeles, California. A lot of this had to do with a company many of us remember from the movie *Erin Brockovich*, Pacific Gas and Electric Company. I was able to track down a lot of corruption that had happened in the building and construction of that operation, which never really became operational. It became a huge white elephant for the Province of Alberta.

I would never have been able to track those things down if my sources did not have faith in me: they knew they would be kept secret. That is such a fundamental part of journalism and the media, but also a fundamental part of our democracy. As journalists, we have to ensure that our sources know they have the faith, trust, and security to come forward with information, whether it is about public spending, about government, about their community, or about misappropriation and misdeeds with businesses and corporations. We have to ensure that sources have that protection.

Many of us in the journalism industry, or even as members of Parliament, were shocked to learn that the Montreal city police and the Quebec provincial police were tapping the phones of journalists to try to track not only their sources but also their movements. Those of us in Canada just did not think something like this would ever happen. However, it has happened, and we have to take steps to ensure it does not happen again.

• (1755)

Take a look at our history. I was inspired to become a journalist because of some of the amazing stories that happened over the years. Take a look at Woodward and Bernstein in Watergate. Look at the Spotlight team at *The Boston Globe*. It shed a light on the Catholic church in Boston. What about the Liberal ad scam? Some of these things may never have been brought to light if we did not have sources who felt safe coming forward.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: It will be the Liberal infrastructure bank soon.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, maybe that will be next.

These were transformational stories that will not only will be remembered for generations, but also forced governments to change how we did things to ensure these things did not happen again. We want to protect our constituents.

Protecting sources is fundamentally important. The journalists and the sources out there are protecting us, shining a light on things that need to be exposed, and we need to ensure they have the opportunity to do that.

We have to give journalists the tools they need to do their job properly. That is another fundamental piece of the bill.

Private Members' Business

Journalists have a very difficult job, but sources and journalists have to understand they are protected, that they can do their job unmolested in the quest for the truth. We have to support them in that quest. This quest that journalists are on takes them to where history is made. I want them to take that journey, to find that quest for the truth unmolested, knowing they are safe and that we as legislators are here to back them up as well.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and provide some comments on what is a very important bill. I look forward to hearing more members express their thoughts on it.

I have had many experiences over the years with journalists. I think it is safe to say that when we think of Canada as the great nation that it is, there are some very important components to the foundation of who we are. We can talk about our elections and democracy. We can talk about how important it is that there is that interplay between our Parliament and our media, this sense of accountability and transparency, and how that is best had through interactions between politicians and the media, but it goes far beyond the issue of politics.

We only need to ask Canadians what is important to them today. One of the things I often make reference to inside this chamber is that in the early 1980s, Pierre Elliott Trudeau brought in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. That has become a part of our Canadian values. We genuinely appreciate the role the media play in our society. I believe our Charter of Rights ensures that we continue to have a free media that feels comfortable reporting on the facts of matters. There are certain tools that the people in the media require in order to do the job that they do.

I want to use as examples some of the things that I have had to go through. They have not always been good reports that I have had with the media, but good or bad, I have always accepted the importance to recognize the independence of the media and what we can do to support that independence. That is why I was glad when we had the mandate letter from the Prime Minister to the minister responsible. In that mandate letter to the Minister of Justice, the Prime Minister tasked her with ensuring that the rights of Canadians are protected and that the guarantees that are set out in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are respected.

The minister herself has recognized that freedom of the press is a fundamental Canadian value stated in the charter. Moreover, on May 3 during question period, our Prime Minister made it very clear that protection of journalistic sources is something our government strongly believes in. Let there be no doubt that this government recognizes and respects the independence of our media.

When I posed the question, I talked about how the media have really changed. Before, the industry tended to be a bit more focused on TV, newspapers, and radio. Those would have been the big three, if I can put it that way. Today, I am not convinced that those are the big three anymore. Because of social media and the Internet, different pressures are being applied to other media outlets. Today, quite honestly, there are some media networks where, if people get that 10-second clip, it will do them well. It can reach many thousands and hundreds of thousands of Canadians. Today, I

recognize to what degree social media is playing a much larger role. Facebook is a great example of that. It is truly amazing. I believe that Canadians, on a per capita basis in the world, are more connected to that social network than the people of any other country in the world.

