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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, September 26, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: I have the honour pursuant to Section 38 of the Privacy Act to lay upon the table the annual report of the Privacy Commissioner for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2017.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 31st report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts entitled “Report 3, Preventing Corruption in Immigration and Border Services, of the Spring 2017 Reports of the Auditor General of Canada”.

[*Translation*]

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 38th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding membership of the committees of the House.

Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the 38th report be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

SITUATION IN MYANMAR

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and, if you seek it, I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, during the debate tonight pursuant to Standing Order 52, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1005)

PETITIONS

ABANDONED VESSELS

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise again in the House to present petitions signed by citizens of my riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to act on the pressing problem of abandoned vessels. They call on the government to prevent the oil spill risks, the navigation risks, and the impact on local jobs and the economy.

Tonight I head to a convention of the Union of BC Municipalities. At this convention, 1,800 delegates have a recommendation before them to endorse my private member's bill, Bill C-352. We hope this Parliament will take their advice.

S. O. 52

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members that they are required to present a summary of a petition but not add editorial comment.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from residents of Saanich—Gulf Islands, particularly those concerned with the health of the Saanich Inlet.

The petitioners call on the government to act on what has been in abeyance for some time now, the designation of Saanich Inlet as a district in which the discharge of raw sewage is not allowed. That pertains primarily to recreational vessels.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I wish to present today is from residents throughout Saanich—Gulf Islands as well as a number of residents from the Calgary area.

The petitioners are calling on Parliament to act on electoral reform and to remove the system called first past the post and bring in a system in which the popular vote is reflected in the seat count.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from the folks around the Lafleche and Gravelbourg area in my riding. They request the House of Commons to specifically identify hospice palliative care as a defined medical service covered under the Canada Health Act, so provincial and territorial governments can then provide accessible and available hospice palliative care to all residents in their jurisdictions.

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too rise to present a petition from residents of Provencher, in the Ste. Anne and Richer area. As the member for Cypress Hills—Grassland just reported, they are also asking the House of Commons to specifically identify hospice palliative care as an identified medical service covered under the Canada Health Act.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my petition is a little different from many. In our area and across Ontario where we drive we see this grass, phragmites. It has been identified as Canada's most invasive plant. That happened in 2005, and there has been minimum provincial and federal government action to curb its spread.

Petitioners are asking us to protect our significant wetlands in our provincial and national parks, and other valued areas, and because it grows so strongly in wetlands, that we expedite and streamline the approval of the water-safe herbicide glyphosate to control this plant.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry. I should have indicated before that I have two petitions to present.

This petition is signed by many individuals. They are requesting that the Canadian government condemn the illegal arrest of Canadian citizen Qian Sun, who is 51 years old and a member of the Falun Gong practitioners, and that it call for her immediate and unconditional release.

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.

* * *

● (1010)

REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE

TAXATION

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. opposition House leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wrote to you this morning to seek leave for the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing an important matter requiring urgent consideration pursuant to Standing Order 52.

The Minister of Finance is proposing changes to small business taxes as outlined in his paper “Tax Planning Using Private Corporations”. He is consulting, but the deadline for this consultation process is coming up on Monday, October 2. I believe this issue very much fits the criteria for a need for an emergency debate. It is an issue that is affecting the entire country, from fishers to farmers to small pizza shop owners to mechanics to doctors. People from every corner of the country are being affected. They are worried about these proposed tax changes. This is the issue that is dominating the House of Commons. It is what we have been talking about every day in question period. All of us are receiving thousands of letters, phone calls, and emails. Also, our constituents are approaching us when we are in our ridings to talk about this issue. Therefore, it clearly is something that is affecting the entire country, and all of us, as members of Parliament, are hearing about it.

Second, there has been no opportunity for us, as members of Parliament, to debate or discuss the issue here in the House of Commons. The deadline for the consultation process is October 2, and there has been no supply day given last week or this week so that members of Parliament could discuss it. The government has not put any motion before the House. There is no budget bill before the House. There has been no opportunity for us to discuss this important issue. Frankly, members of Parliament have been absolutely shut out of the consultation process.

The other thing that is important to note is that the government need only put a ways and means motion on the Order Paper. There does not have to be any debate for it to have an effect. That compounds the negative effect of the government shutting out the House of Commons in debating these tax changes, but it can implement them without proper consultation.

Government Orders

All of us have been hearing a lot from our constituents about this issue. We need more than the 35-second question period opportunities to talk and ask the government questions with respect to this issue. Canadians have questions. It is clear the government will not extend the consultation time period. We need to have an opportunity to have an emergency debate on these tax changes and the effects they will have on Canadians right across the country. I ask that you grant us that opportunity.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I thank the hon. opposition House leader for raising the request. However, I do not find that it meets the exigencies of the Standing Order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT

The House resumed from September 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-58, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the amendments to the Access to Information Act and the significant reforms our government is proposing in Bill C-58.

[*Translation*]

Ours is the first government in 34 years to substantially revamp Canada's access to information system, and it is about time. Our existing access to information legislation came into force in 1983.

[*English*]

The word that some have used to describe this legislation is "antiquated". It is hard to disagree with this view when we consider that in 1983 government information was mainly recorded on paper and stored in filing cabinets.

[*Translation*]

Moreover, the federal government has grown over the past 34 years, and the sheer volume of government-related information has grown right along with it. The number of requests to access that information has gone up too.

[*English*]

Since 1983, more than 750,000 access to information requests have been processed, and the number of requests the government receives has grown by an average of 13% annually.

The current access to information system is under considerable strain. The information age has resulted in higher expectations for access to government information. Digitization and the Internet have made information readily available and at our fingertips 24/7. Canadians now expect this level of accessibility from their government as well.

●(1015)

[*Translation*]

Canadians expect an open and transparent government. They expect access to government information so they can engage meaningfully in the demographic process and demand government accountability.

[*English*]

In the access to information, privacy and ethics committee, the one thing we heard over and over again was that the 1983 Access to Information Act regime was not built for our times and is insufficient to meet our needs. That is why we are committed to modernizing the act to make government more open and transparent. This is what we are proposing to do in Bill C-58.

First, the bill would amend the act to create a new part relating to proactive publication. This would entrench in law for this government and future governments the requirement that government organizations proactively publish a broad range of information in a timely manner and without anyone having to make an access to information request. This new part of the act would apply across more than 240 government departments, agencies, and crown corporations. For the first time, the act would also apply to the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices, senators and members of Parliament, institutions that support Parliament, administrative institutions that support the courts, and more than 1,100 judges in the superior courts. This would create an obligation to proactively publish information that is known to be of interest to Canadians. The system would be routinely reviewed so that the information that would be proactively disclosed would remain relevant and of interest to Canadians.

[*Translation*]

This information would be available to all Canadians on the government website, no ATIP request required. Our goal is to continue to expand the type of government information that can be disclosed proactively. This measure is consistent with our view that the government should be open by default.

[*English*]

It reflects the future of access to information in the digital age, and the future is now.

Bill C-58 would put in place a range of measures to ease the strain on the antiquated access to information regime. Specifically, we would invest in tools to make processing information requests more efficient; provide training across government to get a common and consistent interpretation and application of the new rules; allow federal institutions that have the same minister to share the request processing services, for greater efficiency; and develop a new plain-language guide that would provide requesters with clear explanations for exemptions and exclusions.

Government Orders

Government institutions would also have the authority to decline to act on requests that were vague or made in bad faith. We want to make sure that people are using our access to information system properly and that it is not being used to intentionally bog down the government. As an example of the type of requests we are talking about, there are some requesters who ask for millions of pages worth of documents without providing a clear reason for that request. Others submit hundreds or thousands of requests at a single time. Such requests are not in keeping with the purpose of the act, which is to give Canadians access to the information they need to participate in decisions about public policy. At the same time, Bill C-58 would amend the Access to Information Act to provide the Information Commissioner with the oversight of this new authority.

[Translation]

Requesters can file an appeal with the commissioner if an institution or organization refuses to process their requests. The Information Commissioner can then examine the complaint and, if it is justified, she can exercise this new power to order the release of information to resolve the matter.

[English]

At the same time, this legislation would affirm the right of Canadians to make broad and deep information requests that were consistent with the spirit of the act. The bill would also give the Information Commissioner's office more financial resources to do the job.

• (1020)

[Translation]

The Information Commissioner's power to order the release of information is an important step that will strengthen access to information in Canada. It is an innovative proposal that would change the commissioner's role from that of an ombudsperson to that of an authority with the power to order the release of government records.

[English]

Bill C-58 proposes a mandatory review of the Access to Information Act every five years so that it never again becomes outdated. The first review would begin no later than one year after this bill received royal assent.

We can never become complacent when it comes to transparency. By revitalizing access to information, our government would raise the bar once more on openness in government.

[Translation]

With this bill, we will be modernizing our law and the access to information system, which is outdated.

[English]

With this bill, we would modernize our antiquated access to information law and system. We would strengthen the trust between Canadians and their government, and we would reaffirm the principle of openness and transparency as a hallmark of our democratic system. I am proud, as both a parliamentarian and a member of the ethics committee, to support this legislation.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the member that during the 2015 election campaign, we all heard the Liberals say that they would open up the Prime Minister's Office and the ministers' offices to public scrutiny, because many Canadians felt that the Conservative government had gone too far in closing those doors. They also promised to bring in an access to information policy that would give access to materials from those offices.

On what grounds did the Liberals decide to break that promise to include ministers and the Prime Minister in the access to information policy?

Mr. Raj Saini: Madam Speaker, on the contrary, this act, which was first formulated in 1983, has not had an update in almost 34 years. This is the first time a government has had the courage to proactively disclose certain issues within the ministers' offices and the Prime Minister's Office.

As is well known, the issue was studied at committee. This would be the first phase of the act. It would be a new regime being put in place, and we would evaluate, as time went forward, how things worked out. The first time this act would be reviewed would be one year after it received royal assent. After that it would be continually reviewed every five years. We want to make sure that what has happened over the last 34 years does not happen again. This act would be continually reviewed. It would be a living document.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to follow up on the question from my friend from the New Democratic Party about opening up the Prime Minister's Office and the ministers' offices.

I sat with the hon. member on the committee, and we heard testimony after testimony that it was the right thing to do. Even in our report we included that it was the right thing to do. I would like to ask him what changed between when we presented our report and now, when the bill has come forward to the House.

Mr. Raj Saini: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right. We did serve on the same committee. He had a lot of wisdom and a lot of great comments. I actually miss him on the committee. I miss his wit at committee.

A lot of what we would do here is because this would be a new regime. Because this has not been done in the last 34 years, it would take time to make sure that government departments and agencies came to a position where they were proactively disclosing information in an efficient and timely manner.

As I said earlier, this act would receive its first review within one year of receiving royal assent, and every five years there would be a process for further committees to re-evaluate best practices and what is working and what is not working. If the hon. member still serves on the committee, or if he is lucky enough to serve on the committee, I look forward to listening to his comments to improve the act even further.

Government Orders

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member why the government chose not to change a single exception to the rule. There obviously has to be a rule, as he pointed out, openness by default, the principle that Canadians expect the government to be open and transparent, to use the member's words.

If that is the case, after so many years, why has the government not changed a single exception to the rule of disclosure? There is nothing to do with the exclusion of cabinet confidences. There is nothing to do with any of the exceptions to the rule. How can he defend that?

• (1025)

Mr. Raj Saini: Madam Speaker, it is very easy to defend it. This act has not had an update in almost 34 years. This is the first time a government has had the courage to proactively disclose certain things.

I appreciate the hon. member's comments, but I also want to remind him that this act could be reviewed within one year, and it could be reviewed every five years subsequent to that. This would be a living document. Future committee members would have the opportunity to look at best practices to see what was working and what was not working and to make recommendations accordingly.

We want to try to do two things. We want to proactively disclose information, but we also want to create efficiency in the system. The government would put resources there to help departments and agencies make sure that information was received in a timely manner.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, as members know, it is always a pleasure for me to take part in debate here in the House.

Considering that we have little, if any, time to debate certain things that are important in our society, I am always happy to talk about them. I think it is important that I have the opportunity to share my ideas as a member of the opposition. Consider for example everything that is going on with the new legislation on taxes, on which we were never consulted and were not able to participate in discussions. I am especially pleased to talk about Bill C-58 today. I would remind the party opposite that it is always useful to listen to the opposition parties and hear what Canadians have to say about things that matter to them.

That said, today we are talking about an act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. The first thing I noticed when I read the bill is that the changes to the Access to Information Act do not make good, yet again, on the Liberals' election promise to extend the act to ministerial offices and the Prime Minister's Office. This is yet another broken election promise. We have lost count of all the Liberals' broken promises. Again, just for kicks, they introduce a bill that does not reflect their initial promise.

Under the new provision in the legislation, the government can refuse any access to information request if the government finds that the request is vexatious. The government is in the process of hand-picking what it wants to protect. The government is giving itself the

right to choose what information to release and what not to release, making itself unaccountable to Canadians. Having already been in government, we know that there is a fine line. When a government wants to be ultra-transparent and says so loud and clear in front of the cameras and through selfies, but then introduces a bill enabling it to pick and choose what to talk about, then people become bitter. They are bitter that the Liberals are still trying to convince us that they are keeping their promise. Clearly they are not keeping their promises. They either backtrack or leave out key words from their election promises. People are not buying it.

When we look at the bill, we realize that the Liberals are giving themselves the power to refuse access to information requests if they are embarrassing to the government. When we talked about the Prime Minister's trip to visit the Aga Khan they may not have wanted us to do so, but that came out because someone somewhere talked. Perhaps the Liberal Party did not let it out by not releasing this information, but journalists dug it up.

However, for my part, I believe that it is a good thing that the mandate letters are made available. I admit that I like the idea. It shows people that we are able to say where we are headed and which minister does what. It makes it easier to understand the minister's or the department's role. What I personally find more problematic is when we ask for all the mandate letters, the briefing packages for new ministers, the titles and references, which is all good, the briefing notes and everything else. At some point we will no longer be able to ask for anything because the door will be shut.

We in the opposition keep asking questions in the House, but we are not getting any answers.

• (1030)

Imagine how far things will go if this bill is passed. We are in the House, we were democratically elected, and we ask relevant questions on behalf of our constituents. However, the members opposite are giving us only meaningless or hastily conceived answers.

When a government emphatically states that it wants to be transparent and introduces a bill like this, it needs to put words into action. Right now, we are hearing a lot of fine words, and the government has taken some action, but it goes against the Liberals' election promise. As I said a number of times, this is just another one of their broken promises.

We have been talking about Bill C-58 for several days now, and what saddens me is that it is always the same government members who rise to speak to bills. I am not the only one who is saying so. Quebeckers even have their own nickname for these members. When the government rises to defend its bills, it would be nice if more members participated in the debate, not just the same ones all the time.

On this side of the House, we have always been relentless in our efforts to make the government more accountable to Canadians. The key word here is "Canadians". Many of the questions that our constituents are asking remain unanswered. Earlier, we requested a debate on the new tax system, but that request was refused. However, a discussion like that in the House would give us the opportunity to speak on behalf of our constituents.

Government Orders

I hope that the government will be a bit more transparent in that regard and that the Liberals will give us the chance to talk about the tax reform in the House. It is just as important as Bill C-58. People are writing to us about it every day, and I am sure it is the same for the Liberals. We are not the only ones getting those letters. That is impossible since they are addressed to everyone. We see all the names that are on them.

For all of these reasons, I oppose Bill C-58. It is one more broken promise in a string of Liberal promises, and it proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that despite what the Liberals say about wanting to be transparent, there will actually be less and less transparency, because the government gets to pick which subjects it wants to address and refuse those it finds embarrassing. This is an important point for me. Some information is not easy to disclose, particularly if it is security-related, but other information that is just as important deserves to be publicly released, even at the risk of embarrassing the government.

The government says it wants to be transparent, but it is arranging things so that it gets to make all the decisions, saying that it is the best, and just too bad for everyone else, because they will not get the answers they are looking for. That is a real shame.

• (1035)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to be back here debating this bill, and I thank the Conservative member.

However, I disagree with some of the things she was saying. I am extremely proud that our government is truly raising the bar on openness and transparency by revitalizing access to information.

By contrast, according to the Information Commissioner, the Conservatives blocked all access to information requests to ministers' offices. Without authorization, they blocked and delayed responses prepared by public officials. After a decade of being negligent and obstructive, the party opposite is now painting itself as a champion of access to information.

Why did the Conservatives ignore this issue for 10 years?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, I completely disagree with her.

We are talking of 10 years, when all of your other colleagues have said that nothing has been done for 34 years. Therefore, all parties were responsible for failing to act, since the Liberals were also in power during that time.

What we are seeing here today is that your talk of transparency is little more than smoke and mirrors, while you choose to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that she is to address her comments to the Chair and not to members or parliamentary secretaries.

The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

I appreciate the honesty of her speech on transparency, which is something that voters care about and expect. I applaud her for listening to the people who talked to her about it.

However, we must remember that in 2006, the party that she represents had also promised to improve transparency. God knows we talked about it for five years. You were not there. Of course, it is easy to say that you were not there, but what I am trying to ask you is if you—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member that he is to address the Chair and not the member directly.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Madam Speaker, if the member were in government, would she be more transparent than the Conservative government we had for 10 years?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. As an aside, I was there from 2006 to 2011, so I have been in government, and I know what transparency is all about.

We did not make promises that we could not keep. That was always one of our strengths. We said what we would do and did what we said, unlike the Liberal Party, which says a lot of things, but does none of the things it says. I was always very honoured to work for the Conservative Party and for Mr. Harper, who was its leader. Like him or not, when he promised something, he did it, whether people liked it or not.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-58 and the proposed amendments to Canada's Access to Information Act.

To begin, it is important to note that we have thoroughly consulted many individuals to get where we are today, including Canadians at large, parliamentarians, the Information Commissioner, and the Privacy Commissioner as well.

[*Translation*]

Our government is guided by the principle that government information belongs to the people. The Access to Information Act, which received royal assent in 1983, enshrined in law the fact that citizens, both as individuals and as corporations in Canada, have the right to see government information.

[*English*]

This is especially important, as it enables Canadians to participate meaningfully in the democratic process.

[*Translation*]

Providing access to government information makes the government more responsible, because it gives Canadians the information they need to ask informed questions. The legislative updates we are proposing reinforce this original objective and take into account Canadians' expectations with respect to technology, openness, and the availability of information in today's digital age.

Government Orders

[English]

The rise of the Internet since 1983 puts information at the fingertips of most Canadians. People who care about how our government provides services to Canadians are keenly seeking that information. Canadians' information expectations of their government have necessarily changed: faster, easier, better, and more open is what citizens are demanding of us.

[Translation]

Since the act came into effect in 1983, more than 750,000 access to information requests have been processed, and the number of requests received has grown by 13% annually. For instance, more than 65,000 requests were received in 2015-16.

[English]

Self-identification by requesters suggests that 41% of these requests came from business and 35% from the public. Members may be surprised to hear that only nine per cent of the self-identified requests for that year came from the media. Five per cent came from organizations and four per cent came from academia. The source of the remaining six per cent is unknown.

[Translation]

We recognize that although the access to information system is not perfect, overall, it has had a positive impact on government transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, we have an obligation to protect certain information.

[English]

This includes personal information, information about international affairs and defence, and cabinet confidences. Our democratic traditions provide for and protect a safe place for ministers to candidly debate and discuss policy choices, and will continue to do so. Unsurprisingly, the cost of administering the act has gone up, with federal institutions spending more than \$64 million to cover direct costs in 2015-16 alone.

[Translation]

Those costs have gone up by an average of about 8% per year. Those figures do not include costs associated with the research and document review done by employees who handle the material in question. The process can take a long time. It all adds up, but living in an open and democratic society makes it worthwhile. In general, the system has served Canadians well.

• (1045)

[English]

However, we are committed to modernizing the act to make even more progress toward open and transparent government. In May 2016, we issued an interim directive that entrenched the principle of open by default.

[Translation]

That is our guiding principle for making government information available to Canadians because we want to make sure they can consult their government about policies, programs, and services.

The interim directive also eliminated all fees except the \$5 filing fee and instructed officials to release information in more user-friendly formats whenever possible.

[English]

The Government of Canada would continue to collect only the small five-dollar filing fee for each access to information request and would not charge processing fees.

[Translation]

The amendments we are proposing in Bill C-58 will enhance Canadians' access to government information.

For example, this measure will legally require the government to proactively publish a broad range of information on a predictable schedule without the need for ATIP requests.

[English]

It would apply to more than 240 government departments, agencies, and crown corporations, departments and agencies that we all know well, as well as the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices; senators and members of Parliament; institutions that support Parliament; administrative institutions that support the courts, and over 1,100 judges of the Superior Courts. We would also be putting into law the proactive publication of travel and hospitality expenses of ministers and their staff, as well as of senior officials across government; contracts over \$10,000 and all contracts for MPs and senators; grants and contributions over \$25,000; mandate letters and revised mandate letters; briefing packages for new ministers and deputy ministers; lists of briefing notes for the minister or deputy minister, including the titles of these notes and their tracking numbers; and the briefing binders used for question period and parliamentary committee appearances.

[Translation]

Once more government information is available to the public on a predictable schedule, people will have a better understanding of how government works, they will feel prepared and empowered to participate more, and they will have greater confidence in the government.

[English]

That is why, as well as making great strides in proactive publication, we would also develop a new, plain-language guide that would provide requesters with clear explanations of exemptions and exclusions, invest in tools to make processing information requests more efficient, allow federal institutions that have the same minister to share their request-processing services for greater efficiency, and support new legislation with training across government to get common and consistent interpretation and application of the new rules. Government institutions would also be able to decline to act on overbroad, vexatious, or bad-faith requests whose intent is clearly to obstruct the system.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Along with these changes, we will continue to affirm Canadians' right to submit broad and comprehensive information requests that meet the important objective of the act, which is to increase the government's accountability in order to promote an open and democratic society and to allow public debate on the conduct of its institutions.

[English]

In addition, we are taking this a step further. The proposed amendments would change the Information Commissioner's role from that of an ombudsperson to that of an authority with the power to order the release of government records.

[Translation]

These are innovative improvements to our access to information regime that will build trust between citizens and their government.

The amendments also require a review of the act every five years to ensure that it never again becomes outdated.

[English]

The first review would begin no later than one year after the bill receives royal assent. In addition, government institutions would be required, through policy, to regularly review the information being requested under the act.

[Translation]

This measure will help expand the type of information that could become more easily available and will also inform the five-year reviews.

After 34 years, the Access to Information Act is undergoing significant revitalization. These reforms affect the whole of government, including areas never before touched by the legislation.

[English]

I am confident that by working together to strengthen access to information, we will make government more open, transparent, and accountable.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very interesting speech and for the quality of his French. We must take note every time members rise in the House and use both official languages. We want to do so in a positive manner even though it is the day after Franco-Ontarian Day.

We must celebrate the francophonie and bilingualism 365 days a year.

The member is an experienced and senior MP. He knows very well that the bill that was introduced does not meet the expectations of the people who believed the Liberal Party two years ago. He knows very well that groups that spring up every day, those who are most vigilant about transparency and the submission of documents that shed light on the federal administration, are disappointed with the current government. We cannot help but remind members that Mr. Marleau, the former information commissioner, said that this is

one step forward and two steps back and that even the Information Commissioner will have less power.