● (1800)

We are seeing a great deal more advertising on Facebook. If every member in the House is not on Facebook, all of us ought to be in order to communicate our messages, not only to constituents but also to the broader community. YouTube has been utilized in this way. I am not the most computer literate individual, but I recognize that there have been significant changes.

One change I recognized relatively early in the game was blogging. It is important that we factor in many aspects of journalism. It does not take much for individuals to say they are journalists and to start writing stories or blogging on the Internet. There are very real and tangible credentials. There is obviously a great difference between, let us say, CKY or the *Winnipeg Free Press* and John Doe's blog on the Internet. There is a significant difference. We need to recognize that, at least in good part. That is not to take anything away from John Doe. John Doe could have a super fantastic blog and could have literally hundreds or thousands of dedicated followers. It is a way we often reach out to our communities.

We often underestimate some of those community efforts. There are ethnic and community media outlets in Winnipeg. *Pilipino Express*, *Ang Peryodiko*, *Filipino Journal*, and *Artista* are four ethnic community newspapers that have done so well, even with the competition from mainstream media. When I was the immigration critic, I visited Toronto. I met with some Indo-Canadian newspapers and media outlets. I was amazed at how many there are in print and radio, in particular.

We need to look at the bigger media picture and ensure that media remains a very important and protected industry. With respect to this bill, it is the individuals who take the time to become investigative journalists, who will do the background work that is quite often required to uncover things, some of which may be uncomfortable. My colleagues across the way cited a couple of examples. I too could cite a couple of examples, such as the Senatagate issue that occurred just a couple of years ago.

No doubt many examples could be used, whether it is at the national level or provincial level or in other jurisdictions, where there have been outstanding reports and investigative journalism. With the efforts of journalists, we have a better, more educated society. Whether it is government, non-profits, or even private industry, there is a higher sense of accountability because of the independence of journalism. The legislation from the Senate which my friend has sponsored is something on which we need to have a healthy discussion in the chamber, and I look forward to hearing what others have to say.

● (1805)

From my perspective, when we think of that journalist, we have to go beyond stating the obvious, the main stream media. We need to factor in the Internet, the different community newspapers, and radio stations. I felt that was a good thing to contribute to the debate and I look forward to further comments by others.

Private Members' Business

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a fascinating topic. Like many of my colleagues here, I spent a long time as a journalist, but in somewhat more in the tech field than most. I spent nine years as an editor and freelance journalist with an online technology publication, so I was way ahead of the curve. I started writing in 2000, entirely online. We had no print publication. By the end of 2008, we were up to about two million monthly readers on the website. It was called linux.com at the time. The company was sold, without the staff, and that is how I ended up leaving journalism, which is another whole story.

The subject in front of us is protecting sources. I cannot say how important that is to journalism, no matter what an individual is covering, no matter where he or she is. It is a very important topic to discuss. I have not had a chance to read the bill closely, but I look forward to doing that when I have the chance.

Writers have to go out and network. It is really important to know the sources, the companies, and the people who working in the trenches. When they need information, they feel comfortable talking to us and telling us what they know. They use that information to write stories without revealing who it is. This is a really important topic. I thank both the senator and the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for bringing this before us.

When I was writing, one of my favourite things to do was to write satire pieces. Around 2003, the state of California, where my company was based but I was not and had not been there at the time, was going through an entertaining state election. It had removed the governor and some 100-plus candidates were running for governor, including Arnold Schwarzenegger who went on to become the governor of the state of California. I am sure many remember that particular moment in time.

I wrote a satire piece declaring that Linus Torvalds, who was the creator of Linux, was getting into the race. The article was fairly popular in the technical community. I invented a number of quotes for him in this satire piece. What amazed me was a couple of other publications took my clearly marked satire piece, ripped my quotes, and used them as their own in an article about the same thing, making it a real story. It certainly was not the intention, but it made for a good laugh.

Protecting sources has another side to it. Journalists need to have sources. They need to have legitimate research. Real journalism truly requires it. The topic before us is very important and I am certainly enjoying listening to this debate.

I just wanted to get a few quick words on the record.

● (1810)

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that my time is limited, but I want to comment on this bill emanating from the hard-working member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. We appreciate his efforts in getting this bill into this place from the other place.