Finally, my question for the member is very clear.

Is he comfortable with the fact that he was elected in 2015 on the promise that, "We will ensure that access to information applies to the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices, as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and the courts."

Is he aware that this promise from page 26 of his election platform is not being honoured in the bill he is defending today?

● (1050)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his leadership on the francophonie outside Quebec. As a proud Franco-Albertan, I am always happy to use French here in the House.

Contrary to what the hon. member claims, for the first time in 34 years we are going to continue making the Government of Canada more transparent.

For example, the act will now apply to the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices, including minister mandate letters, briefing books for new ministers, titles and tracking numbers for ministers' briefing notes, travel expenses, contracts over \$10,000, and annual reports for all expenses.

For the first time in 34 years, this is a good start. We will continue to make the government more transparent.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have a chance to address my hon. colleague. We used to sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages together, so we got to discuss this file many times. I would like to respond to what he just said, because he is mistaken.

The offices of the Prime Minister and his ministers are going to be subject to proactive disclosure. It is not the case that the Access to Information Act is being extended to cover those institutions, even though that was a Liberal election promise in 2015. Those were actually the words of his Prime Minister himself.

I would like the member to come clean and admit that he has not fulfilled his election promise. Sadly, this is yet another broken promise, and what he just said was not accurate. We are talking about proactive disclosure, not the Access to Information Act. It is not the same thing.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Madam Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work my hon. colleague puts into the official languages file and other files that are important to his riding.

With regard to the Access to Information Act, not only have we listened to Canadians and the experts, but we are taking action by making profound, substantial reforms to the act for the first time in 34 years. We will continue to establish a safe, healthy space for cabinet ministers and the Prime Minister's Office, where policy can be debated in complete confidence, because that is one of the cornerstones of our democracy.

Government Orders

The exclusions and exemptions we are proposing will help protect sensitive information, such as records related to national security, cabinet confidences, and the privacy of Canadians. That is a pillar of our democracy. This is the first major improvement to the act in 34 years. We are proud of what we are doing.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to take part in this debate on the so-called modernization of the Access to Information Act. It is high time that this act was modernized.

I had the opportunity to serve as the chair of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics for two years, from 2012 to 2014. During that time, I learned first-hand of the major changes that need to be made to the Access to Information Act, changes that have been needed for a long time now. I had high expectations of the Liberal government's proposal to modernize this act, something that they promised to do during the election campaign.

That promise was something very different from what I was used to seeing from the Conservative government. In fact, I cannot help but be surprised every time I hear the Conservatives talk about this issue. During the three years that I worked on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, I saw how the Conservatives continually tried to block anything that affected the scope of the Access to Information Act and any attempt to review and improve it in order to bring it up to date with 21st century technologies.

Every time a witness appeared before the committee on these issues, the Conservatives, who held a majority on the committee at that time, constantly blocked any possible progress on this file, particularly when it came to broadening the scope of the law to include the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices. There was no possibility of doing that under the Conservatives. It was non-negotiable. The answer was a resounding no. Today, they are complaining and saying that the government is not going far enough on this issue. I have been rather surprised to hear the points that have been raised over the past few days during the debate on this issue.

I also want to emphasize how important I think it is that Canadian citizens have the right to access information. They must have the right to obtain as much information as possible regarding all levels of government and the decisions they make, the motives behind those decisions, as well as public policy. It goes without saying that anyone who pays taxes, and some people pay a lot, should be able to access any and all information used by our government, since it is government officials, ministers, and people in positions of authority who use public money to keep the country running.

In publicly-traded companies, shareholders demand information and financial statements that are as complete as possible in order to have the facts they need to make decisions. They have access to information because they are shareholders in those companies. The same is true of non-profit organizations that manage donor money. Obviously, those organizations must be open and transparent when they make decisions and spend donor money.

For the same reason, our governments need to be open and transparent, and provide as much information as possible to our constituents, who pay for the services provided. Therefore, it is

essential that our citizens have access to this information. This allows the government to be accountable for its actions, especially when it comes to its expenses, but mainly with regard to its decisions on public policy and the reasons motivating it to choose one course of action over another. To me, this is fundamental, which is why I am very interested in this issue.

Everyone directly or indirectly connected to this had high expectations for the modernization of the Access to Information Act, given the promises of the Liberals during the election campaign. It is almost as if an elephant had given birth to a mouse, if I may use that expression. The expectations were very high, and it is pretty clear now that we are being offered next to nothing and, in some cases, it is just a smokescreen. We are led to believe that this is an improvement but, in fact, it is the status quo that prevails in many cases.

The most disappointing things have been mentioned several times. I will not dwell on them for very long. Obviously, we expected the scope of the Access to Information Act to extend to the offices of the ministers and the Prime Minister, that goes without saying. The ministers make decisions on a daily basis, and Canadians deserve to know what they are based on and what facts justify them.

• (1055)

There is nothing new there. There is proactive disclosure, something that can be done now. The Access to Information Act does not need to be modernized to enable proactive disclosure. It is simply a matter of releasing information.

Obviously, we welcome that and cannot complain about it. People will publish certain hospitality and travel expenses, and some notes that are drafted by government officials for ministers, but we do not essentially have the information to understand and analyze the decisions of our governments, which is highly problematic. We are not asking for access to all the cabinet discussions and to all the positions of the people around the table who arrive at a decision. Simply put, what is being requested is access to the facts, data, and figures that are used in making public policy decisions. This is therefore a great disappointment.

Government Orders

Also, there was no effort to limit what the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices can use as an excuse for denying access to information. Currently, if someone makes a request, the offices can simply say that it is out of the question, that no one has the right to that information, and that it is a confidential document without providing further explanation. The person has no recourse when their request is refused. We have a prime opportunity here to set limits on this exemption so that the Information Commissioner can obtain information and determine for herself whether the documents are truly confidential or whether they are documents that might be subject to the Access to Information Act. If we dropped the ball on this fundamental issue regarding the scope of the legislation, then that is really too bad, because the offices will just continue to refuse access to information requests. There is no oversight by anyone afterward to verify the right to an exemption from the request for access to the information.

I also want to mention our disappointment with what I see as a highly problematic loophole they are creating in the Access to Information Act. They are creating a loophole for departments, not just ministers' offices, but the public service. Departments will have the right not to release information if they deem a request too broad, made in bad faith, or vexatious. Nowhere are these terms defined, and I see that as a big problem.

The government says it wants to broaden the scope of the Access to Information Act to make government more open and transparent, but it is also inventing new reasons to refuse requests. This will result in long-drawn-out procedures, not necessarily in the courts, but beginning with complaints to the Information Commissioner. This will not resolve the Information Commissioner's backlog. She herself has repeatedly told the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics that she is overloaded and does not have the budget to address the many complaints she receives. The government is not doing enough to address that.

The complaints are piling up on the commissioner's desk, especially those about absolutely absurd delays for certain types of information requests, which can take years to be processed. These requests are on the commissioner's desk because a complaint has been made that no good reason was given for the refusal or because the processing times are too long.

Thus, the commissioner is swamped and will have even more complaints with the new excuses being created. The commissioner will have to examine the refusal of departments to answer a question because they claim that a request is too broad. The commissioner will have to determine whether there was cause to reject the request.

In my mind, we are going backwards. Experts are saying that we are going backwards; we may be taking one step forward, but then we are taking two steps back. Thus, we are no further ahead than before the act was modernized. That is one of the major problems that I wanted to mention, in addition to the issue of the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices.

I will close on a positive note as we should give credit where credit is due. We accept the recommendation to give the commissioner the power to order.

●(1100)

This process can be long, time-consuming, and costly for the government and taxpayers, but once it is complete, the commissioner will at least have the right to order that certain documents be published. Unfortunately, we are not talking about cabinet documents—I mentioned my disappointment about that earlier—but at least the commissioner will have the power to issue orders, which is something that has been requested for many years. It was also one of the 32 committee recommendations and one of the 85 recommendations of the commissioner.

Members of the NDP have been fighting for this for many years, well before I held a seat on the committee. The Conservatives always refused to give the commissioner that power, so at least that is a win. The commissioner will have access to documents and be able to order that they be published if she thinks that the refusal was unfounded.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this bill will clearly ensure that over 240 government departments, the Prime Minister's Office, and parliamentary institutions will have to proactively disclose information.

I would like to ask the hon. member why he does not think this will be an improvement for Canadians who want more access to that information.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I did not say that proactive disclosure was not an improvement. I said that we did not need the Access to Information Act to apply it.

In 2017, proactive disclosure can be done on the Internet. It is the simplest way, and it is already being done in some cases. Some departments disclose the summary of access to information requests that they have processed, so it can already be done. Parliamentarians' expenses are also subject to proactive disclosure. My colleagues know as well as I do that some information can be found on an online portal and that all Canadians can access it.

In conclusion, I did not say that this was not an improvement. I said that it was not what the Liberals promised in the election campaign. The Liberals promised to extend the scope of the Access to Information Act to the Prime Minister's Office, and yet, that is absolutely not what has been presented to us. As I said earlier, the proactive disclosure my colleague is talking about is a smokescreen.

●(1105)

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would ask the member to comment on a broader theme. Over and over again, members of the government side have tried to take extraordinary credit for the steps they have taken. In this case, they failed to listen to the experts who testified at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. They failed to fulfill their own campaign promise. They failed to carry out the instructions that the President of the Treasury Board received in his mandate letter.

We heard the President of the Treasury Board's speech on the bill, and he took extraordinary credit for the measures the Liberals had taken, claiming that this would make Canada a world leader in access to information. The experts have broadly panned the bill as a half measure and a broken promise.

Would the member comment on the difference between the Liberals saying that they are going to be open and transparent and actually fulfilling those promises?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. If I remember correctly, he was on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

I used a metaphor earlier involving an elephant giving birth to a mouse. The elephant was pregnant: the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics had made 32 recommendations, the Information Commissioner had repeated her 85 recommendations many times, and then there was the mandate letter of the President of the Treasury Board. All of that seemed to indicate that we were going to have a perfectly healthy baby elephant. Unfortunately, what emerged was a sickly little mouse. Everyone was disappointed, obviously.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill C-58, the long-awaited amendments to the Access to Information and the Privacy Act.

As we have heard from many Liberal members, this is the first time the act has been substantially amended since its initial debut. As has been said by many of us in the environmental law community, Canada does not so much have freedom of information legislation as it has freedom from information legislation.

We had hoped for far more openness, given the promise that was in the Liberal platform. I will just repeat it as a way of context-setting for my presentation:

We will ensure that Access to Information applies to the Prime Minister's and Ministers' Offices, as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and the courts.

To give Liberals their due, let me cover some of the things that I think represent improvements in openness under the new government, and then focus more substantively on the failures and gaps in this legislation.

We do have, on the Treasury Board website, the heralding of access to information that is open by default. I think that is a stretch, but it certainly is a positive step. I want to emphasize that.

This Prime Minister is the first that I know of in our history to have made the mandate letters to ministers public letters. That has already had an impact on other governments. When Premier John Horgan became premier in my home province of British Columbia recently and formed his cabinet, the mandate letters became public. I think that is the first time that has happened at a provincial level, but once it happens federally and once the Prime Minister does it, it was "Where are the mandate letters?"

Government Orders

I am pleased to see in this legislation that mandate letters of a Prime Minister to members of his or her cabinet will, going forward, be legislated requirements for openness. That is a very good thing. It is a good thing to know that briefing packages of ministers will be proactively revealed, that question period binders will be made public, as well as hospitality expenses, contracts over \$10,000, and so on. Those will be proactively disclosed, including expenses from ministers' offices and senators.

There will be a lot more transparency around things that I am going to describe as routine, expenses that are predictable, contracts that are large, and briefing documents that are predictable. It is also important to note that this will apply to other agencies and institutions within the Government of Canada.

Unfortunately, this is not what was promised. What was promised was that access to information legislation would apply to a Prime Minister's Office and to a ministerial office so that, for instance, when an issue arose, a member of the public or the media could ask how that happened and do an access request. That will not be permitted under this legislation. We will not see the opportunity that we thought was going to transpire in this legislation.

Certainly lots of knowledgeable members of what might be called the architecture of privacy and information in this country made recommendations. For instance, Information Commissioner Suzanne Legault recommended that it be up to access to information officials and officers to determine whether emails and memos in and out of the PMO or a minister's office were political or parliamentary in nature, in which case it would be recommended they remain confidential, or would pertain to running a department, in which case they would be accessible through access to information. That recommendation has not made it into this legislation. Perhaps the Liberals are open to seeing amendments to Bill C-58 that would allow the legislation to meet the earlier promise.

I am going to quote from an article by Stephen Maher at iPolitics. He is certainly one of Canada's leading investigative journalists. He certainly has a lot of experience with access to information. He used it very effectively to investigate the robocall scandal, among other things. What he wrote was:

The proactive disclosure of some ministerial documents may be a step backward, because the decisions about what to release and what to redact will not be reviewable by the information commissioner.

In a sense, what looks like a step forward is actually a step backward. Was it an unintentional step backward? We will have to find out at committee how open the Liberals are to amendments on this bill.

One of the things I found very concerning is found at proposed section 6.1, which is that the head of a government institution can, on his or her own initiative, decide to ignore an access to information request for a number of reasons.

Government Orders

Many of those reasons are reasonable. If the request does not meet the requirements set out in the act, for instance, or if the person has already been given access to the record and may access the record by other means, or if the request is for a large number of records and necessitates such a large search that it would unreasonably interfere with the operations of government, it would be reasonable to refuse the request.

• (1110)

However, this one is outrageous: proposed subsection 6.1(1)(d) states that the head of a government institution may on his or her own initiative, and not reviewably, refuse to accept an access to information request if “the request is vexatious”. That is a subjective term. If an institution decides that someone's interest in, for instance, toxic chemicals in their watershed is something the department does not want to share with the public, the institution just has to say it is a vexatious request.

“Vexatious” is far too subjective and far too restrictive a term to be allowed in government legislation. It certainly is a shock to find it in legislation that is supposed to take us to the promise of open and accessible government.

In other areas, those who are knowledgeable are saying that this legislation is not as good as what other provincial governments have already accepted in terms of openness. The information commissioners in the Government of British Columbia and the Government of Alberta have more robust powers than the federal Information Commissioner will have even after this legislation is passed. That is a surprise, because from the Liberal promises during the election campaign, I would have thought that this new access to information legislation would set a new high-water mark to which other jurisdictions could aspire. Unfortunately, the government has fallen short of existing powers that provincial governments already have for their information commissioners.

I am again going to quote someone who is an expert in this area. Vincent Gogolek, who is the executive director of the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, said, “That’s what we have here in British Columbia, and responsible government hasn’t collapsed here.” The Government of British Columbia has been living with a far more robust freedom of information regime, which has not been extended into our federal law with respect to the access to information that we certainly expected to come forward from the government.

How much of this is reviewable by information commissioners? That is an important point. There have been discussions, admittedly, in committee, and recommendations were made that there needs to be some screen to deal with requests that might be seen as vexatious. However, the screen was not supposed to be a subjective unilateral decision by the head of the agency in whose control the information resides. The decision as to whether the information is releasable or not needs to reside with the Information Commissioner or members of that agency. It is up to those officials to decide whether it is vexatious or not.

That failure in this legislation is substantial. I sincerely hope that when the bill gets to committee, the Liberals will be open to amendments. If this legislation stays as it is, there is no question that it will be considered a broken promise, because as much as there

have been steps toward greater openness compared to the previous administration, this legislation falls far short of the Liberals' election promises and compares unfavourably to regimes already found in other provinces.

The model here is a weak model that can be found in other provinces. We find it in Newfoundland and Labrador. We do not find it in British Columbia and Alberta. Exemptions throughout the bill are far too broad. Access to cabinet documents is certainly not something we will see. There are questions as to who would redact information and whether the redactions are acceptable. These will also fall to the agency itself and not, as I understand it, be reviewable by the Information Commissioner.

There have been a lot of concerns on the opposition benches. I wanted to give balance in my presentation today because it occurred to me that in the debate on Bill C-58, the Canadian public watching this debate might be baffled by the assertions being made by Liberal members that this legislation does apply to ministers' offices and to the PMO, while those on the opposition benches think it would not.

Proactive disclosure of some things, like briefing documents, spending, contracts, and so on, is a good thing, but here is the rub: giving that control solely to the agency itself and not allowing it to be reviewable may actually be a step backward, in that it would increase the discretion of those who control information to deny information.

• (1115)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for taking the time to point out that there are a number of very important steps forward in terms of this legislation we are debating, Bill C-58. She is aware that this bill will go to a committee, where concerns she is expressing around powers of the Information Commissioner or issues around who defines vexatious applications will absolutely be discussed and ideas brought forward. Our government does have a record of entertaining and accepting amendments at committees.

I appreciate the balanced nature of her comments, but I take issue with her comments around proactive disclosure, for the reason that currently there is no requirement to proactively disclose briefing documents and the kinds of things we will be regulating here. As a result, if there was anything awkward, it could be pulled off the disclosure list. In fact, we know that the previous government exercised political interference, even with accepted applications that the department had fulfilled. It balked them.

To me, proactive disclosure means that people have to disclose those things. They can be counted on to do it, whether they are awkward or inconvenient or not. It is a big step forward.

Yes, things—

Government Orders

•(1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but there are only five minutes for questions and comments. We have to allow for other questions.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, it is encouraging to hear the parliamentary secretary say, as someone who is within the Liberal government with responsibility in this area, that there will be an openness to amendments. I certainly hope so, and I plead with the members on the other side to consider that this legislation is extremely significant.

My only comment to her direct point is that it is not mutually exclusive to have proactive disclosure of documents and to have access to information requests reviewable by an information commissioner. I am not against the proactive disclosure of this information. What is concerning is that it is the only way in which access to information will now apply to those offices. We were promised more.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her speech, which she delivered with her usual sincerity. It is right to treat these issues with the dignity they deserve.

However, I heard my colleague suggest that in committee, we should try to seek more control over what will or will not be disclosed, so as not to leave it to the discretion of the departments and agencies.

I heard the question from the government member, but I would ask the following question. Even if we can agree that there will be some openness to amendments, what happened with the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage as it was preparing its last report, which was tabled in June, shows that the government is fully capable of rejecting useful amendments and reports out of hand and choosing to stick to the PMO's agenda.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert for his comments on my speech.

It is true that this government has a tendency to go around consulting everybody and then make a decision that runs counter to public opinion, as we saw with the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. That is also what this government did with the environmental assessment process. It held massive consultations, but now it is making bad decisions that contradict the results of those consultations.

I hope that this time, in committee, we will have a chance to make constructive amendments that will improve this legislation.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise today to speak to this bill, a comprehensive set of amendments to the Access to Information Act.

[*Translation*]

It is always with great pleasure that I rise in the House on behalf of the constituents of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital to discuss important amendments to the Access to Information Act.

[*English*]

Bill C-58 would enact a number of the reforms called for on numerous occasions since the act first came into place some 34 years ago. I think we can all agree that the current act is out of touch with the expectations of our citizens in today's digital age. This is hardly surprising when we consider that the act has not been updated significantly since it received royal assent in 1983. That was a time when most government records were on paper. Today, the vast majority of government records are digital, and Canadians increasingly expect to be able to find information online instead of having to request it.

To appreciate the groundbreaking nature of Bill C-58's reforms, it is worth looking at recommendations that have been made over the years to improve the act. In 1987, 30 years ago, the first review of the act by a parliamentary committee identified inconsistencies in its administration across government and recommended clearer Treasury Board policy direction. The committee also made two noteworthy recommendations: first, that the act be extended to ministers' offices, administrative institutions supporting Parliament and the courts, and crown corporations; and second, that the Information Commissioner be granted order-making powers for the disclosure of records. In the end, the government adopted some administrative proposals, but neither of these two key recommendations. The bill before us today would finally put these two reforms into law, some three decades after they were first proposed.

In 1990, the Information Commissioner, academics, and parliamentarians requested additional improvements. Let me highlight two of interest. First, there was a recommendation to extend the act to all government bodies, and second was a recommendation to grant the Information Commissioner order-making powers for the disclosure of records. Neither of these recommendations was implemented. Instead, over the next decade the government made several targeted amendments to the act. For example, in 1992, it enabled requesters with sensory disabilities to obtain records in alternative formats. In 1999, the act was amended to make it a criminal offence to intentionally deny a right of access under the act by destroying, altering, hiding, or falsifying a record, or directing someone else to do so.

Government Orders

In 2001, it added more national security protections. Around that same time, the access to information review task force commissioned numerous research papers and consulted Canadians, civil society groups, and experts across Canada. The task force's 2002 report, "Access to information: making it work for Canadians", made 140 recommendations for improving access to information at the federal level. These included extending the act to the House of Commons, Parliament, and the Senate; establishing broader access to government records, including those in ministers' offices and those produced for government by contractors; permitting institutions to not process frivolous and vexatious requests; granting the Information Commissioner order-making powers; providing more training and resources to federal institutions; and strengthening performance reporting. While these proposals were not acted upon at that time, I am pleased to report that the bill before us today addresses many of these important recommendations. I will highlight a few in just a moment.

Returning to the history of reform of the act, in 2006 the Federal Accountability Act expanded coverage of the Access to Information Act to officers of Parliament, crown corporations, and institutions created under federal statutes. This increased the number of institutions to which the act applied to about 240. The 2006 amendments also established a duty to assist, meaning an obligation on institutions to make every reasonable effort to assist requesters and to provide a timely and complete response to a request.

● (1125)

Finally, in 2009, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics undertook a review of the act. The committee consulted with civil society, media, and legal organizations, as well as provincial information and privacy commissioners. Its report made a number of suggestions, including granting the Information Commissioner the power to order institutions to search, retrieve, and reproduce records; granting the Information Commissioner a public education mandate; requiring a review of the act every five years; and extending the act to cover the general administration of Parliament and the courts. Once again, regrettably, these recommendations were not implemented at that time.

The bill before us today takes on the challenge of addressing issues that governments have been avoiding for over 30 years, and while there is legitimate debate about ensuring that we get these changes right, our government has the conviction to welcome debate and to listen.

Our bill would break new ground by giving the Information Commissioner the power to order government information to be released. That is very significant. For the first, the act would also include ministers' offices, the Prime Minister's Office, officers of Parliament, and institutions that support the courts, all through a legislated system of proactive publication.

At the same time as we are breaking new ground by providing the Information Commissioner the power to order that government information be released, and legislating a system of proactive publication across government, we are also developing a new plain-language guide that would provide requesters with clear explanations of exemptions and exclusions. We are investing in tools to make

processing information requests more efficient, allowing federal institutions that have the same minister to share their request processing services for greater efficiency, and supporting the new legislation with training across government to get common and consistent application of the changes we are introducing.

Another important change would give government institutions the ability to decline to act on overly broad or bad-faith requests that simply gum up the system. This would be subject to the oversight of the Information Commissioner. If a department decides to decline to act on a request, the requester would have the right to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner, and the commissioner could use the new order-making power to resolve the issue. Finally, Bill C-58 would entrench a requirement that the Access to Information Act be reviewed every five years.