This bill brings up a number of questions of law. I spent many years practising as a lawyer. The bill engages the charter under subsection 2(b) and under section 8, of course. Subsection 2(b) protects freedom of the press. Section 8 protects all Canadians from

unreasonable search and seizure. It also engages the common law on a number of occasions.

There is something called privilege under the Canada Evidence Act and under common law in Canada. There is a specific privilege, journalistic source privilege, that is engaged from time to time. It is meant to protect journalists and to protect their sources, because without unfettered access to these sources, journalists could not do their jobs. Subsection 2(b) of the charter would therefore be undermined, freedom of the press would be prejudiced, and our democracy would suffer.

I think everyone in this House agrees that a robust and free press is a fundamental pillar of a democratic society. We would be hard pressed to find any member who does not agree with that. That is why this bill is an important one, which the House should give due consideration to, considering all the consequences. It puts it in the proper legal framework as well as in the sense of a social framework.

We have heard many members speak eloquently about how journalism has changed, how media has changed, and how people are getting their news from other sources. I do not disagree with that at all. That is quite apparent.

Something that has not changed, something that is almost immutable, is that journalists, especially investigative journalists, need to have the proper tools to do their jobs. Whether their stories are written in the print media, spoken on the radio or on television, or frankly, are on their own blogs on the Internet or on their social media pages, when journalists rely on sources to get their stories, generally speaking those sources ought to be protected.

I mentioned the common law before. This has been known as the Wigmore test. It has been considered by the Supreme Court. There is a significant threshold that needs to be met.

Journalistic source privilege is assessed on a case-by-case basis, but it is not something that should be taken lightly.

When the House considers this private member's bill, it would serve us well if we gave some consideration to how the law exists now. I think our analysis must be this: does the law need to be improved? Frankly, I am not in a position to come to a conclusion just yet. I appreciate the time to consider this bill.

The Wigmore test, as it is known, and it was determined by the Supreme Court in *R. v. Gruenke*, requires that:

(1) the communications must originate in a confidence that they will not be disclosed; (2) this element of confidentiality must be essential to the full and satisfactory maintenance of the relation between the parties; (3) the relation must be one which in the opinion of the community ought to be sedulously...

That is a great old word that means diligently, deliberately, and consciously.

...fostered;

Fourth is that the public interest served by protecting the identity of the source in the particular case must outweigh the public interest in getting at the truth.

I think we have to remember number four. In essence, journalistic privilege is meant to serve the public interest, and we need to keep that in mind when we consider whether to support this bill.

Adjournment Proceedings

•(1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora will have six minutes remaining in his time when the House next resumes debate on the question.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner's term of office will expire in July 2017. So far, it seems the government has not taken any steps to find a replacement.

When Mary Dawson's term expires, the government has three options: it could extend her term with another short-term extension, it could leave the role vacant, or it could hire a new full-term commissioner. At present, each of these three options, in the way the appointment process works, has problems.

The government could extend her term, but that may create the appearance of a conflict of interest and put her in an awkward position. She may well refuse, since she has been on two extensions and has expressed some interest in moving on. She has mentioned that she has not reapplied. Since her continued employment is determined ultimately by the Prime Minister she is investigating for unethical behaviour, it would be a problem to continue to reappoint her.

If the government leaves the role vacant, not only would it be failing to uphold the Conflict of Interest Act, it would clearly demonstrate that its political interests trump all of its petulant claims to be the most open and transparent government in Canadian history.

If the government appoints a new commissioner while this case remains open, though, the new commissioner will be put into an immediate predicament since he or she will inherit an open investigation into the Prime Minister for his personal conduct and his unethical use of a private aircraft while on his visit to billionaire island. This would also put the Prime Minister into a conflict of interest since he would be deciding who to appoint to continue and complete an investigation into his own conduct.

An ethics commissioner appointed by the Prime Minister is not a wise way to structure an accountability institution. Likewise, allowing a commissioner whose term is ending to reapply or to receive an extension also places him or her into a conflict since the commissioner effectively serves at the pleasure of whomever he or she is supposed to keep accountable.