This is the first government to bring forward legislation to enact the important improvements that have been proposed at one time or another over the last 30 years. That is because we believe that access to information is an important pillar of a democratic system of government. It allows citizens to request records about the decisions, operations, administration, and performance of government, subject, of course, to legitimate and very rare exceptions. In short, it allows Canadians to know and understand what their government is doing, and when people have timely access to relevant information, they are better able to participate in the democratic process.

I am proud to be part of a government that has the courage to act on these principles, and I encourage my hon. colleagues to join me in supporting this bill, a bill that would dramatically improve the Access to Information Act and thus strengthen our democracy.

● (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my turn to direct a question to my Liberal colleague sitting on this side of the House.

My question primarily has to do with the Liberal Party's new excuse about access to information. One of the last points in my colleague's speech deals with it. He mentioned a new excuse that the government can use to decline requests for information if the requests are overly broad or made in bad faith. I wonder whether my colleague could provide the House with some clarification on the issue in light of an upcoming vote on this bill at second reading.

Could my colleague clarify what the government means by "bad faith" and "overly broad"? Does he have a definition that could add to the debate? That is one of the issues with the bill right now.

Government Orders

Mr. Dan Vandal: Madam Speaker, clearly, access to information requests to the federal, municipal or provincial government are sometimes simply not serious. Each level of government has a right to decline them. However, the requester always has the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner. That is usual practice in access to information laws at all levels of government. It is important that requesters have a right to appeal if their requests are denied.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the many fine words by my colleague across the way.

The proposed legislation we are talking about is important because we would ultimately see more accountability and transparency as a result. As members noted, it has been more than three decades since changes were made to the existing legislation.

Could my colleague provide some additional thoughts on why it is so important and long overdue that we modernize this legislation?

• (1135)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is bang on. This act has not been significantly amended for more than 30 years. Thirty years ago governments were keeping records on paper. Thirty years ago was before the computer age. It is quite clear that although other governments have promised to make changes, none have delivered.

Among the proposed improvements to the act today, proactive disclosure would be implemented in more than 240 government departments, the Prime Minister's Office, cabinet ministers, institutions of Parliament, and the courts. It is clear in my mind that this is a significant enhancement and improvement in Canadians' access to information from the federal government.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the need to modernize the existing legislation. I wonder if he would agree with me that if the exceptions to the rule of disclosure swallow the rule of disclosure, then we ought to change those exceptions.

After 34 years of cabinet confidences being excluded entirely from the act, with many of the exceptions being very broad and never altered, would it not be timely to actually do something about those exceptions to the rule? However, instead, the current government simply added a new loophole to allow departments to refuse to process a request if they deem it to be overly broad. In other words, rather than subtracting exceptions, the Liberals added exceptions. Does that sound like a sensible reform to modernize this act?

Mr. Dan Vandal: Madam Speaker, I have worked in municipal government for 15 years, and the reality is that some of the access to information requests we received were not reasonable. If we were to act on every single one of them, it would simply not be in the best interest of government and not be good use of time by the administrators who are doing this. That said, it is important to note that there is an appeal process to the Information Commissioner on any request that gets denied. There is an avenue of appeal. If the commissioner decides that the denial is not reasonable, then the applicant would get the information requested.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in turn to talk about this important bill that was supposed to be the centrepiece of the Liberals' election platform in 2015. Since the start of the debate, all kinds of things have been said about Bill C-58 that do not necessarily reflect reality. I feel that it would be in the interests of my Liberal colleagues to properly inform themselves about the content of the bill before them.

For example, we have just heard about the appeal process for requests for access to documents from ministers' offices and the Prime Minister's Office. Unfortunately, with regards to certain kinds of information, people will no longer be able to appeal to the Information Commissioner. There is a little problem there, I feel.

It has also been mentioned, on a number of occasions, that the bill would give Canadians better access to information from ministers' offices. However, the ministers retain an enormous amount of power in determining what can and cannot be disclosed. It is already a little vexatious to say that ministers' offices do not want to waste their time replying to all kinds of information requests from Canadians. It is absolutely unbelievable to hear such things in this place. We are being told that Canadians ask too many questions and so decisions have to be made as to which requests are going to be processed and which are not. That is more or less what I am hearing from my colleague, and I must say I am a little surprised.

We have to take the time to study Bill C-58 properly. At the outset, it was supposed to be key among the Liberal Party's election commitments. Let me remind them of that commitment; it appeared in the chapter entitled, "Open and Transparent Government":

We will ensure that Access to Information applies to the Prime Minister's and Ministers' Offices, as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and the courts.

It is the promise that got the Liberals elected. It is not the first time that the Liberals have done this. It is not the first time that we have been told that something is going to happen during this government's term and that promises have not been kept. This is one example.

We all remember the promise to run small \$10-billion deficits, supposedly in order to invest in Canadian infrastructure and stimulate the economy. We were told that we had to take advantage of low interest rates in order to invest. Two years later, the result is that \$25 billion, not \$10 billion, has been invested in infrastructure. Moreover, we are still waiting for a number of infrastructure announcements because it would seem that the money ended up having gone to various government programs, instead. In other words, they have been feeding the beast rather than investing in regional infrastructure, which would have stimulated the economy.

The Liberals are just riding this wave of economic recovery that has been sweeping over North America and that started under the previous government. That government knew how to manage the public purse in a reasonable manner, and the Liberals look good today as a result. However, it will not be the case in two years, 10 years, or any number of years, when our children and grandchildren will have to pay off this huge deficit that the Liberals are going to leave us with. That is another unkept promise.

Government Orders

In addition, the promise to cut corporate taxes had been clearly set out in the Liberal platform, but we no longer hear about it. Then, there is the promise of electoral reform, one that the Prime Minister personally committed to fulfilling. I remember attending the throne speech for the first time as an MP, over in the Senate, and hearing words written by the Prime Minister's Office saying that the election that had just taken place would be the last to use the voting system that we have always known.

When the Liberals realized that fulfilling that promise would mean shooting themselves in the foot, and that it would hurt them more than the opposition parties, they backed off. This means that the Liberals were elected under false pretences. Promises made to Canadians must be kept. That is what Canadians voted for.

• (1140)

Unfortunately, we have yet another example today with Bill C-58. The Liberals were elected on false promises of transparency and openness. We actually see that Bill C-58 will instead better protect information from ministers' offices and the Prime Minister's Office.

Let us look at a concrete example of the type of information that the government may want to protect. We now have before us, in the House, a tax reform proposal that will affect each and every Canadian, small and medium-sized business, and farmer in Canada. They will all face tax increases, because the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister, who chose to protect themselves from those changes, have not, or may not have, studied the effects of the changes on farmers and small businesses. Perhaps they did not want to.

I have no way of knowing if they considered the impact. My sense is that they did not because, logically, nobody would do things like that without taking a close look at the impact. My point is that we will never know because Bill C-58 will not make the briefing notes from ministers' offices and the PMO available to us. We will not have access to them, so we will never know what the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food said to the Minister of Finance when the latter made up his mind to propose a tax reform last June.

Was the Minister of Finance made aware of the impact of his tax reform on agriculture? Did the Minister of Finance ask his Agriculture and Agri-Food colleague how his proposed changes would affect farm families across Canada?

Unfortunately, I do not know the answer to that because I do not have access to the Minister of Finance's briefing book. If I wanted, I could try getting access to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's briefing book. I could ask him if he was consulted and if he commented on capital gains taxation for farmers' family members or if he offered up any proposals about taxation of dividends paid to family members and passive income.

Did the Minister of Agriculture himself consult? Will his briefing book reflect that, following the process, he attempted to influence the Minister of Finance's decision by pointing out to him the repercussions that these changes would have? What did the Minister of Finance take away from the consultations that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food may have had?

We are speaking in "maybes" and "ifs". We are living in anticipation. For the past two weeks, all of my colleagues and I have

been getting letters every day from our constituents, farmers, agricultural associations, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, and the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec. They are calling on us to ask the government why it would target them in such a way, and that is what we are doing. We have been asking the question every day for a week. We asked the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food a question in writing so that he may provide us with more information. He could decide not to give us that information under Bill C-58. That is the problem with Bill C-58.

Do the Minister of Agriculture and the Prime Minister have any reason not to provide that information? The information belongs to them, but they got elected on a promise to provide information. That is the problem. The Liberals asked Canadians to trust them and promised to give Canadians information. At the first opportunity to show Canadians that the government is open and transparent, it is being closed and opaque.

• (1145)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is fascinating to see how my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable, who often likes to remind us that he was not part of the previous government, manages to talk about access to information while talking about all manner of things. He did still manage to give some concrete examples of how the people we represent, including my constituents in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot and Canadians everywhere, are directly affected by this lack of access to information, and the fact that the Liberals have clearly broken a promise.

Essentially, I am asking my colleague whether it is important to make sure our constituents understand that the openness and transparency the Liberal government is trumpeting means nothing in the absence of concrete measures, when it confuses proactive disclosure and access to information, and when it does not give sufficient resources to the Information Commissioner. When I talk about insufficient resources, I do not know if my colleague understands what I am talking about.

The people we represent need this information to confirm that the fair and transparent government that the Liberals keep bragging about is not just empty rhetoric.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I can tell the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot that I hear a lot of things about tax reform from constituents in her riding.

She is from an agricultural riding, and she knows very well all the impacts this reform will have on the farmers in her riding. Sadly, as it stands, Bill C-58 will not get us all the answers from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food that would allow my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot to respond to her constituents.

That is the problem right there. They make promises, they crow, they use big words like “proactive disclosure”. That may have a nice ring to it, but “proactive” means that they can decide what information to give. When we want information, it is called vexatious. It is true that it may be vexing for a government to have to respond to opposition requests for information, but these requests for information come to us from Canadians.

• (1150)

[English]

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to recognize the wonderful speech of my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable. He touched on a lot of very good points.

I want to reflect on the presentation of the member for Saint Boniface—Saint Vital. He said that the government did not want to respond to access to information requests because it was not in the government's best interests—not Canadians' best interests, but the government's best interests. That is the problem with the Liberal government. The Liberals think they are above accountability. They keep ramming things through the House. They do not want to be accountable. They do not want to be responsible for their actions. Now they are trying to push this very repressive tax attack on small businesses and farmers.

Could my colleague comment on that a little more?

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Provencher explained it so well in his comment.

Indeed, it is unbelievable to say one thing and to do the complete opposite, and yet, that is exactly what my colleagues on the other side of the House have been doing since the start of the debate. They probably did not have access to the right briefing book because I think even the backbenchers on the government side do not have access to the briefing book that gives real examples of the effects of the changes proposed in Bill C-58.

Perhaps it is vexatious for cabinet members not to give information to members of the Liberal caucus.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will begin by reminding colleagues in the House and all of those watching at home that the hallmark of the Liberal government is broken promises.

To the litany of broken Liberal promises on tax cuts and government spending, electoral reform, revenue-neutral carbon pricing, indigenous matters, restoration of home mail delivery, United Nations peacekeeping, and on open and transparent government, to all of those broken promises we now add the broken Liberal promise on reform to the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act.

Bill C-58 is a hefty document. It is 53 pages of amendments to the existing act, definition sections and subsections, terminological changes, and designated duties and exceptions. The President of the Treasury Board tabled a truly weighty bundle of bureaucratese, but it is as light as a feather in terms of undelivered promised content.

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To be fair—we in the official opposition do not abuse the meaning of this word, as the Liberals so blatantly do when they recite their speaking points about tax fairness—Bill C-58 does give the Information Commissioner the power to order government departments to release information, but it prevents the commissioner from looking at documents if the government claims they contain cabinet confidences. That represents, in the view of all the experts, the deepest black hole in the ATI system.

When the ethics committee completed its study of this issue last year, chaired by the Conservative member for Red Deer—Lacombe, it made a number of unanimous recommendations in line with recommendations suggested by the Information Commissioner. The ethics committee—Liberal, Conservative, and NDP members—unanimously recommended that legitimate cabinet confidence should be protected. However, at the same time the committee said that much content that is too often shielded on cabinet confidence justifications should be accessible.

Recommendation 23 says:

That the mandatory exemption for Cabinet confidences would not apply to: purely factual or background information; information in a record of decision made by Cabinet or any of its committees on an appeal under an act; where consent is obtained to disclose the information; and information in a record that has been in existence for an appropriate period of time as determined by the government and that this period of time be less than the current 20 years.

All of that advice is ignored in this Liberal bill.

Bill C-58 also falls short on another important recommendation made by the ethics committee, and that involves the matter of a general public interest override. The committee's recommendation stated:

That in the first phase of the reform of the Access to Information Act, the Act be amended to include a general public interest override, applicable to all non-mandatory exemptions, with a requirement to consider the following, non-exhaustive list of factors: Open Government objectives; environmental, health or public safety implications; whether the information reveals human rights abuses or would safeguard the right to life, liberty or security of the person.

That recommendation is also ignored by the Liberals and is not included in Bill C-58.

The Liberals are making much of proactive disclosure provisions in the Access to Information Act provisions. These provisions will require the Senate, the House of Commons, parliamentary entities, ministers' offices, including the PMO, government institutions, and institutions that support superior courts to proactively disclose specific categories of information, such as mandate letters, travel expenses, contracts, documentation on the training of new ministers—and there has perhaps been a deficit in that area with the government—development notes for question period, and boilerplate backrounders for appearances before parliamentary committees.

That is actually misleading, the so-called opening of ministerial offices to the Access to Information Act.

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● (1155)

We remember that the Liberal campaign promise was to ensure that access to information applies to the Prime Minister's Office and the ministers' offices as well as administrative institutions that support Parliament and its courts. The proactive disclosure provisions in Bill C-58 do not come anywhere close to fulfilling that promise.

The BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association has dismissed the so-called proactive provisions as a bizarre sleight of hand, which seems intended to give the false impression of an election promise kept. Compounding the broken promise are the conditions to refuse requests when it comes to requests for information that the Liberals themselves may rule are frivolous or vexatious. Many jurisdictions have provisions to prevent frivolous or vexatious abuses of access to information laws, but that power resides with the Information Commission, not with a minister or department that is the subject of that request.

Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch offered a measured, if critical, assessment of Bill C-58 in saying that the bill proposes good amendments, by requiring a more proactive publication of some information, by giving the Information Commissioner the power to order the publication of some information, but it “does nothing” to fill the huge gaps in the act, as promised by the Liberals.

Stéphane Giroux, president of la Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, offered the federation's assessment of Bill C-58 with droll irony. He said that the most interesting fact for them was to have access to ministers' office documents. However, he concludes it was a false alarm, too good to be true.

A former information commissioner, Robert Marleau, lamented the fact that under Bill C-58, there is no one in government departments to review what they choose not to publish. He said this is contrary to the principle of the act. It puts the commissioner completely out of the loop. If people requested briefing notes previously and parts had been blacked out, they had someone to appeal to. This would be no longer the case, and they cannot even ask in court. Monsieur Marleau concluded that it is one step forward, two steps back.

Members will be forgiven if they have lost track of the number of Liberal promises broken, not across the entire Liberal policy spectrum but here in Bill C-58 alone. They may have noticed recently that the Liberals are somewhat sensitive to discussion of the emptiness of their virtue signalling in policy pronouncements. I am sure that this is a phrase that was coined only in the past few years, but it could well have been custom designed for the current Liberal government. Virtue signalling has become a shorthand characterization for the spouting of superficial, platitudinous, supposedly high-minded, morally correct commitments with little intention of fulfilling or living up to these commitments. I am sure members will agree that characterization applies almost top to bottom with the Liberals' 2015 campaign promises. Much was promised, as I detailed in my opening remarks, with regard to tax cuts and government spending, electoral reform, revenue-neutral carbon pricing, indigenous matters, restoration of home mail delivery, United Nations peacekeeping, and open and transparent government; but precious

little has been delivered. There have been so many promises blithely broken.

Bill C-58 is a perfect example of virtue signalling in the promises of great reform, transparency, and openness in Canadians' access to information. The reality is, as has been said so often in this debate on Bill C-58, one step forward and several steps back.

● (1200)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the remarks of my colleague, who was a member of the previous government. That government actually gave political instructions to ministerial staff to block or delay responses to freedom of information requests that had already been accepted and fulfilled by the access to information secretariat staff. The moral high ground he seems to be taking in his speech is a little curious, given that.

I understand that he also has some measured comments about our bill. I would like to address the comments about frivolous and vexatious applications. First, it is important that our system works for everyone. Second, requests are increasing by 13% a year. Third, there are some requests that gum up the system and are not really intended to secure information.

As the member fairly pointed out, we know that the commissioner, the committee, eight provinces, and many countries have provisions for frivolous and vexatious requests. He criticized the fact that these decisions to accept or not could be made by the government. In reality, people who have their request denied on this basis will still be able to complain to the Information Commissioner, who has order-making powers.

Does the member think it is better to not do this and have an inefficient system, or is it better to actually remove some of these requests that gum up the system?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, two years of Liberal government should put in the past the schoolyard practices of pointing elsewhere when criticism is presented to the litany of broken promises that it is accumulating.

With regard to frivolous and vexatious questions, I agree that there is often occasion for a good number of such frivolous and vexatious requests for information. I found that in my time in government as a minister. It does represent a continuing problem. The various information authorities across the country have pointed out that in fact Bill C-58 does not have that defined right of appeal to the Information Commissioner. The appeal is not formally implanted in this legislation, and it appears that the word of the minister or the individual department will be considered as final. I am sure this will be brought up in review at the one-year point, although I hope that in committee an amendment will be made to provide for a formalized authority for appeals directly.

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● (1205)

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague referred to the bill as another example of broken Liberal promises.

Does he agree that it is also a bill that could be termed as a bill of missed opportunities? For example, in the frivolous and vexatious requests debate that just occurred, in the province of British Columbia, there is a very miniscule 1% type of number for those requests that are deemed frivolous and vexatious. Unlike in this bill, they go straight to the commissioner for a determination. Imagine letting the government decide whether it likes a particular request.

Would it not be better to have the commissioner make that decision and apply mediation to get rid of those totally illegitimate requests that so infrequently occur but still do from time to time? Would that not be an example of an opportunity missed in this bill?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend speaks to the matters of information in Bill C-58, the considerations included and not included, with the authority of his personal history. Yes, that is exactly the suggestion that has been made, not only by my hon. friend but by experts across the country that, in fact, the appeal process should be directly to the Information Commissioner who, with the authority of the position, would make a decision one way or the other.

It is true that the statistics do not show great continuing volume of frivolous and vexatious questions. However, I can say that there are times, as in our previous government, when certain interest groups will deluge certain ministries with what can only be considered frivolous and vexatious requests.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the government to speak to our efforts to strengthen our access to information regime.

Our government recognizes the importance of a solid framework for access to information. We promised to provide a modern access to information regime because we are determined to preserve and strengthen the democratic principles of openness and transparency. We recognize that Canadians cannot meaningfully participate in democracy without having the information they need. In fact, we believe that the information that Canadians have paid for belongs to them. They absolutely have the right to have access to it.

Bill C-58, a detailed set of amendments to the Access to Information Act, was designed to give Canadians the openness and accountability they expect. Furthermore, it will enhance transparency, foster greater public participation in governance, and support the Government of Canada's commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

Canada's access to information legislation has not changed a great deal since 1983, but our world has changed a great deal since then. The proliferation of personal technology like smart phones has transformed many aspects of our lives. We recognize that technology in all its forms is changing how citizens interact with their government in powerful ways. This change is happening around the world and certainly here in Canada.

Technology is empowering citizens to act on their expectations that a government be honest, open, and sincere in its efforts to serve the public interest. Canadians are demanding greater openness from their government. They are calling for greater participation in the government's decision-making process. They are seeking to make their government more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to its citizens. That is why, in 2016, the President of the Treasury Board issued the interim directive on the administration of the Access to Information Act. Under this directive, federal employees are required to waive all access to information fees, apart from the \$5 application fee.

Wherever possible, they are also required to provide the information to requesters in formats that are modern and easy to use. This directive enshrines the principle of openness by default. Make no mistake, this is a crucial measure. Being open by default means optimizing the release of government data and information. The interim directive sends a clear message to all federal institutions. Citizens should not have to explain why they need information in the government's possession. On the contrary, our government said that it intends to publish as much information as possible, subject to certain necessary restrictions that we can all understand, such as protection of personal information, confidentiality, and national security.

Here are some examples of information that will be proactively disclosed: travel and hospitality expenses for ministers and their staff, as well as senior officials across government; contracts over \$10,000 and all contracts for MPs and senators; grants and contributions over \$25,000; mandate letters and revised mandate letters; briefing packages for new ministers and deputy ministers; lists of briefing notes for the minister or deputy minister, including the titles of these notes and their tracking numbers; and, of course, the briefing binders used for question period.

● (1210)

This is fundamental not only to the ability to participate in the democratic process, but also to hold the government to account. Today, with Bill C-58, we are going further. The legislation proposes to entrench in law for current and future governments an obligation to proactively publish a broad range of information to a predictable schedule and without the need for an access to information request.

One way to ensure the continued strength of the access to information regime is to undertake a review of the Access to Information Act every five years, another important feature in Bill C-58. Legislative reviews provide an important opportunity for stakeholders to have their say on access rights, and help us ensure that the regime continues to meet their needs.

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In conclusion, open and transparent government is the way forward. Canadians have waited a long time to have their access to information regime modernized to meet their needs in the digital age. I encourage my hon. colleagues to support Bill C-58, thereby giving Canadians the kind of access to information regime they expect.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our colleague from Vaudreuil—Soulanges shared some fine principles with us.

However, I would like him to explain how these fine principles will be put into action, because I am having difficulty understanding that. Most of the 32 recommendations made by the ethics committee following its study on access to information were disregarded, as were the 85 recommendations made by the Information Commissioner, who does not have enough resources to do her job. There is no way these words can be put into action when the government is confusing proactive disclosure with true access to information.

The government has told us what information will be shared, but the problem lies with the information that will not be shared. We do not know what will constitute a frivolous request. Why would a citizen be accused of being frivolous? How can a citizen be accused of requesting something too general? How will the government determine if a citizen's request is inadmissible?

It is not clear at all. I would like the member to provide some clarification on this.

•(1215)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

This is not just talk. In the speech I just gave, I mentioned some practical measures that will be taken to ensure that our government becomes increasingly transparent and accessible. We have been waiting for real changes like the ones set out in Bill C-58 since 1983, and I am proud to be part of a government that keeps its promises, a government that is more transparent and more accessible to people across the country.

[*English*]

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to access to information, Canadians want to understand what the government is doing. When they have a question, they want a real answer. We have heard a lot of testimony over these last few days about requests taking months under the current system. When I have made requests, the answers I have received have been absolutely bland and have contained no information at all.

The Prime Minister promised that he would fix this and that it would include the PMO. Clearly, that promise has been broken. Could the member speak to how the government can get to a place where the answers to the questions contain real data and real answers?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, that is a sincere question, and I very much appreciate all of the member's questions.

She is 100% right that the system is broken. The system is not working the way it should. I am confident in the steps we are taking right now to make the system work better, not only for members of the House but for all Canadians. Concrete measures are included in

Bill C-58 that would ensure Canadians have greater access to their government and that future governments, not just the current government, are more transparent.

What is also great is that in five years, which is a component of the bill, we will see how things are going, if the changes we have put in place are having a positive impact, and if there are other ways we could perhaps make the system even better. It will be revised in five years. Hopefully we will all be here at that time to look at what has been done and see how we can make it even better. One of the positive aspects of Bill C-58 is that it would give us the capacity to do that in five years.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, members of the opposition appear to want everything that every expert and academic has suggested for our access to information regime to be in this one bill, which, for the first time in 34 years, addresses the shortcomings. Does the member view the other approach, which is a step-by-step approach our government is taking, as a better way forward?

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Mr. Speaker, we have taken the appropriate steps. The methodology we have used to come to a conclusion on the proposal in Bill C-58 is the best way to move forward on this. We did it in a transparent way. We were able to talk to Canadians about this. I had discussions in my own riding about the best path forward.

This is something all Canadians can get behind. It is easy to understand. I think Canadians understand that this would allow them to have more efficient, transparent, and easily accessible contact with their government so they can better understand the actions we take as their government.

I look at this bill as one that will positively impact not just the current government but future generations of governments to come. As well, it will positively impact Canadians. They will now have a better, more transparent, and more accessible government.

•(1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's debate on Bill C-58.

The bill amends the 1983 Access to Information Act. Amendments to the act will affect organizations that share information with federal government institutions and people who want to access that information. It comes as no surprise that this Access to Information Act reform does not fulfill the Liberals' election promise to apply the act to ministers' offices and the PMO. That is the time-honoured Liberal way of doing things.

What is new here is that the government is implementing a proactive information disclosure regime. Under the new Access to Information Act, ministers' offices and the PMO will have to proactively publish several types of information.

Ethics and transparency matter to me, so I strongly condemn the fact that the Prime Minister is breaking yet another election promise. In fact, I find it offensive.

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The Liberal government calls itself open and transparent, but it has once again missed an opportunity to prove it. It has failed to deliver the amendments it promised with respect to access to information from ministers' offices and the PMO.

Under our very eyes, the Liberals are being dishonest with Canadians and are once more seeking to make their decisions behind closed doors in order to make their friends rich and to hold on to power. This also reminds me of the marijuana legislation scandal last November when it was seriously suspected that the marijuana task force report was leaked before it was tabled. As if by chance, this benefited a company operated by the person responsible for the Liberal Party's finances. Oh, yes, that person is the co-founder of a company that produces marijuana and that saw its shares double in a week, even though the final report had not yet been released. We saw that the Minister of Justice was not too co-operative and did not want to face those facts.

Despite all their fine promises during the election campaign, the Liberals have failed to increase the government's openness and transparency. It is no exaggeration for me to add that, since the Liberals took office, even the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner has had a hard time overseeing and enforcing the guidelines in the document entitled "Open and Accountable Government", which, let us recall, comes from the Prime Minister himself.

This government is known for not walking the talk because it unscrupulously chooses what information to publish and when not to be accountable to Canadians. Once again, it is scandalous to see that only its cronies get preferential treatment.

How can the actions of such a government be described? It is easy, in fact. It is called the art of giving itself the power to refuse to respond to access to information requests when the government considers them embarrassing or shameful.

There is something to be ashamed of when one thinks of the scandal of the Prime Minister and his family vacationing down south at the Aga Khan's home at the expense of taxpayers. We received the information in dribs and drabs and waited more than eight months before finding out how much that luxury of the Prime Minister really cost us.

It is absolutely appalling that the changes proposed by the Liberals will ensure that even less information will be available to Canadians, and that they are obviously doing nothing to address the already unacceptable delays.

Monitoring this government is becoming virtually a full-time job because ethics is a value that it undeniably lacks.

• (1225)

I think the Liberals like to test limits. Not only did they give themselves the power to sidestep their duty to be transparent for Canadians, we know that they like to walk a fine line between conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest, which is unacceptable for our Canadian democracy.

Last December, I had to raise this issue in an adjournment debate seeking to ensure that no preferential access or appearance of preferential access would be granted to individuals or organizations

that have contributed to the Liberal Party at the many events where a parade of cabinet ministers have all the time in the world for their special friends who pay for preferential access.

I would like to remind members of the injustice, unethical behaviour, and lack of transparency.

It all began with the relocation costs of two employees and friends who work in the Prime Minister's Office. Their move cost Canadian taxpayers \$200,000. Then we happened to get wind of a number of cocktail parties that cost \$1,500 to get into, but guests could eat canapés, drink some good wine, and while they were at it, as I just mentioned, have privileged access to ministers and friends of the party in order to talk secretly about matters and issues that have to do with the portfolios of those ministers.

We also learned about the donation from a wealthy Chinese businessman, which made Canada a place where not only are ministers for sale or rent, but so is the Prime Minister. In exchange for a huge donation, he just might be able to get a foothold in our Canadian economy in any way he chooses.

Then there is the scandal involving the Minister of Justice, who turned blue in the face denying leaks from the task force on marijuana. Not only is the Liberal government and its Prime Minister irresponsible, but they are undermining our democracy in every sense of the word.

Once more, the Prime Minister thinks he is above the law and the obligation to be transparent. In our view, the Liberals are being dishonest with Canadians and are again trying to make decisions behind closed doors to make their friends rich and hold on to power.

We see that they have always favoured those who have the means to pay for the luxury of special treatment in true Liberal style.

Since the Liberals are unlikely to vote to put an end to this ethics and transparency scandal and to have the Prime Minister and the ministers take their duties seriously and with transparency, I would like to know what the government plans to do to put an end to this old Liberal practice.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say, that was a rather surprising speech. The Conservative MP started by criticizing Bill C-58 in its entirety. He then talked about a number of other things that have nothing to do with today's topic. For the first time, the Access to Information Act will be extended to include the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices. This bill gives the Information Commissioner the power to order government information to be released for the first time. We are making substantive amendments that will have the combined effect of reducing delays. There are a number of initiatives in addition to the powers of the Information Commissioner.

Does the member not feel that granting powers to the Information Commissioner is an improvement to our current access to information regime?

• (1230)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Government Orders

The first thing that the government could do in order to provide all Canadians with better access to information would be to simply answer questions in question period. It could also give us actual figures when we ask, and actual details of what it is doing.

We are forced to make access to information requests to find out what this government has really been doing, even after asking questions. In some cases, we had to wait eight months for a reply to questions we asked in the House about amounts that even the Prime Minister and other ministers did not want to provide.

Why not simply provide the information directly to the House in question period?

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague. I heard the parliamentary secretary say, in so many words, that there is nothing to get worked up about. That is like someone wanting to sell us their house but refusing to allow an inspection and telling us there is nothing to get worked up about since we were given a tour of the bedroom. We want to see the entire house and get an inspection.

That said, I cannot help but roll my eyes when I hear the hon. member saying how dreadful this is and demanding access to all of the information.

Will my colleague at least recognize that the reason Canadians want more information on what is happening in the government stems from the fact that for 10 years they got almost nothing from the Conservatives when they were in government?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I disagree with my colleague opposite, who has been sitting with me in the House for a few years now.

We answered questions from opposition members in the House and also talked to them outside of the House and provided them with the information they asked us for.

Here we have a culture where the government shows no sign of being transparent, and that culture undermines Canadians' trust in the government. We will certainly solve that problem in 2019.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here we have proposed legislation that would make the first significant improvements in well over three decades. Stephen Harper, throughout his duration as prime minister, chose to ignore such legislation. Today, we have substantial changes.

Will the member across the way at least acknowledge that this is a significant step that no one can deny? Would he support the legislation's going to committee?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would have preferred it if my colleague had talked about frivolous requests.

Who is going to determine whether a request for access to information from a Canadian citizen deserves to be processed or not? It is such a broad term that I think no Canadian will get the answer he or she deserves.

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on behalf of the government about our efforts to strengthen our access to information system.

This government recognizes the importance of a robust access to information framework. We promised to deliver a modern and responsible access to information regime, because we are committed to upholding and strengthening the democratic principles of openness and transparency.

We recognize that Canadians cannot meaningfully participate in a democracy without having the information they need. Indeed, we believe that information Canadians paid for belongs to Canadians. They have every right to access it.

Bill C-58, a comprehensive set of amendments to the Access to Information Act, is designed to provide the openness and accountability Canadians expect. It would also bring greater transparency, open the doors for greater public participation in governance, and support the Government of Canada's commitment to evidence-based decision-making.

Canada's access to information legislation has not really changed much since 1983, but our world has changed very much since then. The proliferation of personal technology, such as smart phones, has transformed so many aspects of our lives. We recognize that technology in all forms is altering how citizens interact with their government in powerful ways. This change is happening around the world and right here at home. Technology is empowering citizens to act on their expectations that a government be honest, open, and sincere in its efforts to serve the public interest.

Canadians are demanding greater openness in government. They are calling for greater participation in government decision-making, and they are seeking to make their government more transparent, responsive, and accountable. That is why, in April 2016, the President of the Treasury Board issued an interim directive on the administration of the Access to Information Act. This directive requires federal officials to waive all access to information fees, apart from the \$5 application fee. It also requires them to provide to requesters, wherever feasible, information in modern and easy-to-use formats, and it enshrines the principle of open by default. This is an important measure.

Being open by default means maximizing the release of government data and information. As such, the interim directive sends a strong message across federal institutions. It says that government information belongs to the people it serves and therefore should be open by default.

Citizens should not have to make the case for why they deserve information from the government. Instead, our government has said that it will make as much information as it can available, subject to necessary limitations, for reasons we all can understand, such as privacy, confidentiality, and national security. This is fundamental not only to the ability to participate in the democratic process but to hold the government to account.

Government Orders

Today, with Bill C-58, we are going further. The legislation proposes to entrench in law, for current and future governments, an obligation to proactively publish a broad range of information on a predictable schedule and without the need for an access to information request. The amendments would create a new part of the act on proactive publication, taking advantage of digital technologies and building on current best practices. This new part of the act would establish consistent requirements for the proactive release of key information across government.

Let me list a few examples: travel and hospitality expenses for ministers and their staff as well as for senior officials across government; contracts over \$10,000, and all contracts for MPs and senators; grants and contributions over \$25,000; mandate letters and revised mandate letters; briefing packages for new ministers and deputy ministers; lists of briefing notes for ministers and deputy ministers, including the titles of these notes and their tracking numbers; and the briefing binders used for question period and parliamentary committee appearances. This would allow our citizens a greater understanding of government and demonstrate effective stewardship of public funds.

We are doing this because we know that Canadians want us to pull back the curtain on how government spends and the factors that influence the decisions that affect their lives. Canadians expect to know how and why decisions are made on their behalf.

• (1235)

That is not all the bill would do. No access to information regime is complete without powerful and meaningful oversight. We promised Canadians that we would empower the Information Commissioner to order government information to be released. Bill C-58 would do just that. This bill would change the commissioner's role from that of an ombudsperson to an authority with the legislated ability to order government institutions to release records.

We also recognize that this reform cannot be a one-off initiative. We have been witness to many changes in society since the access to information program was established back in 1983. We need to find ways to ensure that the system continues to grow and change alongside us. We cannot allow our access to information practices to become stagnant. A vibrant and evolving access to information regime will support a strong, open, and transparent democracy.

One way to ensure the continued strength of the access to information regime would be to undertake a review of the Access to Information Act every five years, another important feature in Bill C-58. Legislative reviews would provide an important opportunity for stakeholders to have their say on access rights and would help us ensure that the regime continued to meet their needs.

Let there be no doubt. Open and transparent government is the way forward. If citizens understand why their government takes a particular course of action, if they have been engaged from the beginning, if they have access to the same information government has, they will have more confidence and trust in the outcomes.

Canadians have waited a long time to have their access to information regime modernized to meet their needs in the digital age. I encourage my hon. colleagues to support Bill C-58, thereby giving

Canadians the kind of access to information regime they expect and deserve.

• (1240)

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing the member said is that citizens would not need to make a case. Actually, they would have to make even more of a case now because of the subjectivity of this legislation. That is concerning to me. In a free and open democracy, if a citizen is to make a case and actually have results, they should get those, not just from the subjectivity of a minister or a bureaucrat randomly making a choice.

In addition, the member also stated that there needs to be powerful and meaningful oversight. Robert Marleau, the former information commissioner, said he has real concerns. As he has stated, "They've taken the commissioner out of the loop." If someone requests briefing materials, and parts of them are blacked out, there was someone to appeal to in the past. Now this is no longer the case.

The two issues the member has brought forward to the House are actually not borne out in the legislation. Would the member like to correct the record, because obviously, this is subjective and is not meeting the needs of Canadians?

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right about subjectivity. The member's subjectivity is possibly clouding the overarching positive aspect of this bill, and that is the ability of Canadians to access information to which Canadians are entitled.

I will reiterate comments made earlier today about the fact that this is a big change for Canadians. Starting about 12 years ago, for a period of 10 years, Canadians waited six, seven, and eight years to actually get information from the previous government, and then, in fact, it was denied.

Bill C-58 takes a new approach. It is open by default, with the opportunity for all Canadians to access the information they are rightfully entitled to.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary mentioned open by default several times. We know that the Liberals campaigned in the last election on a promise to make things open by default, to open up the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices to access to information requests, yet they have now backed down on that promise. The Liberals have broken that promise.

Could the parliamentary secretary comment on why the Liberals decided to break that promise?

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation does in fact talk about the openness of the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices and access to briefing materials, information that in the past was not readily accessible by Canadians.

We are indeed fulfilling our promise to make sure that those in the Prime Minister's Office, ministers' offices, deputy ministers' offices, and the like would now have a reporting mechanism that allowed Canadians to see the very information the member is talking about.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources. The former information commissioner, Robert Marleau, had this to say about Bill C-58:

There are many, many countries that are much better, and some that are not quite as advanced technologically as we are. We are not the shining light, even after this legislation, and we were in 1983. In 1983 most countries looked to us for innovation and transparency, and we've lost that halo.

This is from a knowledgeable, non-partisan observer. Although Bill C-58 includes some welcome efforts at transparency, it falls far short of what provincial governments, such as B.C. and Alberta, are doing in this country. I would ask the parliamentary secretary if she does not agree that the government should do better.

• (1245)

Ms. Kim Rudd: Mr. Speaker, I think that is exactly the point. The mandatory review every five years is about making it better. It is about looking at each piece of legislation as we change as a country and as a society, as technology changes, and as opportunities to make things better come about. The mandatory five-year review speaks exactly to that.

This bill has not been reviewed since it was created in 1983. In 2016, the President of the Treasury Board made a commitment and started along this process. I am very happy to stand here and talk about Bill C-58, because I think it is a step in the right direction. Five years from now, we may be back here having a conversation about how our digital world has changed and how Canadians want us to respond to them, and we will be reacting to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today for the first time since we all returned home this summer at the conclusion of an intense session.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to Bill C-58, an act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

This bill will amend the Access to Information Act of 1984—I mean 1983. I am smiling as I say this. You will understand why in a moment.

The amendments to this act will affect every organization that sends information to federal institutions and every person who tries to obtain information.

Think back to 1983. Does anyone here remember who was in power? Who was the Prime Minister of Canada? No, it was not Mr. Mulroney, it was Mr. Trudeau, Trudeau senior. Trudeau senior was in power, he tabled this act in 1983, and today, his son is going to fix a past mistake. The Liberals passed legislation only to realize that it fell short of Canadians' expectations. That historical tidbit is why I was smiling earlier.

Reforming the Access to Information Act is a good idea. As parliamentarians, it is a good idea for us to open our eyes, to want to improve our systems and our laws. Unfortunately, upon closer inspection, it seems that this bill is once again just smoke and

mirrors. That is what we are used to from the Liberal government. The bill has no substance. On the surface it appears to be a wonderful thing, but in reality it is a hollow bill.

This reform does not even fulfill the promise that the Liberals made during the 2015 election campaign. They said that they were going to extend the act so that it applied to the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices.

Here is the proposed wording in Bill C-58:

An Act to extend the present laws of Canada that provide access to information under the control of the Government of Canada and to provide for the proactive publication of certain information.

As parliamentarians, we do a lot of research to be able to provide clear and transparent information. I took the liberty of looking up the meaning of the word “proactive”. According to the dictionary, to be proactive means, “to be enterprising, to take initiative or to act on one's own initiative without waiting to be asked or instructed to do something”. The government is proposing legislation absent any accompanying framework.

I also looked up the word “appearance”. Excuse me, I meant to say “transparency”, but it all relates because what the Liberals are interested in is the appearance of transparency. The dictionary defines “transparency” as “complete accessibility to information regarding public opinion”. If I am smiling yet again, it is because I was pleasantly surprised to see the example that followed, which was, “demanding transparency regarding political party financing”.

As fate would have it, we are talking about a Liberal bill and the dictionary gives an example that talks about transparency around political financing. I mention this in the House because I hope that the people watching at home will question the transparency of the Liberals' fundraising activities.

Let us recall that the Liberals made a promise about this bill during the election campaign, but they also made a lot of other campaign promises that they have not kept. A lot of people probably do not remember a very popular promise in the Montreal region, that of bringing back Canada Post letter carriers and their routes. The promise was made in 2015 and there has been a technological evolution since. I do not know whether the Liberals have evolved, but we in the Conservative Party have evolved.

• (1250)

Mr. Harper, our prime minister at the time, decided to manage public resources very carefully and to provide the same service to all Canadians. To get themselves elected and to play to the crowds, the Liberals promised that they were going to put the letter carriers back on the job. They are still not there. The Liberals also promised to reduce the tax rate for our businesses. I will come back to that later because, in terms of tax rates for businesses and of respecting SMEs, we are now seeing how this government treats the businesses that create jobs in Canada.

Government Orders

The Liberals also said that they would run a slight deficit of \$10 billion and that they would get back to balanced budgets before the next election. They went on to waste a bit of money. I have no problem with investments when there is a plan. The Liberals, however, have no plan and they are making huge expenditures with no control or proper management of the public purse. The parliamentary budget officer, an independent officer of Parliament, cannot see the day when Canada's budget will again be balanced. It is comforting to have the Liberals in power.

The Liberals also said that it would be the last election where the current system would be used to choose the 338 members of Parliament who represent Canadians. The Liberals derided the committee, thanked the minister, and then removed her from her portfolio.

We are now talking about tax reform. Small and medium-sized businesses are the key economic drivers in my riding. We do not have a lot of big public multinationals, and in fact they do not represent the majority of businesses in Canada. They are big businesses, but the lifeblood of our regions and the Canadian economy are our SMEs. The Liberals never mentioned this during their election campaign, and today, they are taking away their incentive to thrive. These businesses have the right to prosper. These business owners, men and women, get up early every day and have to deal with the stress of managing their businesses and ensure that they do thrive. When they are able to thrive, they can provide jobs to our middle class, which we Conservatives stand up for. It is important to support our SMEs instead of stifling them. I received a text message from a business in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier; I actually talked about it last week.

I will be told that I am biased, so I will quote an article from the wise and respectable newspaper *Le Devoir* from September 15, 2017, written by Shawn McCarthy, president of the Canadian Committee for World Press Freedom:

The Liberals promised that the ATI law would be amended to apply to the Prime Minister's Office and offices of ministers. [Bill] C-58 does nothing of the sort. It maintains the status quo.

When the [Liberal] government released its long-awaited bill to reform the 34-year-old Access to Information Act on a sunny Friday afternoon before Parliament's summer recess, it gave itself a check mark in the promise-kept column.

[Bill] C-58 represents an improvement over the current system. And the Liberals suggest it as a first step, with promises of more sweeping reforms some time later. But why wait?

Anyone taking the time to review C-58 before Parliament resumes September 18 will find the Liberals come up short on election promises made on Access to Information reform in 2015. As the Centre for Law and Democracy noted in a review of C-58, the proposed legislation "is far more conspicuous for what it fails to do."

Let's look at those promises, starting with one the bill seems to have delivered—enhanced powers for the Information Commissioner. Bill C-58 gives the commissioner the overdue power to order government departments to disclose information.

The government promised to eliminate all ATI fees except the nominal \$5 application fee. That promise was delivered before C-58 was tabled.

The Liberals did not need this bill. I will read another section from the article: "The Liberals promised that the Act would apply to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and offices of ministers. C-58 does nothing of the sort. It maintains the status quo."

●(1255)

I could go on, but I will stop there by saying that, although it seems good on the surface, this bill has no substance.

[*English*]

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the hon. member and others in the House that the legislation has not been touched in 30 years. That was part of the reason we campaigned on openness and transparency and why this government is moving forward with the changes suggested in the legislation.

One of the initiatives in the bill includes taking away the fee, so there will only be a \$5 filing fee and everyone can have access to information. We do not want it to be cost prohibitive. Initiatives also include proactive disclosure for the PM's Office and ministers' offices, proactive disclosure for institutions that support Parliament, service improvements that will expedite the length of time for these requests, and reviews every five years. Does the member support these initiatives?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

If she had listened to my introduction, she would have heard me congratulate the government on having had the idea to bring in more effective measures to increase transparency and improve access to information.

In her intervention, my colleague mentioned the \$5 fee, but the Liberals did not need a bill to bring that in. That was already done. What I am saying is that this is a hollow bill that has no teeth. We are wasting our time. We should have a clearly defined bill that allows us to proceed quickly.

Someone across the way mentioned a step-by-step approach earlier. I prefer to proceed quickly in the interest of all Canadians.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for the excellent corn on the cob from Neuville.

I would like to talk about the fact that this is just another broken Liberal government promise. It promised to extend access to information to the Prime Minister's Office and to ministers' offices. Unfortunately, it is not doing that. Instead, it is actually creating a new loophole. This is making things worse, because requests for information will be rejected from now on if they are deemed too general, if they seriously hinder government operations, or if they are filed in bad faith.

Does my colleague agree that this makes no sense? This kind of vocabulary gives too much latitude and will result in too many access to information requests being arbitrarily rejected.

Government Orders

• (1300)

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I am delighted that he had a chance to taste Neuville's delicious sweet corn. This is not a competition, of course, because I know there are corn farmers in every riding. I am just happy to have the opportunity to let all the members of this House know that Neuville sweet corn has received a protected geographical indication, or PGI.

To answer my colleague's question, yes, this bill is hollow. What I find disappointing about this government is that it is wasting our time. It is introducing laws and saying it will roll them out gradually, but it is incapable of defining them clearly. From reading this bill, it is obvious that consumers and the various organizations that usually need to submit access to information requests will receive less information. That is troubling. Information needs to be shared.

I can understand that some information needs to remain confidential in certain situations, such as information about our military strategy. During the NAFTA negotiations, there may be some information we have to withhold as good negotiators. Not that I think the Liberals are good negotiators, but that is another story.

In short, this Liberal bill is deeply troubling.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House to speak to Bill C-58 for the first time.

Let us look back at how we got to where we are today. When the Liberals were campaigning in 2015, I believe it was on the tenth day that the member for Papineau, now the Prime Minister, stood before Canadians and said that a government under him would be the most open and transparent in Canadian history. Man, how far we have fallen from those comments. Canadians probably had some hope at that point, but shortly thereafter it was a case of the government saying, "We were just joking, do not take us seriously on things such as the debt perhaps and other areas."

Early on we heard things in the opposition and Canadians found out through mechanisms such as access to information and others about things such as pay to play. I will refresh the House's memory that early in the government's mandate, in every mandate letter the Prime Minister directed his ministers to conduct themselves to the full extent of the law and to be able to take the most fine-grained public scrutiny. What we have seen to this point is some ministers operating as if they are above the law, and that includes the Prime Minister as well.