In light of these two conflicts, last week I asked the Prime Minister whether he would recuse himself from the appointment process for the new commissioner. Like the vast majority of answers

he and his ministers provide, the response was irrelevant, underwhelming, and, frankly, an insult to the intelligence of Canadians. Instead of upholding the integrity of an appointment system by agreeing that he would recuse himself, the Prime Minister instead just veered into a vague and barely related tangent of credit-taking for the Liberals' exercises in identity politics.

This is just another example of the Prime Minister talking down to Canadians through their elected representatives, much like he did yesterday when opposition members asked him over and over again whether he had met with the Ethics Commissioner about the investigation. Every time he stood to deliver the same banal response about being happy to answer her questions. It is actually not relevant whether he is happy to answer her questions.

We want to know whether he has met with the Ethics Commissioner about the investigation, whether he realizes he has created a conflict of interest by appointing her for a temporary term, whether he understands the next commissioner will be in a conflict, potentially, due to the same investigation, and whether he has the personal integrity to recuse himself completely from the appointment process.

Canadians, parliamentarians, and the current commissioner deserve to know whether her replacement can finish the investigation in good conscience and without conflict.

•(1820)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I understand and can appreciate that the member opposite does have some concerns about the appointment process. I would like to assure him that he does not need to be concerned. Let me make a very clear statement. Then I hope the member opposite will understand and appreciate why I say that.

It is important to recognize that we have seen a much higher sense of accountability and transparency on many different fronts, including appointments, with the current Prime Minister. I would compare the appointment processes of the former prime minister, Stephen Harper—and for that matter, many other prime ministers, but in particular Stephen Harper—to that of the current Prime Minister and what this government has been doing with respect to appointments. We have put in place a new appointment process, which supports an open, transparent, and merit-based selection process. Our aim is to identify high-quality candidates who will help to achieve gender parity and truly reflect Canada's diversity. This is something that this government has been progressively and aggressively pursuing since it has taken office.

If we look at the kind of results we have seen under our new process, we see that we have made 122 appointments, of which over 60% are women, 13% are visible minorities, and 10% are indigenous. Canadians can continue to apply for positions on commission boards, crown corporations, agencies, and tribunals across the country as the selection process for more positions continues to be launched.

Adjournment Proceedings

I genuinely believe that what we have seen through this new process is something that Canadians, as a whole, would support. The Conservatives can stand up day after day if they so choose, if they feel that is the direction Canadians want them to take in dealing with this issue. It is up to them, as the official opposition. However, I suspect that if we and the members across the way shared with Canadians some of the results that I have just shared with the House, a vast majority of them would recognize that what we are doing is far better than what we have seen in the years leading up to the member for Papineau becoming Canada's Prime Minister, and that we have a government that understands that we need to get those qualified individuals.

There are some other considerations, and we are not talking about political partisan considerations. One example is with respect to the appointment of senators. We have more senators who are genuinely and truly independent, which is becoming much more recognized throughout the country as this Prime Minister is starting to change the way appointments are taking place.

We see it as a positive, and we would ask the Conservative Party to get on side and support this process.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I think it will come as no surprise to those who listened to that response that I found it somewhat less than assuring. The member just talked about non-partisan appointment processes right after the Liberals appointed a Liberal loyalist and former cabinet minister to be the Commissioner of Official Languages. He said that they have this wonderful new appointment process that is under way, even as people charged with murder are being released from prison for lack of judges to hear their cases. He is telling us that we should be reassured by their appointment process because of all of this wonderful, flowery verbiage to describe their process.

The Prime Minister is under investigation for his own personal ethics, yet he still retains the power to appoint the commissioner who will investigate him. It is absolutely ridiculous. The Ethics Commissioner's appointment is ending; the Commissioner of Lobbying, who is investigating Liberal fundraising, needs to be reappointed; and the Liberals are clipping the power of the parliamentary budget office. It is absurd.

• (1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we will have to save the parliamentary budget officer for another debate.

The Conservative Party is not really on side with a vast majority of Canadians. This is where we disagree.

Liberal members understood that there was a need for change, and this is part of the real change we talked about. We wanted to establish a process for making appointments that was different from what Stephen Harper and other prime ministers did. The results speak for themselves. Of those 122 people, over 60% are women, 13% are visible minorities, and 10% are indigenous people. All of them are highly qualified individuals for those appointments. I will compare that record to Stephen Harper's record any day.