Early last year, the Minister of Justice perhaps forgot whether she was representing her riding at a pay-to-play event where a fee was charged for dinner with a full house of solicitors and lawyers at a Toronto law firm. The House reminded her of the distinction and asked very cautiously whether she was acting as a member of Parliament for her area or the Minister of Justice at the time. I think we saw a bit of retraction there.

We have a Prime Minister who himself is under multiple investigations by the Ethics Commissioner. One thing that keeps coming up—and I am not going to minimize this—is his vacation with the Aga Khan. I do not judge anybody. We work very hard as members of Parliament and people should be able to take their

vacations when they can, but our Prime Minister has probably shown disregard for the rules. The rules do not apply to him in terms of public expenditures and he has refused to this point to answer any questions on the huge cost that has been passed on to Canadians as a result. He has deferred the questions and, some might say, blamed the very public servants whom we trust, the public servants who put on their uniforms every day knowing full well that they are going to encounter danger. When we pick up the phone and dial 911, they come running regardless of any illness or stress they are facing, without exception. Instead of answering the question, our Prime Minister has deferred every question on the cost of his trip to the RCMP, perhaps even blaming them for the exorbitant costs associated with it. That is shameful.

• (1305)

This speaks to where we are today with the Liberals who have continually blamed the government and Parliaments of previous years and have asserted that they are "modernizing" the government and this House. They use that term all the time.

Time and again, Liberal ministers and perhaps the Prime Minister himself have stood with their hands on their hearts and used the words "open and transparent" when talking about about consultations on things such as electoral reform and carbon pricing. They were going from coast to coast to coast to talk to Canadians about, let us get this right, a campaign promise of theirs. They were going to reduce the small business tax. Where did that go? I guess we are probably going to be talking about the liberals' unfair tax plan in a mere 45 minutes. That is another broken promise, and it is not open or transparent at all. It is disappointing.

The Liberals campaigned on real change. The second page of their campaign document read:

Together, we can restore a sense of trust in our democracy. Greater openness and transparency are fundamental to accomplishing this.

Those are great words, but we have not seen action by the Liberals. As a matter of fact, the next paragraph stated:

...our objective is nothing less than making transparency a fundamental principle across the Government of Canada.

Where has that gone? It is gone. Everything they are doing absolutely flies in the face of their campaign promises.

Again, they are talking about modernization of the House, doing things better here and better for Canadians. I am going to bring us back to just before we rose in June, the six or eight weeks when the House leader, a mere 18 months into her tenure as a member of Parliament, tabled a document, a discussion paper. She wanted to have a discussion in the House on how we could make the House better and do things better. I have been a member of Parliament for the same time she has, and while we all have ideas on how we can make things efficient and smooth, I would not be as arrogant to think I can put a paper together, put it out in the media, and suggest that we are going to do things better when this House belongs to Canadians. It does not belong to me or the members who are present. It belongs to those in the gallery and those who elect us to be here and represent Canadians.

Government Orders

What the Liberals have done with Bill C-58 under the guise of being open and transparent is to stop what has brought us here. We have a Prime Minister who is under multiple investigations. We have had patronage appointments, as access to information requests have found out. What they want to do is to stop that. They do not want Canadians to know. They want the power to say what is frivolous and without merit. That is unacceptable.

We are smack in the middle of international Right to Know Week, which runs from September 25 to October 1. There are 10 principles of right to know, which I found on the government website. Number one is that “Access to information is a right of everyone.” Number two is “Access is the rule—secrecy is the exception!” We agree. There are certain things that we do not put into the hands of others. As my hon. colleague mentioned earlier, defence issues are one of them, or things that could tip off those with nefarious ideas.

However, simple everyday common information that the public, and indeed the opposition and those who represent the public, require to do their everyday jobs is fundamental. The things they are talking about in Bill C-58 are inherent principles and rights that the public and opposition already have. This does not need to be done.

• (1310)

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a couple of the member's colleagues and he questioned the commissioner's ability to declare requests vexatious or made in bad faith. The suggestion by a couple of his colleagues was that a better way to deal with this would be to go back to charging people who want to make access to information requests.

Does the member agree that the way to deal with vexatious and bad-faith submissions is to charge people for the requests, because that would serve as a deterrent, as his fellow colleagues have suggested?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, again, this is just a deflection tactic by the government. The reality is that we are here to talk about its open and transparent ways. The Liberals have proven time and again over the last 24-plus months that they have not been open and transparent.

I was reading the bill, and proposed section 6 deals specifically with the government's ability to say no to requests that might be vexatious or seen to be frivolous. The fact is that the government would be able to make that decision when it should instead be made by an independent source regardless of the mechanism. It should be decided by an independent source if we are truly going to be open and transparent.

If the Liberals truly want to live up to being open and transparent, they would change the bill and go through with the good points in it and scrap the ones that are controversial.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the member agree with the NDP and our concerns that the Liberals are breaking their promise to make the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices open to these access to information requests? This is not open and transparent government. This is closing the doors.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the amendment that my hon. B.C. colleague has mentioned and so I cannot speak

directly to that, but I reiterate my comments. We are here today as a result of access to information requests. We are here because we have a Prime Minister, a cabinet, and a government that have been under investigation for questionable actions and decisions. I think I will leave it at that.

We need to make sure that Canadians have the mechanism to be able to ask for the information they require so that we can be held to the highest account, and indeed live up to the mandate letters that the Prime Minister gave his ministers by his own penmanship, saying that they should be able to withstand the highest public scrutiny. However, to this point, the reason we are here today is that time and again they have proven that they cannot.

• (1315)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all politicians. Most of us were elected two years ago, and some were elected during by-elections. However, when we live by politics, it is very important to keep our promises.

What kind of signal is the government sending to people when the Liberals say something during the election campaign but do the reverse when they are in office?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, the selective memory of our current government is interesting. Indeed, the Prime Minister himself, when he was a member of Parliament in the last Parliament, tabled Bill C-613, which absolutely flies in the face of what his current government is tabling. It is like the debt. It is like the carbon tax. It is like the small business tax that the Liberals promised to lower.

Once they got into power, they kicked up their heels and brought all their friends in and paid them via high-priced patronage appointments. They kind of forgot what their promises to Canadians were. However, I will tell the member that we on this side and Canadians will not forget.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during their respective campaigns, the Liberal government and the Conservative government before them promised to amend the Access to Information Act, specifically by expanding the act to apply to the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices. After the Conservative government failed to take the necessary steps to modernize the act, the Liberal government is making an attempt with Bill C-58, which seeks to amend the Access to Information Act, 1983.

This law is essential because it allows Canadians to apply to federal institutions to get access to information on the government and on government institutions. With Bill C-58, the government's goal is to amend access to information, the Privacy Act and other acts that deal with the same subject.

Canada was a pioneer in access to information. We were one of the first countries to pass legislation about information, in 1983. Today, with this bill, the government is seriously compromising access to information.

Government Orders

The bill has many problems. Many recommendations from the Information Commissioner and from the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics have not been considered.

We are asking that all these recommendations be incorporated into the bill, which currently contains so few as to prompt us to wonder whether the government even read their work. It feels like it was all for naught. What is the point in asking expert organizations to make recommendations if those are not taken into account in the government's bill?

Members of the NDP, including the former member for Winnipeg Centre, tried several times in 2006, 2008, 2011, and 2014, to introduce proper legislation modernizing the Access to Information Act. All those initiatives were rejected even though the former government and the current government claimed to want to amend the act.

The NDP tried very hard to propose concrete amendments to modernize the act and allow people to have better access to information. However, the Conservative government and the current Liberal government both refused to listen.

Except for the fact that the Information Commissioner has the power to order the disclosure of information, which is one of the important points that we have long been calling for, and that the bill provides for a legislative review every five years, the NDP believes the bill is inadequate and does not go far enough. That is why the NDP is totally opposed to the bill at second reading.

Despite its election promises, the government does not really want to be transparent and that is unacceptable. I think it goes without saying that Canadians ought to have the right to review the information that the government does not want to publish. Since it governs at their pleasure, it is accountable to them.

The Liberals do not want to extend the act to the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices. Do they have something to hide? The government must set an example and obey the law. It cannot ask Canadians to obey the law if its own members do not. The government is not above the law, nor is it above Canadians.

Why is the government renegeing on its promise? I know that this is not the first time that the government has broken one of its promises. The people have every right to wonder how many other election promises the Liberals will break, how much more backpedalling they will do, as they are doing now. The Liberals are hiding behind this bill and that is not right.

I will remind members what the Prime Minister kept saying during the campaign, which is, "A country's information system is at the very heart of the principle of open government" and "Transparent government is good government."

The Prime Minister himself seems to be saying that the Liberal government is neither open nor good. He also claimed to want to extend the act to the Prime Minister's Office, to other ministers' offices, and to administrative institutions supporting Parliament and the courts. However, once in power, the government had no qualms about breaking this campaign promise, even though it was so important to Canadians, who have been calling for the modernization of the Access to Information Act for a few years now.

Perhaps the government should reacquaint itself with its election promises to realize that it did exactly the opposite in this bill. Canadians are increasingly interested in the government's actions.

● (1320)

In fact, they made 81% more access to information requests in 2015-16 as compared to five years ago, which is their right. Canadians want to know how their money is being spent and how the government acts by having access to some confidential documents. Canadians must be able to have access to information to avoid all sorts of scandals, such as the sponsorship scandal, in which the government lied to the public by refusing to release the invoices from its suppliers.

Canada currently ranks 49th in terms of right to information legislation. The bill would enable it to move up from 49th to 46th place, but this small gain shows full well that this bill does not go far enough. It is just window dressing.

With this bill, the government is making information less available to people. For example, the bill does away with the government's obligation to publish information about government organization mandates. It even gives officials the right to decline access to information requests that they feel, for whatever reason, are made in bad faith.

The NDP cannot support this bill at second reading for two main reasons. First, despite the election promise, it does not expand the act to cover the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices. Second, it does not reflect crucial recommendations by the Information Commissioner and the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

The Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics produced a report with 32 recommendations, and the Information Commissioner's report contains 85. The government had plenty to draw on, but it included very few of those recommendations in its bill. The Liberals are so proud of their proactive disclosure idea, but it does not really give people better access to information. The government should also provide criteria for deciding whether a request is overly broad or cannot be processed. Departments will also not be required to publish their org charts, their powers, duties, and functions, or descriptions of all classes of documents they are responsible for.

The bill imposes no specific legal obligation to document cases of failure to comply or appropriate sanctions, which was a key issue for the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. This bill also fails to shorten deadlines for access to information, which are currently much too long at up to 200 days, and to reduce the number of extensions.

Government Orders

For example, in April 2016, *The Globe and Mail* reported that it took more than a year for the RCMP to provide them with statistics for its series of investigative reports titled *Unfounded*, which revealed that police dismiss one in five sexual assault claims as baseless. What makes the government think it can take so long to provide citizens with this information? This clearly shows that access to information is vital and that it can bring to light certain things that organizations and citizens need to know about.

Naturally, we want the government to extend the act to cover Prime Minister's Office and the offices of other ministers as well, which is a priority for citizens and one of the main changes they have been calling for. We support the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics and the Information Commissioner. We need to modernize the Access to Information Act, but we cannot allow the government to take an authoritarian approach and do away with some of the rights currently provided under the act in its present form.

Canadians do not want their rights taken away. They are simply asking for the act to be modernized, because it is now out of date. Canada was seen as a pioneer in the area of access to information. With this bill, the government is trying to take rights away from people rather than to give them more, as it promised during the election campaign. Canadians deserve answers from the government. It must explain to us all why it has decided to limit access to information from the Prime Minister's Office and the offices of the other ministers and, in its bill, to remove some rights that were, in fact, in the act.

• (1325)

The government must explain to us all why it is not keeping one of its main campaign promises. It is the government's duty to provide explanations to the Canadians who are demanding answers.

In conclusion, access to information is the basis of democracy. Sadly, the government is trying to obstruct democracy with this bill, even though it promised to expand the legislation for Canadians. There was never any question of a bill of this kind during their campaign.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the legislation before us would make significant changes to the way information would be accessed. There is a wonderful component about proactive disclosure, something we believe Canadians want and deserve. We should support that. There is an interesting aspect that empowers the commissioner to order information to be released. This is one of the strongest aspects in the legislation. In so many ways, our system will be healthier as a direct result. There would be more accountability and transparency. The bill is all about that.

Would the member not acknowledge and support the principles of what our government has been able to achieve within the legislation, and perhaps share some of the ideas she talks about, possibly at the standing committee? We know we are not going to wait another 30 years before we have to modernize the act. The legislation calls for reviewing and updating the act on a more regular basis. Would she not agree that this is good for Canadians?

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the issue. I want to support more than just principles. I want to support concrete actions.

We can have proactive disclosure now. We do not need a bill for it; it is already possible. It is important not to confuse proactive disclosure with access to information. Canadians must understand that it is not the same thing and that access to information is not provided through proactive disclosure. They are two separate things.

I think it is unfortunate that this bill is now mixing up the two when there is a clear difference. A tangible action would be to follow the 32 recommendations of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, and the 85 recommendations of the Office of the Information Commissioner. Those are tangible actions that I am ready to support.

• (1330)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my sincere thanks to my colleague, the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, for her speech. I completely agree with her that this bill is weaker than what the Liberal Party had promised in the past election campaign.

Does my colleague think it is possible to propose changes to this bill in the committee in question? If the government were to support the amendments to strengthen this bill, would the NDP support them?

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, not only is it possible to improve this bill, it is vital that we do so.

Yesterday at an event, I noticed how popular my colleague is with young women.

I am the mother of teenagers and young adults. I have noticed among some of my constituents that younger people want and have access to information. I am always amazed to see how much more my children know than I did when I was their age. They want to know. They seek information. They will quickly realize that they have hit a wall when it comes to accessing information.

To meet current needs, it is vital that we have real legislation that provides access to information. Today, people want to know and it is their right; they need information. We have to give them the means to access it.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-58, An Act to amend the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, because in my work as an MP I often have to obtain information beyond that provided by the government.

Government Orders

It is very important to me to speak to this bill. I have come to realize that Canadians across the country, including the constituents of Drummond, often seek information to which they do not necessarily have access. It should be known that the government decides to voluntarily disclose some information, but not all. I discovered this when I was elected in 2011. I was looking for a lot of information about shale gas and fracking, because that was a hot topic in the riding of Drummond and across Quebec at the time. I realized that the federal government at the time had conducted research and several studies and put together several review committees, but that not all these reports had been made public.

I ended up having to submit some access to information requests, which is when I realized the limitations of the Access to Information Act. Many passages in the documents I received had been blacked out and made unreadable. Other documents took months and months to reach me. Furthermore, I recently asked a series of questions about the appointment of Ms. Meilleur as official languages commissioner. She eventually took herself out of the running, which I thought was a wise decision. At the time, I asked the government some questions about contact between Ms. Meilleur and officials in the Prime Minister's office and contact between her and officials at Canadian Heritage. Since the answers I received were totally unsatisfactory, I submitted some access to information requests. Right now, I am told, the wait time to receive even a partial answer from Canadian Heritage is 105 days. For the Treasury Board, it is 90 days, and for the Department of Justice, it is 120 days.

I am not going to receive my answers before the new commissioner is appointed. It is easy to see how important it is to have access to this information. I would like to congratulate all the members on the ethics committee for the work they did. They conducted a study and issued a number of recommendations. The ethics commissioner made the same recommendations. The time was ripe for this debate, seeing as this law has been on the books for more than 30 years and never been reviewed. It is worth noting that the sole reason we have this bill is to fulfill one of the Liberals' election promises. The Prime Minister promised during the campaign that he would review the Access to Information Act and extend this act to cover the Prime Minister's office and the ministers' offices.

Unfortunately, I do not see that anywhere in Bill C-58. I asked my Liberal colleagues about this, and they told me it had been extended to ministers' offices and the Prime Minister's office, but proactive disclosure does not mean extending the Access to Information Act to the Prime Minister's and ministers' offices. It is not the same thing. Proactive disclosure, as the word "proactive" implies, means that people choose what they want to disclose, but often, what people want is the information the government chooses not to disclose. That is the difference, and that is why the Access to Information Act is so important.

• (1335)

Earlier, I shared some examples to do with shale gas, fracking, and the appointment of an official languages commissioner who apparently had ties to the government. In cases like those, it is important for people to have access to information that the government chooses not to disclose for various reasons.

I have some other concerns about this bill. For example, it adds new loopholes. As I mentioned, for various reasons, information can be blacked out or entire reports can be nothing but blank pages. The pages exist, but all that is provided is blank pages. That is a problem we have already.

Now there will be a new loophole allowing departments to decline to process requests that they deem overly broad, that they feel would seriously interfere with government operations, or that they think are made in bad faith.

I will come back to those last two very important elements. Obviously, if the government deliberately decides, for example, not to disclose large quantities of research and studies conducted by Environment Canada and Natural Resources Canada on fracking and shale gas and I request it, a lot of work will need to be done to gather and process all of that information. I am not asking for it because I am acting in bad faith or because I want to interfere with the government's work. I am asking for it because residents of Drummond and Canadians paid for that information. It should already be available. However, I have to go through the Access to Information Act to give people access to that information. The government cannot start saying that this will create too much work. Of course if the government does not disclose information proactively, then it will create a lot of work for itself down the road.

The government could also determine that the request was made in bad faith. No definition, details, or explanation is provided in that regard. That means that anyone can decide that a request was made in bad faith. If I ask a question about the connection between the current government and Ms. Meilleur's appointment as official languages commissioner, my request could be deemed to have been made in bad faith, when in actual fact it is extremely important that Canadians have that information in order to make sure that the Liberals do not make the same mistake again.

This is completely unacceptable, and that is why we will be voting against this bill. For a government that claims to want to be transparent and to improve access to information, this bill is not going to work at all.

I would like to talk about the battle that the NDP has been waging since the mid-2000s to improve the Access to Information Act. My former colleague, MP Pat Martin, tried a number of times to improve the Access to Information Act. Unfortunately, the Conservative government at the time thwarted all of his attempts. It was really disappointing.

Government Orders

We have nothing against the government's much-vaunted proactive disclosure. It is good in principle. However, proactive disclosure is not the same thing as the Access to Information Act. Obviously, if we already had more proactive disclosure, we would not have to submit so many access to information requests. However, the fact remains that the government could still, at any time and for any reason, decide not to disclose certain information. That is why the Access to Information Act is so important. It needs to be revised and improved. This bill will not do the trick, and that is why we need to fix it.

• (1340)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I firmly believe that this bill will improve access to information for all Canadians. According to the specifics of the bill, proactive disclosure will apply to 240 government departments and agencies, including the Prime Minister's office, MPs' offices, and the institution of Parliament.

Why is the NDP siding with the Conservatives in refusing to give Canadians better access to information?

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, who does such excellent work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, on which I also sit.

As the member well knows, proactive disclosure is not the same thing as direct access to information. He knows full well that Canadian Heritage refused to proactively disclose the connection between the department and the individual it had decided to appoint as official languages commissioner. He knows full well that the Prime Minister's Office refused to proactively disclose its connection to Ms. Meilleur when it decided to appoint her official languages commissioner.

That is why we need access to information legislation that is robust and that applies to the Prime Minister's Office and all ministers' offices, but this bill does not provide for that.

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Saint Boniface—Saint Vital for his assurances that this document will indeed provide Canadians with more access to information, but I want to ask my hon. colleague from Drummond if he feels some uneasiness.

Time and again, for the last 24 months, we have heard promises of openness and transparency from the government, but it has again failed us. It has failed Canadians. It has not lived up to those promises time and again. This is merely another opportunity for the government to pick and choose what it tells Canadians, to go about things its own way, to make the laws for itself, and to shut out Canadians and those who have been elected to represent them from the information that is critical to Canadians.

I wonder if he feels exactly the same way as those on this side of the House.

• (1345)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question and his comment.

He is quite right. This is another broken promise from this Liberal government. It made a clear, specific promise that it would extend the Access to Information Act to the Prime Minister's Office and ministers' offices.

Why did the government go back on its word? Why did it not keep its promise? I do not understand. We find it completely unacceptable to renege on such a clear and specific promise. This promise was even explicit in the mandate letter.

It is unacceptable to backtrack without a valid reason, and yet that is what the Liberals are doing. They are trying to play a shell game by saying that there will be proactive disclosure, but that is not the same thing. One must not confuse carrots and potatoes; they are two different things. They want us to believe their malarkey.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as we gather today to debate Bill C-58, we should be mindful of the fact that this is international Right to Know Week. As we gather here, in another part of town the Information Commissioner is holding a full-day conference on declaring that access to information is a fundamental human right. In that case, I wonder if my colleague would agree that our human rights are violated when Bill C-58 falls so short of being true access to open government and access to information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, not only does Bill C-58 not extend the Access to Information Act, but it goes even further by giving departments loopholes so they can refuse to process access to information requests on the grounds that, for example, they were made in bad faith or would create too much work for public servants. The government cannot do things like that.

I have submitted plenty of access to information requests about fracking and shale gas. Of course the departments got annoyed at me for pestering them, but why did they not disclose that information themselves? Because they did not want to.

It could easily happen again. The government will disclose the information that makes it look good, and any information that could be harmful or embarrassing to it will be tucked away where no one can get at it. This is utterly unacceptable. These are not the actions of a transparent government that respects the people. It needs to change its attitude.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the vote be deferred to the expiry of the time provided for government orders on Wednesday, September 27.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 27, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

* * *

• (1350)

[*English*]

CUSTOMS ACT

The House resumed from September 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Customs Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have a wonderful piece of legislation before the House of Commons. It is truly amazing in terms of the wonderful, positive measures that this government has been able to achieve in less than two years. I see my colleagues across the way enjoy that fact, and we continue to encourage opposition members to support good government initiatives, and this is yet one more example.

It was not that long ago that we were talking about pre-clearance issues and the benefits to Canada and the U.S., but in particular for Canada, on the whole issue. We learned quite a bit from that legislation in terms of how that enabled Canadians to get into the U.S. in a quicker fashion by being pre-cleared here in Canada so that, when they arrive in the U.S., they could walk off the plane into the communities to which they have flown, and the economic impact of having that.

I would reference the additional airports that were being incorporated under pre-clearance and how those communities in different regions of our country were economically going to benefit by that, not to mention Quebec and B.C. and the benefits in terms of the railway pre-clearance concept.

The legislation we are debating today is yet one more step, and this is a very aggressive, progressive government wanting to take advantage of what is really important to Canada's middle class and those who are aspiring to be a part of it, and that is growing the economy. I would suggest that is what the bill is about. It deals with the exportation of products. Though we hear concerns at times from members across the way regarding exportation of some products, this legislation deals with that.

I would like to go into some of the specifics, but before I do that, I want to highlight what I believe are some of the initiatives that this government has taken on the important issue of trade. Even today we

are in negotiations in regard to trade with the United States. We have a minister who is diligently, in a very robust way, ensuring that Canadians' best interests are at the table. We have industries, such as agriculture to aerospace and all the industries in between, that are being well represented by that current negotiating team. It goes without saying that Canada has some of the best, if not the best, trade negotiators in the world.

We have seen that in terms of some of the agreements we have been able to accomplish in the last couple of years. Yes, in some ways the previous government was able to initiate some trade agreements and we were able to continue the discussions. In some cases we actually saved the discussions, so that ultimately we would have a final trade agreement. I see that as a very strong positive, because it adds value to Canadians in terms of jobs and opportunities.

Canada's middle class is best served when we have a government that is in tune with the needs of our middle class. Today, through this legislation, we are seeing a number of initiatives, and I would like to share through the bill's summary what Bill C-21 would do:

This enactment amends the Customs Act to authorize the Canada Border Services Agency to collect, from prescribed persons and prescribed sources, personal information on all persons who are leaving or have left Canada. It also amends the Act to authorize an officer, as defined in that Act, to require that goods that are to be exported from Canada are to be reported despite any exemption under that Act. In addition, it amends the Act to provide officers with the power to examine any goods that are to be exported. Finally, it amends the Act to authorize the disclosure of information collected under the Customs Act to an official of the Department of Employment and Social Development for the purposes of administering or enforcing the Old Age Security Act.

• (1355)

There are significant benefits from this legislation. I will list but a few of them. We would improve the ability of law enforcement to respond, for example, to things like an Amber Alert and to the outbound movement of known high-risk travellers, child sex offenders, human traffickers, and fugitives from justice, all of which I believe are important for us to recognize. It would help to prevent radicalized individuals from travelling overseas to participate in terrorist activities, and it would help to prevent the illegal export of controlled, regulated, and prohibited goods from Canada. It would also allow for the verifying of travel dates to determine applicable duty and tax exemptions, rather than relying strictly on self-declaration.

In addition, it would continue to identify individuals who do not leave Canada at the end of their authorized period of stay. That has always been a very strong personal issue for me because I would travel, especially while I was an MLA and even in my first couple of years as a member of Parliament. People go to places like the Punjab or India or the Philippines and one of the issues when they talk to immigration officials, in trying to serve the constituents whom we represent, is that the officials will say that there is a certain process that needs to be followed for visas to be issued.

One of the issues that consistently has come up over the years is whether a person will in fact return to their own country if that person is issued a temporary visa.

Statements by Members

Far too often, we get family members who want to be able to come to Canada to participate in special celebrations like weddings, graduations, and, sadly, funerals of family members, and they are rejected. I would suggest that the primary reason they would be rejected is that the officials have a question mark as to whether those people would return to their homeland. Time and again and still to this very day, I consistently argue that we need, as much as possible, to give the benefit of the doubt to those family members so they are able to be with their families in Canada during those celebrations and otherwise. The officials often could not quantify it; they could not say that we have x number of people not leaving the country. This piece of legislation would help deal with that.

I see my time is quickly running out, so I will continue after question period.

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary will have 12 minutes remaining in his time for speaking when the House resumes debate on this question following question period.

The hon. member for Repentigny.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

CABLE PUBLIC AFFAIRS CHANNEL

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a place in Ottawa where the Bloc Québécois is recognized for what it is, which is a political party that is there for Quebec. There is a place in Ottawa where the Liberals answer the questions asked of them. There is a place in Ottawa where MPs debate issues that affect Canadians and where the government has to set aside its canned responses and come out of hiding. That place is CPAC.

That is where we speak frankly, where we debate, where we all have our place. For the past 25 years, CPAC has been a key forum that makes us go beyond party lines and refine our arguments. Half an hour of debate every day among MPs forces us to fine-tune our arguments and excel. It makes us better politicians.

For 25 years, the Cable Public Affairs Channel has played its educational and democratic role with talent and enthusiasm.

Hats off to all its creators. Long live CPAC.

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[*English*]

SUMMER IN MISSISSAUGA—STREETSVILLE

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was a busy and productive summer back in Mississauga—Streetsville. Some of the highlights included celebrating Canada 150 in Streetsville Square, throwing the first pitch at a Mississauga Tigers baseball game, and spending afternoons with the local youth at The Dam in Meadowvale. I also conducted a round table with numerous pharmaceutical companies, hosted by Roche.

Another enjoyable part of the summer was visiting numerous employers through the Canada summer job program, which had hired over 300 students, teaching them the valuable life experiences

that would help them in the future. Most important, I had the pleasure of meeting with countless constituents, whether in my office, coffee shops, at local fairs, or at events.

I am happy to be back in the House to continue to voice their concerns and advocate on their behalf.

* * *

● (1400)

TAXATION

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small business owners are the backbone of the Canadian economy. They create jobs and countless opportunities in communities all across the country. Nowhere is that more true than in Banff—Airdrie, the riding I have the privilege of representing.

The Prime Minister keeps trying to claim that these small business owners are somehow wealthy tax cheats. He could not be further from the truth. We are not talking about the Prime Minister's millionaire friends; we are talking about hard-working middle-class Canadians. It is the coffee shop down the street, the person who cuts our hair, and the mechanic who fixes our cars. These are the people the Liberal government is trying to tax right out of business.

There is nothing fair about a massive tax grab on the job creators in our communities. These are the people who support our local sports teams and sponsor our local charities. Every time the Prime Minister stands and calls them wealthy tax cheats, he is insulting millions of Canadians who contribute so much to our country.

This is a crippling tax increase on the very people the Liberals claim they are trying to help, middle-class Canadians.

* * *

U-18 BASEBALL WORLD CUP

Mr. Don Rusnak (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past month, Thunder Bay was honoured to host the 2017 under 18 Baseball World Cup. Over 10 days, our city saw 50 baseball games played by teams from Canada, United States, Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Japan, Korea, Chinese Taipei, Italy, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Australia.

Along with having the opportunity to watch the best young baseball players in the world in action, Thunder Bay also saw some incredible displays of sportsmanship and hospitality off the field. Moments before Team Cuba headed to Port Arthur Stadium for its game against Team Canada, players were gifted some baseball cleats by employees of Canadian National Railway, the CN Police Service, and the Canadian Pacific Police Association. Moments like these make our whole city extremely proud.

I want to take this chance to thank organizers, volunteers, and athletes for their amazing work. They put on an extraordinary event.

It was an honour to host these incredible young athletes, and an incredible opportunity to showcase Thunder Bay and our region to the world.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

QUEBEC CULTURE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to develop my first passion, the music industry, for 25 years. I have always believed that society's great projects are born of culture. It was because our cultural industry had never been in so much trouble, weakened by the digital revolutions and abandoned by our governments, that I decided to put my money where my mouth was and go into politics.

This week, I am resolutely awaiting the Minister of Heritage's speech about the future of our cultural industries. Like everyone else, I have a lot of expectations, and I am worried.

I am worried that in the new policy, I may not find the measures that are key to ensuring the continuity, the equity, and the support so sorely needed by our industries and by our image as a people on screens both at home and abroad.

I am worried that the reform may not be as solid, not as structuring, for Quebec culture as were Pierre Juneau's quotas or Camille Laurin's Bill 101.

I am worried, unfortunately, that the federal government may once again impose a one-size-fits-all Canadian solution on Quebec, where we have our very own cultural ecosystem, a success that is the envy of the whole world.

I will be listening to the minister's speech on Thursday. Although I still allow myself a little hope, I must confess that I am really worried for Quebec culture.

* * *

[English]

DIABETES

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after a very busy and productive summer in my riding of Brampton South, I am happy to rise today.

This summer I joined my Brampton colleagues for a community celebration in July. I enjoyed seeing the diversity of my community through Carabram, and we marked Canada's 150th anniversary together.

As chair of the all-party diabetes caucus, I visited Canadians across the country to discuss our healthy eating strategy and looked at ways to reduce the impact of diabetes, which affects 11 million Canadians.

I am happy to be back in Ottawa to get back to work on the priorities I heard during those consultations. I want to thank the hard-working health care advocates across the country who met with me and who are our allies. We are moving forward to defeat diabetes.

* * *

● (1405)

TAXATION

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past month, I have hosted two town halls with business people from my riding of Calgary Midnapore. Because they were so

concerned about the impacts of this attack on small business, they took time away from their family and companies to share with me the shock they felt that they were being punished for creating new businesses, employing Canadians, and contributing to the economy.

Mr. Dunlaw has farmed all his life. These changes will mean it is cheaper for him to sell his family farm than to pass it down to his kids. This is just sad.

Dr. Julie Schell is a local veterinarian. Under this unfair tax policy, she would have to lay off employees, cancel new hires, and forget any plans to upgrade her equipment.

These people are not the 1%; they are hard-working middle-class families trying to make a living, which is becoming increasingly difficult under the Liberal government.

I urge the Prime Minister to stop treating small business owners, the backbone of our country's economy, with such disrespect.

* * *

AUTISM

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, autism affects one in 68 children. It restricts brain growth and social development. In my province of British Columbia, it impacts an estimated 56,000 people.

The good news is that in B.C. there is a place for families to go so they do not feel alone in their struggle. I am excited to tell the House about the work of the Pacific Autism Family Network and its newest autism hub in Richmond.

This provincial centre of excellence unites research, treatment, and support for those affected by autism. Through spoke centres, it connects families, organizations, and researchers in communities across the province.

I commend the founder, Wendy Lisogar-Cocchia, for her vision and commitment to this cause, and the members of the Pacific Autism Family Network team for their dedication in improving the lives of families with autism.

* * *

[Translation]

TERRY FOX DAY

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be back on Parliament Hill after a busy summer in Vimy, the riding I represent. I am sure that we have all worked hard in our ridings, especially my colleagues out west who are affected by the forest fires.

Last week in Vimy, I had the honour of joining many Canadians for Terry Fox Day, when every year we raise money in support of cancer research. The loss of our friend and colleague Arnold Chan reminds us that everyone is affected by this disease in one way or another. I would like to thank all those who participated in this day's activities across Canada and around the world, and who give hope to all those affected.

Statements by Members

[English]

I thank all the runners, the volunteers, those who donate, and the Terry Fox Foundation for continuing to work to achieve Terry's vision: a world without cancer.

* * *

TAXATION

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I stopped at the local gas station to fill up. Chad is one of the local owners and provides with me with updates on the community. However, last week was a bit different. He shared with me his thoughts on the proposed Liberal tax changes that would impact his family.

Chad is the youngest son of Sam and Camilla. Sam and Camilla have owned the local store and station for over 30 years. The store and station is their retirement. Sam is now ill. Sam and Camilla have assisted their children in post-secondary education through their hard work. Instead of letting them live their retirement in dignity after working 60 to 70 hours a week for decades, the government is throwing a wrench in their retirement. All of the financial risks they carried personally during their years of supporting their family through highs and lows no longer matter.

I urge the government to start thinking about the small business owners in Elgin—Middlesex—London. They are not the 1%; they are farmers, renovators, home builders, restaurateurs, and retailers. I ask the Liberals to start listening, please.

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[Translation]

LASSONDE INDUSTRIES

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have good news. I would like to recognize the 100th anniversary of an extraordinary contributor, Lassonde Industries, in Rougemont, in my riding of Shefford.

The company, which was founded in 1918 by Aristide Lassonde, is proud to begin its 100th anniversary celebrations. It is a jewel in our industrial landscape, one that the entire population and all workers are very proud of.

Through acquisitions and agreements with major brands like Sunkist and Sun-Maid, the company is now recognized for its products, including Oasis and Rougemont. It has grown into one of the largest fruit juice manufacturers in North America, with 2,100 employees and sales of over \$1 billion a year.

Lassonde Industries makes an important link between agriculture, processing, and innovation. This company is a model of growth and success. I extend my best wishes for their celebrations.

* * *

● (1410)

AU DIABLE VERT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to Jeremy Fontana, Julie Zeitlinger, and the whole team at Au Diable Vert in Glen Sutton

for winning the prestigious title of Canada's Leading Wilderness Resort 2017 at this year's World Travel Awards.

Au Diable Vert offers everything from treehouse cabins and hiking trails winding through green mountains to treetop cycles and canoeing down the Missisquoi River. In short, it is a magical spot where this innovative team has created novel outdoor activities that everyone can enjoy.

Congratulations to Jeremy and Julie for their vision and dedication. It is thanks to entrepreneurs like them that our region has such a wealth of recreation and tourism opportunities to offer. It also happens to be the grape harvesting season. Brome—Missisquoi welcomes you.

* * *

[English]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when speaking at the United Nations General Assembly last week, the Prime Minister had an opportunity to lay out a plan for Canada's leadership on the global stage.

He could have asked the UN to appoint a humanitarian coordinator for the Venezuelan situation to address the inability of NGOs to deliver aid there. He could have challenged the world to support the Yazidis and announced when he would fulfill his promise to bring 1,200 Yazidis to Canada. He could have called upon the world to encourage Myanmar to give citizenship to the Rohingya people and allow aid organizations and journalists into Rakhine state. He could have supported the Secretary-General and his calls for reforming the UN and calls for a reallocation of the UN's budget to its human rights protection activities, which presently only receive 2% of the total budget. He could have called for the UNHCR to reform its operations to better protect genocide survivors, internally displaced persons, and persons facing immediate persecution. He could have done these things and more, but he did not.

On the global stage, Canadians need someone who believes in doing more than speaking pretty, hollow words. Canada and the world deserve better.

* * *

WOMEN IN THE HOUSE PROGRAM

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and recognize the 100 amazing young women leaders on Parliament Hill today, who are shadowing MPs as part of the University of Toronto's women in the House program.

This program was co-founded in 2013 by Tina Park and our very own Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. Its aim is to promote greater representation of women in Canadian politics.

Equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women. When women participate fully in the public life of our country, we all benefit from the diversity of perspectives, talent, and experience they contribute.

Oral Questions

To this end, since 2016, \$13.5 million in Status of Women Canada funding has been approved to strengthen the participation of women in democratic life.

Finally, I would like to give a special welcome to Lydia and Heather, who are shadowing me today. I welcome them to Parliament.

* * *

ROBERT CARRICK

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honour Constable Robert Carrick, a police officer from the town of LaSalle in my riding.

Constable Carrick lost his life while responding to a domestic violence call on August 23, 1969. He was 22 years old and had been an officer in the Sandwich West Police Force for only three years. He was the first to arrive at the violent scene where, despite the dangerous situation, he was able to safely get the wife, child, and babysitter out of harm's way before the husband opened fire and shot Carrick five times.

Constable Carrick loved being a police officer, and he had a great love for helping people. His family described him as a generous person who would buy extra groceries or shoes, leaving them on the doorsteps of people who needed an extra helping hand.

I want to also recognize the work of LaSalle town councillor Mike Akpata, who tabled a motion in council, and LaSalle police deputy chief, Chuck Scanlan, who was very active on this issue. Their work led to Constable Carrick's memory being properly celebrated on August 20 this year, when our community gathered to honour the service of this hometown hero with the dedication of the Robert C. Carrick Memorial Tunnel.

I hope everyone in the House will join me in expressing our thanks to all police officers, first responders, and front-line workers who have lost their lives on the job in our community.

* * *

• (1415)

WORLD ALZHEIMER'S MONTH

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to recognize that September is World Alzheimer's Month, while September 21 was the day we reminded ourselves about Alzheimer's.

There are an estimated 564,000 Canadians living with dementia, and about 25,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. In 2016, we were one of those cases.

I want the House to know something. I want this House to know that in the past 16 months, I have learned a lot. I have learned that it is incredibly frustrating that there is no treatment or cure for Alzheimer's. I have learned that one needs to be prepared to have everything take a lot longer: a lot longer to get out the door, a lot longer to discuss issues, and a lot longer to talk about directions going to the grocery store. However, most important, I want the House to know that living with dementia can be okay. We have a good life. We focus on things Bruce can do, not on the things we can no longer do. We keep our health well. We sleep. We eat well. Bruce

exercises, and we socialize together. These are the things that actually matter.

I want the House of Commons to know that life can be okay with dementia and Alzheimer's, and I will continue to update the House as we continue our journey.

* * *

CYBERTIP.CA

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this month marks the 15th anniversary of Cybertip.ca, a tip line for reporting the online sexual exploitation of children.

[Translation]

Continuing our work with this organization is absolutely essential to our efforts to protect children. This group has been a vital partner in our strategy for the protection of children from sexual exploitation on the Internet since 2004, when Anne McLellan was the minister.

[English]

In the last 15 years it has received 266,000 tips, 40,000 in the last year alone. Every tip represents a child's victimization but also a step toward the rescue of that child and the apprehension of the predator.

We are so lucky and grateful to have this program. We are so grateful for the work it does. We only wish it was not necessary.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

TAXATION

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are telling us how concerned they are about the tax increases the Prime Minister wants to impose on local businesses. This affects our farmers and our small business owners, as well as all their employees. Our public meetings across the country have been attracting hundreds of people who are wondering how these tax hikes will affect their jobs and retirement plans.

Will the Prime Minister listen to what Canadians are saying and finally stop raising taxes on local businesses?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard the concerns of Canadians across the country and I can reassure them. We are not going to hurt small businesses or the middle class. We are committed to helping the middle class. That is why we lowered taxes on the middle class and raised them on the wealthiest 1%.

We are always going to help small businesses with innovation and by providing them with the support they need to succeed. We know that the economy depends on them. That is why we will always stand by small and medium-sized businesses.

Oral Questions

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small-business owners use legitimate tools like passive investments to save for things like the future growth and expansion of their operations. They also use it as a rainy day fund to get them through when times are tough. Now the Liberals want to tax these savings at a rate of up to 73%.

When it comes to these increased taxes on passive investments, in the long run, can the Prime Minister tell us exactly how much more revenue the government will collect?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a system we inherited from the Conservatives that allows wealthy Canadians to use private corporations as a way of paying lower tax rates than middle-class Canadians. We do not think that is fair.

When it comes to passive investments, it is actually interesting that the top 2% of private corporations hold 80% of all the passive income in this country. Those are wealthy Canadians we want to make sure pay their fair share of taxes. That is what all Canadians want. That is what we are delivering on.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that seems to be a no. He cannot tell us exactly how much the government will collect. What we do know is that when they raised taxes even on the 1%, they ended up collecting less revenue. Department officials show that. What we are learning is that the Liberal government is so incompetent that it cannot even raise taxes properly.

A new report confirms that 81% of middle-class families are paying more in taxes under the Liberals, but he admits that his new changes will not touch his own family fortune.

Why does it always seem that the Prime Minister's plans are designed to hurt everybody but himself?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, interestingly, that new report completely overlooked the Canada child benefit. We are giving nine out of 10 Canadian families more money every single month for the high cost of raising their kids. The way we are doing that is by not sending it to wealthy families, like the Leader of the Opposition's or mine. We are giving it to the families who need the help. The way we are doing that is actually having an impact on Canadians right across the country, as we are reducing child poverty by 40% in this country. That is what this government sees as important. That is what this government is going to continue to do.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he does not seem to need the child tax benefit, but he sure does not mind taking taxpayers' money for government-funded nannies.

With these increased tax hikes, the average family is now paying close to \$1,000 more every year in taxes. That is money that should be going to pay for things like bus passes, hockey practices, and swimming lessons, not new taxes.

The Prime Minister is always out there looking for more, because he has a spending problem. The first step is always to admit that one

has a problem. Will the Prime Minister admit that he has a problem and abandon these unfair tax hikes?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the very first thing we did in government was lower taxes for the middle class and raise them for the wealthiest 1%, which that party voted against. The next thing we did was bring in the Canada child benefit, which gives more money to nine out of 10 Canadian families for the high cost of raising their kids, but it is only nine out of 10 Canadian families, because the wealthiest families no longer receive Canada child benefits, unlike what the Conservative government previously did.

We know the best way to help this country grow is to help those who need it, not those who do not.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is just his wealthy family that gets support from taxpayers for looking after his kids.

The Prime Minister's tax increases are going to hurt middle-class Canadians who are trying to run their businesses. Their staff are worried about being faced with reduced hours and an increased chance of layoffs. He either does not care or he is completely oblivious of the impact of his policies, except that he is quite sure that these new rules will not affect his own family fortune.

Why will the Prime Minister not give the same protection to middle-class Canadians that his family trust enjoys?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we need a system that is fair for everyone. The current system encourages wealthy families to actually use private corporations to pay a lower tax rate than middle-class Canadians. That is not fair. Canadians elected us to fix it, and that is exactly what we are going to do. We are doing it because it is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

From lowering taxes on the middle class and raising them on the wealthiest 1%, to delivering the Canada child benefit, we have created opportunity and economic growth for the middle class across this country, after 10 years of failure—

• (1425)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Outremont.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government issued new directives on torture. Those directives still allow the use of information obtained through torture. To the NDP, there is no context in which torturing a human being is defensible.

Oral Questions

How can this Prime Minister, who brags about being a great defender of human rights, approve the use of the fruits of torture?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, torture is prohibited under the Criminal Code, by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, by the international community, and by our Canadian values.

The new directives we brought forward reinforce the prohibition on torture and clarify the fact that we do not accept it. That is what Canadians expect. We will always do what it takes to protect the rights and values of Canadians, while keeping them safe.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he says that torture is poison, but he is not shy about using the fruits of that poisonous tree.

Earlier this year, in this place, the Minister of Public Safety stated that torture was contrary to the charter. He also said, “torture is found to be abhorrent by Canadians, and we reject it.”

They cannot claim to stand up for human rights on the one hand and be complicit in torture on the other. How can the Prime Minister stand in this place and defend the use of information obtained by torture?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, torture is prohibited by the Criminal Code. It is against the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is condemned by the international community, and it is abhorrent to Canadian values.

That is why the strengthened ministerial directives we put forward actually reinforce the prohibitions against torture and reassure Canadians that we will do everything we can to keep them safe while upholding our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our values.

* * *

ETHICS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he is not prohibiting the use of the fruits of torture. That is what is wrong here.

[Translation]

What do the Commissioner of Lobbying, the Commissioner of Official Languages, and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner have in common? All three investigated the Prime Minister and all three are looking for a new job.

The government has spent more than \$2 million looking for a new commissioner. All we got was the botched nomination of a partisan Liberal. That cost \$2 million.

What is really going on? Could it be that the Liberals want lapdogs instead of watchdogs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since we have been in government, we have put in place a new appointment process that has resulted in a number of appointments within our government that much better reflect Canada's diversity: a record number of women, indigenous peoples, and people from visible minorities.

We established a better way to select people based on merit. We will continue to choose people who reflect Canada's great diversity and strengths.

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost 10 months since the Ethics Commissioner launched an investigation into the Prime Minister's private billionaire island vacation. It is coming up on a year since the Lobbying Commissioner began looking into Liberal fundraisers hosted by the head of pharmaceutical giant Apotex. By the way, we just learned that Apotex is suing the Lobbying Commissioner to stop that investigation. It is hard to keep track of all these scandals.

My question for the Prime Minister is, what the heck happened? What happened to his promise of respect for Parliament and empowering the independent officers? People say that power corrupts, but boy, this was awfully fast.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect a government that is open and transparent, that co-operates with all investigations, that encourages a level of public disclosure never before seen. As a party and as a government, we have consistently raised the bar on openness and transparency, including when it comes to fundraising, and I encourage the members opposite to follow the new rules on fundraising to prevent them from fundraising in secret, behind closed doors, and refusing to let journalists see just who they are raising money from.

* * *

● (1430)

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, many businesses are worried about the NAFTA negotiations, but here at home, our own Liberal government is going after our small local businesses, our farmers, our electricians, our entrepreneurs, and our restaurateurs by taxing them more heavily, which will cause job losses across Canada.