We have a process the Conservative Party should get behind.

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 6, I asked the Minister of Health if the federal government would be giving the provinces the necessary funding to provide people with the services they need.

In recent months, the federal government has pressured the provinces and territories to accept agreements that slash health transfers from 6% to 3%. This measure is clearly a holdover from the Harper government's austerity policies and forces the provinces to absorb the predictable burden of rising health care costs over the next 10 years.

This will have a major impact in Quebec. Whereas 23% of Quebec's health care spending has been covered by federal transfers until now, only 20% of it will be in the future. Researchers say that Quebec is looking at a shortfall of almost \$7.5 billion over 10 years.

The upshot for the people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale, and for all Canadians, is longer wait times and fewer services. Quebec's health minister says that this agreement will have serious consequences well into the future. The cuts will compromise patient care quality and overload our professionals. The provinces have a major problem to solve here.

By putting the budgets of provincial governments at risk, the Liberals are opting for a dangerous short-term strategy that ignores growing challenges in the field, such as our aging population.

In addition, we regret the federal government's decision to resort to something much resembling blackmail to get these agreements signed. In fact, the \$11.5 billion promised by the Liberal government was made available only to the provinces and territories that signed an agreement. There are two particularly troubling points here.

On the one hand, the government is reducing transfers to the provinces and disengaging financially from health care concerns. On the other hand, the lump sum it is offering is conditional on the provinces agreeing to certain priorities and meeting certain performance requirements.

This is a way for the government to increase its power and control over the provinces. We in the NDP condemn the Liberal government's desire to direct health policies without having to assume the costs. Who is better positioned than the provinces themselves to determine their own needs?

I would add that, by forcing these agreements, the Minister of Health set off a real tug-of-war between provincial and federal institutions. For instance, mental health and home care are already priorities for many provinces, such as Quebec, because they are familiar with the needs on the ground and did not need the federal government to tell them to make those things the priority.

In my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, health institutions work in partnership with countless community organizations and have an intimate knowledge of what our constituents need.

Adjournment Proceedings

When I think about mental health community agencies, I think about the Centre psychosocial Richelieu-Yamaska, Contact Richelieu-Yamaska, and Collectif de défense des droits de la Montérégie. When I think about home care, I think about the volunteer centres in Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale, and the Aux P'tits soins cooperative.

All these organizations already do extraordinary work in mental health and home care. The government's initiative is positively absurd. Is the government establishing trusting relationships with the provinces and the territories when it comes to health? I do not think so.

In closing, I would like to know if the government plans to keep interfering in the provincial jurisdiction of health and impose its own will.

• (1830)

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her question and the interest she takes in these issues that are very important not just to her, but to the vast majority of Canadians, if not all Canadians, who care about and take great pride in their public and universal health care system.

Health care spending increases every year in Canada. In 2016, the cost of health care totalled \$228 billion, or 11% of our GDP, our gross domestic product.

The provinces and territories were provided with increased funding for health care through the Canada health transfer. For 2017-18, the government has provided \$36.1 billion to the provinces and territories through the Canada health transfer. This funding will continue to increase year over year according to the GDP growth rate, with a minimum increase of 3% per year. This exceeds the average annual increase in provincial funding for health care in recent years and is greater than the rate of inflation. In the next five years, this will amount to approximately \$200 billion in support for health care.

In reality, the system has a hard time keeping up with the needs of today's families. There is a growing demand for prescription drugs, home care, and mental health care services, among other things.

That is not surprising. As the member mentioned, the population is aging. People are living longer. Chronic diseases are on the rise, and technological advances have an impact on our way of treating and caring for patients.

[*English*]

Through these changing realities, our system remains trapped in its original design of more than half a century ago, with a focus on high-priced institutional and specialist care. Given today's pressures, it makes more sense to shift health care delivery away from institutions into the homes of Canadians in their communities. This is why our government has shown leadership and a real commitment to engaging in a discussion with provinces and territories about how to improve health care in Canada.