Will the Prime Minister finally give our middle-class workers a break? Will he stop picking their pockets to cover the massive deficit he himself ran up?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our current tax system encourages the very wealthy to set up private companies so they can enjoy lower tax rates than the middle class. It is not a good system.

We will look at ways to improve our system. We are also doing things to improve the economy. It is important to have an economy that works for small and medium-sized businesses. Fortunately, that is the kind of economy we have. We have a very high growth rate and lots of new jobs, which is very important for small businesses.

Oral Questions

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance can keep on repeating his talking points as much as he wants. There is one fact that he will never be able to deny: our job creators, the SMEs, farmers, and local businesses that create 90% of our jobs by working hard every day are going to be hit hard by this unfair tax reform.

Will the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance stop lecturing us every question period and stop this direct attack on our entrepreneurs, our job creators, the people who create jobs across Canada?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is not at all the case.

We are looking for a way to improve our tax system. We are going to find a way to have a system that encourages people to invest in their businesses. That is very important. We need a fair tax system. A tax system that encourages the wealthiest Canadians to set up private corporations that are taxed less than the middle class is not a fair system.

We want a system that is fair and allows people to invest in their active businesses.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday I was at the Halifax West High School, where over 400 residents crammed into the cafeteria to talk about these tax changes. I listened to their stories and shared their concerns, and yet I was the only member of Parliament in attendance. That is right: not a single one of the 32 Atlantic members of Parliament were there to listen or to defend their government's policies.

If their own members are not willing to defend this policy, when is the minister going to drop these changes?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that citizens in Atlantic Canada and across the country want a tax system that is fair. They want to make sure that the system does not encourage the richest to incorporate so they can have a lower tax rate than the middle class.

We are out listening to people. I too was in Nova Scotia listening to small business owners and professionals and I too was in New Brunswick listening to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and we are going to continue listening to them. We know that what we are focused on are measures that are helping the very wealthiest. We know that 80% of assets and past investments are in 2% of small companies. What we are doing is making sure our system is fair.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): He may have gone to Atlantic Canada, Mr. Speaker, but he absolutely did not hear from constituents. Let me give an example.

On the same day that he decided he was not going to go to this incredibly large gathering of 400 people, he did have a private closed-door little session 15 kilometres down the road. Here is the thing about it: when the public tried to get in, what did they do? They locked the doors.

I want to know. Even if he cannot defend these changes to the general public, I am wondering if he will stop locking people out and start listening.

• (1435)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the members opposite focus on how they can help the wealthiest to maintain tax breaks not available to other middle-class Canadians, what we are trying to do is ensure that our system works for the long term, so I will continue to be out listening to Canadians. That is very important.

We know that as we move forward, Canadians want to make sure that we get this right. They want to ensure that we continue to have investments in our small businesses and the incentives to do so. We will do that, but at the same time, we will make sure the system works for all Canadians.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the finance minister are not only helping the wealthy, they are doing it by helping themselves.

The Prime Minister said his family fortune will be sheltered from these changes. The finance minister has structured the changes so that they will not apply to any company that trades on the stock market, like his billion-dollar family business, so while ma and pa in the corner store will pay higher taxes, his billionaire company will not. Why will the bill on Main Street be so much higher than for Bill on Bay Street?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this sort of scaremongering is what is going on across our country.

The fact of the matter is that we will make sure small business tax rates stay low. We will make sure that small businesses can continue to invest in their business. That is our ongoing commitment. However, we are making sure that the system does not advantage the wealthiest in our society over the middle class. This is important.

We on this side of the House can actually do two things at the same time: help small businesses to invest and keep tax rates low. That is what we are going to do.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they are doing two things at the same time: protecting the finance minister's family fortune and the Prime Minister's family fortune. If it is just scaremongering, if it is not true that their fortunes are sheltered, can the minister give me one example of a change in these proposals that will raise taxes on the Prime Minister's fortune or on the finance minister's fortune?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know, having taken a look at our tax code, that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Most members in all parties are able to sit through question period and not react when someone else is speaking and are able to wait until the microphone is on in front of them and it is their turn to speak before doing so. I would ask the rest to show a little respect for opposing views. Whether they like what they are saying or not, we have to listen to them in a democracy.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everyone remembers the fraudulent scheme orchestrated by Swiss Bank UBS to help wealthy individuals, including Canadians, avoid paying their taxes.

Believe it or not, 10 years later, the Minister of National Revenue is still refusing to meet with one of the main whistle-blowers in this case. It is completely ridiculous. A former bank employee wants to share information about instances of tax evasion and the minister is simply refusing to listen to what he has to say. Let us be serious here.

Can the minister explain why she is still refusing to listen to what this whistle-blower has to say, even though he made it possible for the U.S. to recover hundreds of millions of dollars?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is fully committed to combatting tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance.

In our last two budgets, we invested nearly \$1 billion to crack down on tax cheats. Our plan is working. Last year, we announced that we would recover \$13 billion. What is more, 335 cases were transferred for criminal investigation, and \$10 million in fines were imposed, as were \$44 million in third-party penalties. We have a tax informant program in place if anyone anywhere in the world has any information they want to give us.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, she could also just set up a meeting with him.

[English]

It is funny how a Liberal's memory sounds like Dory's in the movie *Finding Nemo*.

A small business tax reduction: never heard about that. However, the Liberals promised to tackle big loopholes for CEOs that cost us hundreds of millions of dollars. Not anymore. In fact, the finance minister said on the radio, "That issue is not something that we've backed away from. It's just not something we've moved forward on."

Come on. Why are the Liberals targeting the little guys and protecting their wealthy friends on Bay Street?

• (1440)

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to take that question. We took a look at our tax code. We took a look at where significant advantages were going to wealthy Canadians and how, just by incorporating, they are able to reduce their tax rate so it is lower than the tax rate for people in the middle class. We know that is not fair. We also know that it is not something that will allow people to make investments in the ongoing success of our economy. Therefore, we are focused on how we can make the system fairer, how we can encourage small businesses and all businesses to invest. We are going to move forward with these measures after listening to Canadians about how to do them properly. That is really important. We will end up with a tax system that is more fair.

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRIFOOD

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of questions regarding the new Liberal tax and yet I keep hearing the same broken record. The Liberals are insulting farmers with their inane one-liner. The farmers, their families, and the people in my riding who purchase our high-quality local products at reasonable prices are worried. The Minister of Agriculture is creating doubt in their minds, instead of encouraging them to cultivate prosperity in Canada.

When will the minister stop being the Prime Minister's yes-man and start acting responsibly to defend farmers?

[English]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we want to create a tax system that is fair for Canadians. We are listening to farmers and encouraging them to share their ideas as to how to create a fairer tax system.

Being a farmer, I truly understand saving money for a rainy day. I know that my colleague would not want to mislead farmers. The fact is that the money that is saved in the corporation is there, fully available for the farmers to use for buying equipment, buying land, growing their company, and making sure that the farm succeeds. What we are going to do is create more business, not less business.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the agriculture minister's answer very interesting. He said that money invested in a corporation is there for a corporation, but clearly he does not understand his own tax changes. The finance minister is taking the ability away from farmers to save for their retirement, invest in their own operations, or put money away for a rainy day in a down year.

Canadian farmers understand the implications that these changes will have. The changes will devastate rural communities and wipe out the family farm. Will the agriculture minister stand with farmers? Will he stand up against the finance minister and beg him to back down from these tax changes?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, this government would create a fairer tax system. I am sure my hon. colleague would never want to mislead farmers. The fact of the matter is that the money that is invested in the corporation is fully available, if my hon. colleague wishes to listen.

The money is fully there and available for the farmers to build buildings, buy property, and increase their business. In fact, what this government wants to do is make sure there is more investment and more business expansion, and with these tax changes, there will be more business expansion.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now I understand.

What is the difference between the Minister of Agriculture and the Minister of Finance?

There is none.

Both ministers regard farmers as cash cows to pay down the Liberal deficit. Some 43,000 farming households in Canada are desperately asking the two ministers to extend the consultation period, but they refuse to listen to them.

Farmers do not benefit from the advice of Morneau Shepell and they do not have time to attend cash-for-access events to speak with the Prime Minister.

If the Minister of Agriculture does not have enough influence to change things, who else will stand up for family farms?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to have a tax system that is fair.

We know that this is not currently the case. Now the wealthy can simply incorporate and pay a lower tax rate than middle-class Canadians. That is not fair.

I know that farmers can continue to invest in their farms. That is very important. We are going to keep listening in order to make sure that farmers can continue their operations, which are so important to our country.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for generations, family farms have been the heart and soul of my community. Farming families work side by side and share in the risks and rewards of making their farms a success. That way of life is now threatened by the Liberal proposal to introduce crippling new taxes that could make transferring the family farm to the next generation next to impossible.

Why are the Liberals threatening to kill family farms with their tax changes, while the multi-millionaire owners of Bay Street businesses like Morneau Shepell will not pay an extra cent?

• (1445)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated many times in the House that what we want to do is create a more fair tax system. These transactions are very complex and have been very complex for many years. We want to hear the views of farmers as to how we handle these transactions and make sure that we are able to help farmers move their family farm from one generation to the other. What we want to do is to hear from the farmers.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this evening, the Minister of Foreign Affairs will be hosting a dinner as part of the NAFTA renegotiations at the National

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Arts Centre. By choosing that location, the minister is stressing the importance of keeping cultural protections in the agreement. Bravo.

However, I sincerely hope that this gesture is not just another symbolic one because the signatories to the nationwide declaration on culture are concerned. They all recall that when the Minister of Canadian Heritage went to Silicon Valley to explain our policies on cultural diversity, she hit a wall.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs assure our creators that she will not bargain away cultural exemption?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, protecting the cultural exemption is a priority for our government.

We recognize how important the contribution of arts and culture is to our economy and our society. NAFTA's record is marked by economic growth and job creation for the middle class. We will continue to work on the national and international levels to preserve cultural diversity in the digital era.

* * *

[English]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while we remain hopeful that our NAFTA partners will see the importance of treating workers fairly, the NDP and workers are concerned. The side agreements on labour standards are weak and unenforceable, and despite the minister's talking points, Canadian officials told the media yesterday that there was little chance of progress. We cannot continue to allow quality Canadian jobs to be exported to Mexico and right-to-work states, where workers are paid as little \$1 an hour.

Will the minister stand up for Canadian jobs and commit to making real progress on workers' safety, rights, and income fairness?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is absolutely committed to advancing the cause of workers' rights through NAFTA and the NAFTA negotiations. In fact, we are very proud in these negotiations to have put forward the most progressive, the strongest labour chapter that Canada has ever put forward in a negotiation. We are very aware that it is unfair to expect our workers to be part of a race to the bottom and to compete against workers with lower standards. That is what we are saying at the table.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the vice-chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. As she will know, today the committee was unable to elect a chair. Could the vice-chair inform the House of the agenda of the committee going forward, considering this new development?

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Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. As members know, questions about the agenda of a committee are in order.

The hon. vice-chair of the committee.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition put forward the member for Lethbridge as the Conservative nominee for chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, someone who is not supportive of women's right to choose. We believe that a committee as important as ours needs to be chaired by an individual—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The vice-chair has the floor.

Ms. Pam Damoff: We believe that a committee as important as ours needs to be chaired by an individual who will protect and advance women's rights. I hope the leader of the official opposition will reconsider and put forward someone who believes in those—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. Members are complaining about what the member is saying, but I cannot possibly hear with all the yelling. If members want the Speaker to listen for breaches of the rules, they are going to have to allow the Speaker to hear what is said.

The hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

* * *

• (1450)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have admitted that a record 40,000 people will make asylum claims to Canada this year. Many of these claims will be made by people illegally crossing the U.S.-Canada border and many of them will be found to be invalid. News reports show that the cost of processing these claims alone, never mind the social assistance payments, is projected to be over half a billion dollars.

Will the Liberals close the loophole in the safe third country agreement, or is the government's new tax on small businesses going to pay for the cost of these false asylum claims?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the safe third country agreement is not about denying asylum. It is an agreement between the United States and Canada on the orderly processing of asylum claimants. We are proud of our robust system. Canada is a welcoming country and we value orderly migration while also ensuring the safety and security of Canadians.

The member opposite must know that the IRB is a quasi-independent judicial body that looks at all asylum claims and determines the merits of each and every case. If an individual has a need for protection, that individual gets to stay in Canada. If not, that individual is removed.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, the safe third country agreement acknowledges that we should not allow border shopping between the U.S. and Canada.

Second, the minister does not acknowledge the fact that the IRB is not processing claims in a timely manner, and this is going to cost Canadians billions of dollars and is preventing people like Yazidi genocide survivors from coming to Canada.

When the government is looking at 300,000 more people in the same situation in the United States, why is it not closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the safe third country agreement works fantastically well for Canada. We use it to co-operate with the United States on the orderly management of asylum claims.

We recognize that the situation presented challenges but we demonstrated time and again that we were ready and nimble enough to manage the situation responsibly.

The member opposite must know that asylum claims fluctuate on a yearly basis and sometimes even on a monthly basis.

The fact of the matter is that our agencies were nimble enough. We were able to put full capacity within IRCC to process claims and move the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like the minister to explain to me why disturbing cases of asylum seekers turning up at our border in possession of child pornography made global headlines last month. Worse still, according to those reports, there are no guidelines for handling such cases. Canadians want assurances that criminals are not crossing our borders.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House when Canadians can expect to have national guidelines for handling this serious problem?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be absolutely assured that in dealing with extraordinary circumstances at the border, all Canadian laws are enforced and all Canadian international obligations are respected. That has in fact been the case throughout the past seven or eight months of activity at the border.

When a specific case of criminal activity is discovered, it is referred to police authorities for the proper prosecution.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Quebec saw a record number of illegal asylum seekers cross the border this year. The number of people entering Canada illegally grows by the day. As we heard today, the Liberals do not want to do anything about this problem.

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Will the Liberals finally admit that the Prime Minister's tweet is the reason people are coming to Canada and that he created a crisis at the Canada-U.S. border?

Will they get to work on fixing the flaw in the safe third country agreement?

[English]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada will always be a welcoming country for those seeking protection from persecution, war, and terror. That is what the Prime Minister's tweet said.

We recognize that the situation presented certain challenges and our agencies, including the IRCC, the RCMP, and CBSA, were able to move nimbly and quickly enough to address the situation.

When that party was in government it did not respond to the largest humanitarian crisis at the time. It was mean enough to cut refugee health care. We will never take lessons on refugees from that party.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, oil spills and marine debris from thousands of abandoned vessels pollute our waterways and threaten local tourism and fishing jobs. After years of neglect, the Liberals will not commit the resources needed to deal with the backlog of abandoned vessels.

This week, the Union of BC Municipalities will vote on a resolution urging the Liberal government to adopt my legislation to solve the long-standing abandoned vessels problem.

When will the government finally listen to coastal communities? Will it support my legislation to clean up our coasts?

• (1455)

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been listening to Canadians. Our Prime Minister announced the oceans protection plan on November 7. We announced the abandoned boats program in May. The Minister of Fisheries and I were in Vancouver three weeks ago announcing another cleanup program. Last week, we tabled the Nairobi international convention on abandoned vessels.

I do not know why that person is not listening to all the initiatives that we are taking to clean up our coasts.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talk about who is not listening and not showing up. Last week the government announced on Twitter that it had signed on to the UN clean seas initiative, but today it is obvious that there is no funding and no plan to meet our obligations. Unfortunately, tweets and selfies will not clean our coastlines.

Volunteers in my riding of Courtenay—Alberni are now in their 10th month cleaning up the largest marine debris spill in decades on the west coast, yet there has been zero funding for this cleanup from the Liberal government, just delays, excuses, and rhetoric.

When will the government finally get to work and fund the cleanup of the Hanjin debris field?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of the oceans protection plan, we made it very clear that we would be introducing legislation with respect to abandoned and wrecked vessels. I just outlined several things related to that. Also, part of the oceans protection plan is to hold the ships that have lost some of their cargo responsible for cleaning up the cargo themselves, which will be part of the oceans protection plan.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we have the Liberals lining the pockets of Liberal insiders. The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations has limited resources to support the welfare of first nations children, and so it is shocking to me and Canadians that she gave half a million dollars to a Liberal friend rather than investing in the well-being of children.

Why do the Liberals put the interests of the former Liberal candidate ahead of the interests of aboriginal children?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to completely overhauling the child and family services in full partnership with first nation communities. The special representative met with 261 chiefs, experts, officials, advocates, individuals, and lived experience from coast to coast to coast to inform our commitment to first nations child welfare reform.

We look forward to receiving a report and recommendations on how we can transform the system to better support and reflect the needs of first nation children and put their well-being first.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and the Liberals are out of touch with the indigenous Canadians they are supposed to be serving. When Cindy Blackstock, an advocate for indigenous youth, questioned the half-million-dollar payout for what she called a “public relations exercise”, Wesley-Esquimaux fired back saying, “If Cindy and her bunch would work together and stop attacking, we could get a lot more done.”

Can the minister tell the House if she agrees with the statements of this former Liberal candidate turned Liberal adviser?

Oral Questions

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge the disproportionate number of indigenous children in the child welfare system. We believe that the transformation requires investments in children, families, and communities, not in lawyers, agencies, and non-indigenous foster families. The MSR was critical to understanding the needs of communities in order to overhaul the system and prevent children from entering the system at all.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only priority of these Liberals is padding the pockets of their Liberal friends. When criticized, Esquimaux defended her lavish payout, saying that it was appropriate because she would have to pay too much in taxes.

If all this minister can do is attempt to justify paying a failed Liberal candidate half a million dollars for a few months' work, will the senior minister of that portfolio sitting beside her at least stand up in the House and condemn this outrageous payout?

• (1500)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, time and time again we have heard from first nation communities that the present system is not in the best interests of children. We need to listen to communities, and that is what the MSR did, because communities do not believe that the perverse incentives that agencies now have are in the best interests of their children.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that CETA is a progressive trade agreement that provides significant advantages for both Canadians and Europeans and that it means that Canada has access to over 500 million EU customers and their GDP of \$22 trillion. This is great news for Canada's hard-working farmers, ranchers, and growers.

Can the Minister of Agriculture highlight some of the successes that the implementation of CETA will mean for Canada's farmers and farm families?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it will certainly be a success for Canadian farmers and it will increase our exports by \$1.5 billion. It could mean \$600 million in the beef industry, \$400 million in the pork industry, \$100 million in the grain industry, and a further \$300 million in processed foods, fruits, and vegetables. This historic agreement will grow our economy, put more money in the farmers' pockets, and help more people join the middle class.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is very selective in its approach to the economics of justice. The Liberals spend millions fighting clearly losing battles in court against indigenous children and women, but the Liberals abandoned a principled defence of Omar Khadr's extravagant claim with a \$10-million payoff they tried to keep secret. The public safety minister blithely claims that, by caving on Khadr, he saved taxpayers millions. That is an unacceptable answer while the government

moves to tax Canadian small businesses literally to death. How is that fair?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue in the Khadr case was precisely and specifically whether the behaviour of Canadian government officials had violated the rights of a Canadian citizen while that individual was in jail. On at least two previous occasions, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled with absolute clarity that the answer was yes, no matter how unpopular the individual in question might be. Rights are not determined by popularity polls or shock jocks on radio; they are determined by the rule of law and the Constitution. In the process, we saved taxpayers millions of dollars.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I launched the "end pension theft" campaign in Jonquière, along with steelworkers, machinists, and retirees from Sears, Rio Tinto Alcan and Abitibi-Consolidated. They were all pleased to see the NDP stand up for the pensions of the workers of Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, because the Liberals made all sorts of promises in the election campaign and, once in power, they just cross their fingers.

Right now, the pensions of Sears employees and retirees are at risk. When will the government make the diversion of pensions illegal?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, those cases are settled under bankruptcy legislation in Canada. We look for a balance between workers' rights, their pension plans, and ways for the company to maintain its activities and jobs. We monitor those situations carefully. We look for balance.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for decades, the RCMP has had Métis artifacts, including clothing, a book of poems, a crucifix and a hunting knife belonging to Louis Riel.

[English]

Advocates have been calling for the items to be returned to the Métis nation for generations. Can the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on the status of the artifacts?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the RCMP has signed an agreement with the Manitoba Metis Federation and the Métis National Council that will see the Riel artifacts returned to the Métis people. According to the agreement, the items will remain on display at the RCMP heritage centre in Regina while the Métis nation finds a more suitable location. These important historical artifacts are being returned to the Métis in the spirit of reconciliation. The agreement is also a recognition of rights and a demonstration of respect, co-operation, and partnership.

* * *

● (1505)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at a time when our retail sector is in crisis, the last thing Canada needs is another retailer going under. Sears Canada has a long and proud tradition in Canada and employs thousands of Canadians in every region. As everyone knows, Sears is currently undergoing a restructuring process.

Will the minister take action and support the efforts currently being undertaken by the executive chairman to save the retailer and most of the 15,000 jobs now at risk and avoid the company being liquidated?

Mr. David Lametti (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously we follow these situations very carefully. As this process is being regulated by the law, we will not comment specifically. However, the law does search to balance the rights that workers have but also give the company an opportunity, in restructuring or when it is being sold, to make sure it protects the workers and their jobs. Once again, we are looking for balance. We do that through the application of the law and our procedures.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the spring, Donald Trump said that he wanted to remove aluminum from the free trade agreement, claiming national security. This is a move to give the aluminum monopoly to a less competitive American company. It is a new trick to circumvent NAFTA. Aluminum is the second-largest export sector in Quebec and accounts for thousands of jobs in Lac-Saint-Jean.

Can the government assure us and our aluminum workers that their jobs will not be left on the table during negotiations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member and all Canadians that the rights of workers in all sectors in Canada are very important to our government during NAFTA negotiations, including workers in the aluminum industry. It really is a very important issue to us. We know that there is a protectionist administration in the United States, but we are working for our workers.

Mr. Simon Marciel (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our farmers are used to being taken for a ride by the Liberal government. Dairy and cheese producers were taken for a ride with the Canada-EU

agreement, our producers were taken for a ride with the compensation program that lasted all of 20 minutes. This is a joke. With NAFTA being renegotiated, they are once again at risk of being hung out to dry. Quebec producers have had enough.

Will the government finally protect supply management in Quebec?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are there to help our dairy farmers and the entire Canadian dairy sector. As for dairy products, I am confident that Canada meets all of its trade and international commitments. I would like to remind everyone that the United States has a five-to-one surplus in their dairy trade with Canada.

Mr. Simon Marciel (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent for me to move the following motion:

That the House reiterate its desire to fully preserve supply management during the NAFTA renegotiations.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. René Arseneault: Mr. Speaker, clearly, a few moments ago, a good portion of the House was unable hear the response from our colleague from Oakville North—Burlington. I think you yourself were not able to hear her response. How can we make sure that all parliamentarians are able to hear responses in the House? Could we please hear our colleague's reply?

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his comments. It is important that we listen in order to hear members' answers, and I strongly encourage everyone to listen. Attacks on members must be avoided. I will review the Hansard blues.

● (1510)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, earlier today I asked a question of the Minister of Finance and he rose to respond. Then I asked a supplemental question, and he was sheltered from answering.