In keeping with its mandate commitment to a new health accord, last December our government proposed to invest another \$11.5 billion over 10 years to support targeted actions in home care, mental

health, health innovation, and pharmaceuticals. These are the four areas federal, provincial, and territorial governments agreed to in January 2016 as the priorities for investment. Budget 2017 confirmed this federal offer, which includes \$11 billion over 10 years to provinces and territories to improve home care and mental health services as well as \$544 million over five years to federal and pan-Canadian health organizations to support health innovation and pharmaceutical initiatives. This investment, targeting improvements in home care and mental health, is unprecedented and will make a real difference in the lives of Canadians.

• (1835)

[*Translation*]

Providing funding to the provinces and territories based on their share of the Canadian population is an approach that allows the government to provide similar levels of support to all Canadians. Ultimately, we want to ensure that all Canadians have comparable access to improved home care and mental health care services. That is a fundamental principle that guides the actions of our government.

I will close by saying that the \$11.5 billion in funding over 10 years for mental health and home care services has been generally well received and will make it possible to offer Canadians quality mental health care and home care services.

With regard to respect for jurisdictions, I just want to say one thing, and that is, in the case of Quebec, where I know the member is from, we also followed the principle of asymmetrical federalism, which recognizes Quebec's jurisdiction and its distinctiveness.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, in my riding and elsewhere, the population is aging. The latest statistics show that a quarter of us are 65 or older. Going forward, more and more seniors will need care regardless of GDP growth and inflation. Seniors make a tremendous contribution to the vitality of our communities. They are active in countless associations, they organize events, and they advocate for causes they believe in. They pursue their passions and share their experience with future generations.

The RCMs of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton are proud of their seniors, who enhance their communities immeasurably. That is why I feel that these agreements are a reckless gamble with the future on the part of the Minister of Health and the government. Cutting health transfers jeopardizes the health and independence of our seniors and future generations. It denies them the right to enjoy their retirement under optimum conditions and compromises their active involvement in the community. Since we now have more seniors than young people, I would like to know if the government is aware of how challenging the aging population and the well-being of our seniors will be for Canada's future. Does the government understand how important it is to ensure that health transfers are sizeable enough for the provinces to take care of our seniors' health?

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Mr. Speaker, we are very aware of the challenges that come with the aging population.

Adjournment Proceedings

The 3% increase in Canadian health transfers is greater than inflation, the projected GDP growth, and the annual average increase in provincial health spending. We are also committed to investing \$11.5 billion over the next 10 years specifically in home care and mental health care. With an aging population, home care takes some of the pressure off the health care system.

Canadians expect the government to invest carefully in our health care system in order to achieve measurable results in improved health care.

However, there is no evidence to support the idea that our health care system simply needs more money. Canadians spend more on health per capita than any other country in the world, and many of those countries get better results by investing less money.

[English]

It is not only about spending more money, but rather about investing our dollars strategically to better meet the health needs of Canadians and their families today. We have a strong interest in helping to ensure that new money does not simply inflate an unsustainable system even further, but helps to strengthen health care on the road to long-term stability.

I am out of time, so I will conclude with that.

[Translation]

I thank the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for the question.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today during this adjournment debate to address a very important issue, that is the government's inability to find the money to repay the huge debt that it is accumulating for future generations.

What does this have to do with the subject at hand? We are talking about the sale of airports. Why is the Liberal government interested in selling airports? The answer is clear: the Liberal government's credit card is maxed out and it needs money to pay the interest on its debt, which is increasing every day. Its miracle solution is to sell assets such as Canadian airports.

The Prime Minister recently said that the sale of airports was not part of his plan and that he has other things to worry about. There are concerns. We really have to start worrying when the Prime Minister says that something is not going to happen

I clearly remember all the promises made by the Liberal candidates in all the regions during the election campaign. They promised to run up a tiny deficit. However, less than a month later, we learned that the deficit would be twice as high. Then last December, the Department of Finance, which is not currently being run by the Conservatives, released an analysis of economic forecasting—I can barely say the word “economic” when I am talking about Liberal governments—regarding the government's finances.

That analysis revealed that a return to a balanced budget would not happen until 2050. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister repeated over and over that it would be balanced by 2019.

Unfortunately, now it will be 2050. It is unbelievable. My children and grandchildren will be the ones to pay for this deficit. If the Liberals stay until 2019, it will be our great-great-grandchildren who will be paying for it, because the deficit will go on forever.

Now then, to try to ease the pain and improve the numbers once the election approaches and to please even more Canadians, the magic solution is to sell our airports. However, that is not a sure thing. When we asked the Minister of Transport if he really planned on selling the airports to pay the interest on the debt, he replied that the government was taking care of aviation safety and that passenger rights were his top priority. We did not get an answer. When we asked for a copy of the Credit Suisse study on the privatization of airports, we were told that we could not have it.

For all these reasons, this evening, I am proud to rise here and say that selling our airports is not a good idea. In fact, a Liberal senator agrees with me. I will have the opportunity to talk more about that in my reply to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

• (1840)

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable for his question and for the opportunity to discuss this subject.

[English]

We have not put forward a proposal on the matter of airport asset recycling. However, the member will recall that in November 2016, the minister presented his transportation 2030 strategy, a plan for the future of transportation in Canada for a safer, more secure, greener, more innovative and integrated transportation system that will support trade and economic growth, a cleaner environment, and the well-being of Canada's middle class. The traveller is the core theme of that vision.

Transportation 2030 also includes the ability for Canadian air carriers to have greater access to international investment, allowing for current air carriers to be more competitive, but as importantly, opening the way for new ultra low-cost carriers to develop in Canada. These ultra-low-cost carriers have the potential to provide more choices at lower prices for Canadians and can increase the competition among air carriers in Canada.

To demonstrate our commitment to this, in December 2016 the minister issued exemptions to two companies, Enerjet and Canada Jetlines, to support their efforts to develop ultra-low-cost carriers in Canada while we pursue the necessary legislative amendments. Again, Canadians should benefit with more routes, more options, and lower prices.

[Translation]

Canadians want a strong, integrated, and modern transportation system. That is essential to the continuity of economic growth and competitiveness. Our government will support increased service offerings, better service, lower costs, and new rights for passengers in Canada's middle class.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1845)

[English]

Our government is committed to getting Canadian products to global markets. We recognize that Canada is a trading nation and being competitive on a global scale requires world-class infrastructure. Our government is moving ahead with making smart investments that will grow our economy.

[Translation]

We will make strategic investments in transportation projects that build stronger, more effective transportation corridors to international markets and that help Canadian companies grow and create more jobs for middle-class Canadians.

[English]

I am certain the member would be happy to know that others agree with our approach. The president of the Association of Canadian Port Authorities had this to say about budget 2017:

We welcome the focus this government has placed on our marine ports and national trade corridors and the recognition the critical role these assets play in our global economic competitiveness.

I hope that the member is reassured that all decisions we take moving forward will continue to be in the best interests of Canadian travellers and Canadian gateways.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I did not hear any reference to the privatization of airports, but I would like to remind the parliamentary secretary of what the Minister of Transport's press secretary said on April 20. It comes from an article written by Bloomberg. She said:

[English]

The federal government continues to study the issue and no decision has been made on whether to proceed on the privatization.

[Translation]

It is still up in the air.

I would like to read a quote from an article in the May 8, 2017, edition of *Acadie nouvelle*. In it, Liberal Senator Dennis Dawson is quoted as saying:

Many of these decisions or directions are motivated by the greed of the Finance Department and Finance ministers, eager to do anything that could help the government generate short-term revenue increases...

Another quote comes from Alexandre de Juniac, director general and CEO of the International Air Transport Association. He said:

Let me be completely unambiguous. Canada will regret it if the crown jewels are sold...

The parliamentary secretary has two minutes left to answer this question: does the government, the Department of Transport, intend to sell our airports, the crown jewels? If so, is it to pay the interest on the huge debt the government is in the process of saddling our children with or is it simply a matter of ideology?

[English]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member that the Minister of Transport is committed to building a modern and efficient transportation system for the future, a system that will work effectively to grow Canada's economy and to support middle-class Canadians. A key element of this vision, transportation 2030, is the traveller. The minister wants Canadian travellers to have more competition, lower costs, enhanced passenger rights, and greater connectivity.

[Translation]

Canadians want a strong, integrated, and modern transportation system. That is essential to the continuity of our economic growth and competitiveness.

[English]

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

(The House adjourned at 6:48 p.m.)

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