I was wondering if you would permit the hon. minister to rise now and answer that question.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton knows the rules, and he knows that the government can decide which minister will answer a question, as he is well aware. This is not a valid point of order, but I appreciate his comment.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***CUSTOMS ACT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-21, An Act to amend the Customs Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader had 12 minutes remaining in his time for speaking when the House went into question period.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was going through Bill C-21, I was trying to highlight what I believed were some really important aspects of it.

To ensure the efficient movement in legitimate trade and travel, and to keep our borders secure, it is essential that we have a clear picture of who enters and exits the country. There are many benefits to that. This is where left off when I had to sit down prior to Standing Order 31 presentations.

I was commenting on what I believed was one of the important issues I had to face over the years. I want to highlight something from a personal perspective, and that is the issue of the visiting visas and the manner in which they are issued.

One of the considerations of immigration officers abroad, whether it is in the Philippines or India, is will that person return. Whenever I have the opportunity to visit these facilities, and I do periodically, both in India and the Philippines in particular, but also in Ukraine, I try to get a better understanding of the whole question of “will they return?”. That is one of the reasons we are rejecting so many temporary visas.

Unlike many other countries in the world, we do not have the same sorts of recording mechanisms or collection of information systems that are so very important for different departments to get a sense of individuals and whether they will return. Immigration is just one of those departments,

I would like to see further discussion of this in the chamber and in the committee to see if there are ways we could improve it. At the end of the day, I hope we will see more family members coming to Canada. If we can illustrate that we have a better recording mechanism, more family members from many countries in the world will have a greater chance to come to Canada. I see that as a strong potential positive. I hope to add some more thoughts in regard to that.

That is not the only benefit. I made reference to helping prevent radicalized individuals from travelling overseas to participate in terrorist activities; verifying travel dates to determine applicable duty and tax exemptions, rather than relying strictly on self-declarations; identifying individuals who did not leave Canada at the end of their authorized period of stay; enabling immigration authorities to make more effective use of resources by eliminating wasted time and resources spent conducting investigations on people who had already left the country. It is amazing how many resources are invested in that. I mentioned limiting the collection of exit data that had existed since 2012, for example, 35 warrants and 146 removal orders of

people no longer in Canada; and better protecting taxpayer money by making it easier to identify fraud and abuse of social benefits with residency requirements.

There are so many reasons why this is good legislation, and members should support it.

There are concerns with respect to privacy. The minister and the government have engaged proactively on the file with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. We take our obligations to protect Canadian privacy rights very seriously. From what I understand, that was taken into consideration as the legislation was developed.

● (1515)

The legislation is in good part consistent with what the U.S. has been doing. We signed an agreement, I believe back in March. It would make us consistent with with respect to collecting basic biographic entry and exit information. It is not a new issue.

I can recall sitting on the immigration committee a number of years ago when the issue was before us. We talked about how it was importance for the government to take some sort of action. As I have said on many pieces of legislation, given the legislative agenda and many other budgetary measures taking place by this government, I very am pleased we have been able to bring this legislation forward because it will have a very strong, positive impact.

Bill C-21 would improve Canada's ability to prevent people from travelling overseas to join terrorist groups. It would combat things such as human trafficking, respond to Amber Alerts, and ensure the integrity of certain social benefit programs with residency requirements. That is a significant achievement.

Bill C-21 would also improve Canada's ability to identify and intercept controlled goods being smuggled out of the country. We have a great deal of debate and concern in regard to the types of goods that leave the country at times. This is yet another piece of legislation, a government initiative, that will better reflect Canadian values and their expectations of the government.

No new requirements would be imposed on travellers and no new exchange of data with the U.S. would occur for air travellers.

People collecting social benefits in accordance with the law would not be affected at all by Bill C-21. We really need to reinforce that. Anyone who has spent at least 20 years in Canada as an adult is entitled to receive old age security, regardless of what country he or she lives in, and that is reinforced.

I look at the legislation as a whole, and there is a great deal of interest in it. For example, the province of Manitoba has literally thousands of individuals whom we call snowbirds. We have come through the best summer we have ever had. I can count on one hand the number of mosquito bites I had this past summer. Winnipeg was the best city to be in if people wanted to enjoy summer in 2017, the year in which we are celebrating the 150th. Some might debate that. However, for me, it definitely was the place to be. However, as it starts to get a bit colder, after we get into December and January, some may opt out of the sunny skies of Winnipeg and go where the climate is a bit warmer.

Legislation like this would help provide some clarification. Snowbirds have nothing to fear from it. Some might say they should be concerned, but we will put in place a system that protects the integrity of many different types of programs and benefits in different departments. The legislation would also enable our customs officers and department to look at certain material, merchandise, product, or manufactured products that could potentially cause issues with Canadian values and allow for that additional power to find out what is taking place.

I started my speech by talking about the different types of legislation that the government had brought forward, and some of the trade agreements we had entered into. Canada is a fantastic nation, from coast to coast to coast. We have a responsibility as government to look at the bigger picture and the demands our society has on us. We need to ensure we have good export and import policies.

• (1520)

We need to ensure we have policies that enable Canadians to travel abroad. We need to look at ways to fine tune things to hopefully provide the type of information that allows for better policy decisions to be made.

Again, I emphasize the issue of those temporary visas. There is likely no issue more important from a constituency point of view. Very rarely do I have an issue more important than that in the riding I represent of Winnipeg North. Therefore, getting the facts would allow individuals like me to get more individuals here to visit families. It is important to advocate for that. I write approximately 350 or 400 letters every month to try to assist people in getting family members to Canada. This legislation would assist in making those arguments so we could have more faith and trust in family members, allowing them to come to Canada.

I encourage all members of the House to see the bill as a very progressive step forward. Concerns regarding privacy have been addressed in a very proactive fashion. The legislation is good to go, and I look forward to its passage.

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister first met with President Trump after the U. S. election, there was a lot of talk in the press release about further integration at the border. One of the things that was even floated was housing American and Canadian border agents in the same building and having common systems.

When the public safety committee went to Washington in May, we had an opportunity to hear some of the long-term plans of this entry-exit program. If the member and members of the Liberal caucus are

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not concerned, something is seriously wrong. We are in a situation now where accountability is at its lowest when it comes to national security agencies. Unfortunately, that includes CBSA, which as of now, until the creation of this committee of parliamentarians, is one of the only agencies that has no proper review, much less real time oversight. That is a whole other matter.

I want to understand from the member why, in that context, he would feel comfortable with this sharing of information. President Trump is signing executive orders saying that privacy protection laws no longer apply to people who are not American citizens. We see a situation that almost condones, implicitly and explicitly, potentially the use of torture, with a new ministerial directive that does nothing to alleviate that issue. Therefore, I want to understand why the member could feel comfortable with sharing more information and this further integration, given there is a president who has no respect for the rule of law of his own constitution, much less the constitutions of other countries.

• (1525)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in my comments that the minister had done a fantastic job in being proactive and working with the Privacy Commissioner. We are the party that brought in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We understand the importance of protecting the rights of individuals and the information that is gathered. What is proposed in the legislation further advances Canada's relatively healthy relationship with the United States.

As I said, this is one of a couple of legislative initiatives that clearly illustrate goodwill between both governments, the U.S. and Canada, on how we can better work together so both Canadians and Americans are able to cross the border in an easier way. In many ways, the types of information being gathered is getting closer to being the same. I see that as a positive.

Ms. Filomena Tassi (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to touch on something the member mentioned. He addressed why it is important to keep track of those who are leaving the country. He mentioned the Amber Alert. I would like him to expand on that and to also describe what information we are actually talking about. What is the information on page 2 of the passport that we are talking about being released?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there is basic information required. We will see, through regulation, the types of additional questions and information. What is important to recognize is that Canada is one of what are known as the Five Eyes countries. They include Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. When we look at the Five Eyes countries, we are virtually last in terms keeping up with modernization.

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With the Privacy Commissioner, looking at the type of information we gather, how that information is held, and how long it is held are all very important questions and issues the minister or caucus colleagues are justifiably concerned about. We look forward to the bill going to committee, where we can hear from members and listen to witnesses to deal with some of the issues Canadians might have with respect to this piece of legislation.

Overall, it is one of at least two pieces of legislation I can think of offhand that would move Canada forward in ensuring that we are more consistent with other friendly countries, in particular the United States. Once it is all said and done, I believe it will be a healthy piece of legislation to pass.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the matter of the information that will be shared.

A problem that we are seeing more and more of, and not just with this bill, is that the Liberal government has a tendency to legislate using regulations. For example, in the bill currently before us, the government gives the minister a certain amount of discretion through regulation. That allows the minister to change not only the type of information that is collected but also the manner in which that information is obtained, the parties from whom it is obtained, and the circumstances under which it is obtained. That is a serious problem.

In committee, we asked Public Safety officials about Bill C-23, which is essentially a companion to the bill in question. They said that they were unable to tell us what type of regulations would be changed because of this bill.

Is the member not worried that the government is making legislative changes, while leaving a big asterisk next to some parts saying that it will make more changes later, at the minister's discretion, through regulation? Is that what accountability and transparency are all about?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, we often find that legislation provides the principles and goes into details as to what it is we want to put into law. The provincial legislatures, the House of Commons, and other countries around the world actually bring in laws but allow different departments' ministers, in our case, to assist in providing the details of a law through regulation. That has actually been quite normal practice for 100-plus years.

The member might have some specific issues in regard to a specific type of question. I do not know if that would be an appropriate thing to incorporate into the legislation. It might be more appropriate in regulation. In fact, I suggest that it would be.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very glad my friend had an opportunity to speak to the bill. I wanted to ask about the Canada-U.S. relationship, which is obviously touched on by the bill. Does the government think it has achieved anything in its two years in power in the context of that relationship?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I think we have achieved more in two years than the Conservative government did in 10 years. There are a number of files one could advance. If we went from one

ministry to the next ministry to the next ministry, we would find ample examples.

For example, we have a Prime Minister who has met with the President on several occasions through communications on a wide spectrum of issues that are important to all Canadians. We have seen policy from the government to the effect that all Canadians will benefit. Whether it is the pre-clearance legislation or the trade negotiations that are taking place, these are all initiatives. We can talk about natural resources and pipelines and so forth in terms of what this government has been able to accomplish that the previous government in 10 years was not able to.

Had we not had the change two years ago, I am somewhat fearful of where we would be today. I am very grateful that we have a Minister of Foreign Affairs and a Minister of International Trade who are doing such a fantastic job in protecting Canada's interests and Canada's middle class.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow my friend from Winnipeg North, who was eager to tell us that there have been many accomplishments in the context of the Canada-U.S. relationship, accomplishments such as meetings. Perhaps that illustrates the more foundational problem in terms of the direction we see things going. On this side of the House, we do not consider holding a meeting an accomplishment.

I thought, perhaps, the parliamentary secretary would mention the famous state dinner that members of the Prime Minister's family were able to attend. The natural resources minister was not, but there were still many people at this state dinner.

On this side of the House, we are concerned about a clear erosion of the Canada-U.S. relationship and the fact that this critical relationship for our interests, for our success, is being undermined through significant missteps by the government. It is not new to the presidency of Donald Trump. We have seen a very poor, very ineffective strategy with respect to this relationship under both President Obama and President Trump. I think we can see a number of clear examples of that.

It is important, in the context of that relationship, that we not prioritize, ahead of results, the images, the meetings, and the state dinners. They are not the priority. For the people in my constituency, who are working hard, who are looking for better opportunities for themselves and their families, their principal interest is not the photos that are taken, the meetings that are held, or the food that is eaten at the dinners. Their principal interest is what kinds of accomplishments, what specific agreements and initiatives, are going to happen between Canada and the U.S. on issues such as softwood lumber, which is not as important in my riding but is in other places, and issues such as pipelines and the trade in natural resources, which are very important in my riding.

It is results in those areas that matter in terms of the Canada-U.S. relationship. It is not the socks, the photos, and the images. As my colleague from Durham aptly said in question period yesterday, it is time for the Prime Minister to pull up his fancy socks and start trying to get results.

Government Orders

I want to highlight the fact, again, that the erosion of this relationship between Canada and the U.S. began not under President Trump but under President Obama because of the approach pursued by the government of this Prime Minister.

We had President Obama speak in the House of Commons, and the Prime Minister, in his introduction, referred to a “bromance” and “dudeplomacy”. I had never heard of dudeplomacy before. It sounds like a pretty gendered term, actually. I had never heard of dudeplomacy, but I have heard of diplomacy. What does not seem to have happened is actual diplomacy in terms of the traditional trying to advance ideas that advance Canada's interests. For example, it was relatively shortly after this Prime Minister took office that the American administration at that time said no to Keystone XL. We had virtually no substantial public response from the Prime Minister or the government at the time.

Fortunately, that decision has since been reversed, but as a result of changes in American politics. It had nothing to do with any activity happening on this side of the border with respect to Keystone XL. As my colleague said, immediately there was a desire to take credit for it, but the reality is that it was going to happen if there was a change in the party and the president. That was going to happen.

The government was not at all involved in promoting Keystone XL or in raising those issues, especially after it was rejected by someone with whom, supposedly, there was a bromance and dudeplomacy going on. There was a failure of results with respect to actually getting the market access we needed under that administration.

It is interesting to follow this, because there was a lot of discussion internationally about the Paris accord. Here in Canada, the government immediately wanted to tell us that to meet the Paris accord, we had to impose this massive new tax. Actually, a lot of the analysis shows that this new tax is about raising revenue. It is not going to substantially have an impact with respect to the way it is being set up and what the government has said its objectives are.

• (1535)

An overwhelming majority of the countries in the world are part of the Paris accord, but it is a minority of those countries that actually think that a carbon tax is the way to meet the requirements. We would think from the what the government says that a carbon tax was required by the Paris accord, but that is not the case at all. In fact, most countries that are part of the Paris accord think that the way to meet our Paris accord obligations does not involve a carbon tax, a massive new tax on Canadians.

What is interesting in the context of that relationship is that there was much discussion about the Canada–U.S. relationship vis-à-vis the environment. Canada imposed a carbon tax, and yet the American administration did not bring in a carbon tax. The Hillary Clinton campaign did not propose a carbon tax, and I do not think Donald Trump has much interest in a carbon tax either. The point is that no American administration was moving in this direction regardless, and yet Canada took a step that put us at a significant competitive disadvantage. A possible fruit of that alleged dudeplomacy would have been to push for the Americans to align what they were doing with us, but that was never going to happen. The Prime

Minister was happy to accept pats on the back for his carbon tax action, while in fact there was no serious effort to do the same south of the border.

The other issue, of course, is the government's plan to legalize marijuana. There has not been any thinking through at all about what the implications would be for Canadians travelling south of the border after legalization happens, assuming the government goes through with it. We never know. The government has turned tail on so many of its promises. It is not a done deal. However, assuming the Liberals go through with that, it would create some real issues for Canadians who may choose to use legal marijuana and then want to travel to the United States. There is a possibility of their being asked about that and barred access under that. That is, again, not something that the government seems to have paid any attention to in the context of substantive discussions or negotiations.

There are all these different issues, where what Canadians expect vis-à-vis the Canada–U.S. relationship is for a government to fight for Canadian values, to fight for Canadian interests, and not to prioritize the image dimension. That is what we on this side of the House believe our approach to foreign policy should be. We believe it should be prioritizing fighting for Canadian values and Canadian interests, not prioritizing the international image or personal reputation of particular members of the government. That is important. We have a government that is fumbling this relationship. At the same time, the Liberals are desperate to look as if they are doing something.

We have a bill before us that, actually, we on this side of the House see as a pretty good bill. It would effectively streamline processes at the border. It would deal with smuggling in a reasonably effective way. I think it would reduce costs. It would make the border more efficient. It continues, importantly, with momentum that was clearly started under the Conservative government. Prime minister Stephen Harper put a big emphasis on trying to make the border more effective, and it was not because he thought he could have great photo ops at the border as a result. It was because he understood that having an efficient, effective border would help to create jobs and opportunities for Canadians, it would help to ensure the necessary market access, and it would help also to create opportunities and advantages for Canadian consumers. Therefore, we prioritized making the border more efficient and effective.

In cases where we see the government continuing forward with momentum that was started under the previous Conservative government or even, in general, in cases where we think the government is doing things that are good, we will be happy to support them, to speak for them, and to vote in favour of that legislation. However, the context is important because overall on so many important areas and fronts we have the government bungling this relationship.

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I have talked about how, very clearly, under the current Prime Minister, there was an erosion of that relationship that had already started during the tenure of president Obama. Of course, it has continued in the present environment and it has continued especially as we look at what is happening in NAFTA negotiations. It is very important that we reflect on these negotiations and that the government approach them in the right way. We have to be realistic in the context of those negotiations and the proposals we have put forward, and we have to seek to advance Canadian values and Canadian interests.

• (1540)

I had the opportunity to be in the United States during the time of the last American election. I was actually in Cleveland, which is kind of an epicentre of activity. I was there as part of a trip with a number of my parliamentary colleagues, including the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We observed an interesting phenomenon in terms of what was happening there, which was that messages about trade and the loss of manufacturing were really resonating in certain particular states in the United States, and a lot of those messages came back to certain perceptions about the impact of trade deals. There was a perception, I think an incorrect perception, that some of these trade deals had contributed negatively to the economy of these areas. The electoral success of Donald Trump was significantly informed by his ability to get out his message with respect to trade in those key electoral markets.

We have to recognize, then, that it was what was in the administration's mind when it talked about renegotiating NAFTA. I do not think that when Donald Trump talked about renegotiating NAFTA, his principal objectives were adding sections on gender and indigenous rights. Maybe I was reading different coverage of that election from what others read, but the message about renegotiation was very clear in terms of the objectives.

It does not mean that we should have the same objectives. In fact, it is important that we counter misinformation about the alleged negative impacts of trade, but it is also important that we go to the negotiating table with a realistic sense of what we can achieve and with a goal to do what we can realistically to protect Canadian jobs and interests. The government, in articulating its negotiating objectives, has put itself in a position of very clearly talking past the administration and, in some cases, has put forward proposals that do not even relate to federal jurisdiction. For example, it has talked about what have been dubbed right-to-work laws at the state level in the United States.

We have a federal system in Canada, so the government should understand how a federal system works, that the federal government cannot, in the context of these types of negotiations, demand that states get rid of state-level labour laws. That is not within federal jurisdiction. For the government to suggest that somehow these negotiations should hinge on changes to state-level laws is a fundamental misunderstanding of how federalism works, and it is a strange proposal to come from another country with a federal system that has strong subnational governments.

In general, whether it is labour laws or specific legal protections on indigenous or gender issues, these are the kinds of things that would be the subject of significant substantial national debate in the

United States. It is hard to imagine that Canada demanding them as part of NAFTA talks is going to be the spur that makes them happen. In reality, the specific reason the Americans were going into NAFTA renegotiations was to address this perception about economic interests. What we need to do to be effective in those negotiations is highlight how trade deals have been beneficial to the economy of North America as a whole; we have benefited from trade, but so has the United States benefited from trade.

It is not a zero-sum game. I have used this analogy before. Some people talk about trade as if it is winning or losing, and that is just so outside of what we know to be true about economic interactions. It is like saying, if I go to a restaurant to order a meal, one of us is winning and one of us is losing. Am I winning and the restaurant losing, or is the restaurant winning and I am losing? That is obviously ridiculous. We are both winning. We are winning by mutually beneficial exchange: I am getting a meal and the restaurant is getting business. The same is true of trade. People choose to engage in trade because they have an opportunity that has opened up for them for mutually beneficial exchange.

The Prime Minister of Canada, as the leader of a trading nation, a nation that needs trade and has benefited so much from trade, should be championing the value of the open economy on the world stage.

• (1545)

He should be doing what many Conservative members are doing in opposition, which is standing up for Canada. He should be going to the United States to speak specifically about the economic benefits of trade. He should be trying to make the case, in those critical electoral markets like Ohio or Michigan, about the benefits that have accrued to those areas as a result of mutually beneficial trade, as a result of the freedom to exchange goods and services between Canada and the U.S.

We know those benefits exist. The case can be made there, and yet the Prime Minister only talks about trade in the context of wanting to redefine and talk about progressive trade agreements. In large part, he is taking what Canada has done for a long time. The Conservative government signed many trade deals, and in every case we were dealing with, as was realistic and practical in the context, provisions in the agreements and side agreements that dealt with issues like labour rights and other rights.

The trans-Pacific partnership was negotiated by the Obama administration. We still have yet to hear from the Liberal government its position on that or on some kind of successor deal that does not include the United States. The government should at some point take a position with respect to the trans-Pacific partnership, or at least the idea of a trans-Pacific trading bloc, whether or not that includes the United States. These deals have for a long time included these elements.

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It is clear that the Prime Minister wants to find a way to rebrand NAFTA, which was a Conservative-negotiated deal under prime minister Brian Mulroney, and somehow put his stamp on it. It may well be in the end that we get some big unenforceable language in there about some of the issues that the Prime Minister has talked about, but there is just no realistic scenario in which, as part of trade negotiations, the United States would agree to making dramatic changes to its rights frameworks, especially insofar as those changes might impact federalism, just in response to a Canadian demand.

Not only is this relationship eroding under the Liberals, but their approach to these discussions seems to portray a fundamental misunderstanding of the United States, even the constitutional sharing of powers as exists in the United States, and also some of the key political motivations and dynamics that they should be responding to as they are supposedly seeking to advance Canada's national interests.

The problem is that we do not see the advancing of that interest in many different ways. We see the eroding of a voice for Canada's interests and in general of Canada's voice on the world stage. The emphasis instead is on image, photo ops, state dinners, and so on, not on achieving results.

We on this side of the House are in favour of legislation that would make the border more effective. Bill C-21 would improve the efficiency of the border. It is a good piece of legislation that builds on momentum put in place under the Conservatives. It would cut down on costs, it would make the border more efficient, it would address smuggling, and there are a number of different areas where we see concrete improvements coming through the bill.

However, we are concerned about the overall picture when it comes to Canada-U.S. relations. More broadly, when we speak of the government's foreign and trade policy we see a seeming lack of interest in standing up for Canadian interests and Canadian values.

Our objective on the world stage should not be to, above all else, get a seat on the UN Security Council, to cozy up to whomever and do whatever it takes to get there. Our goal should be to ask how we can concretely make life better for Canadians through more trade, more effective borders, and the kinds of opportunities that come with that.

How can we make life better for people across this country in concrete, tangible, and measurable ways? How can we reflect people's values, people's moral convictions in the kinds of causes and principles that Canada stands up for on the world stage? Canada's interests and values should be our priorities, not the image side.

While we do support this bill, we call on the government to do better when it comes to the Canada-U.S. relationship, and to do better when it comes to foreign policy in general, to reflect those priorities that Canadians are telling us they want us to focus on.

• (1550)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be talking about trade here, because it is something that we hear a lot of rhetoric about from the other side. They have notions that they know they are not going to get in negotiations with the United States, but they throw them out there for their base.

My question is on the other side. Of course, I support fair trade deals. I have voted for them in the past. In his speech, my colleague made it look like he would be open to trade with any country. I am just wondering what his conditions would be. For example, if we were going to negotiate trade deals with North Korea or Somalia, or some places like that, what would his conditions be for bargaining with those countries?

• (1555)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I cannot recall ever having proposed a trade deal with North Korea. I do not know what we would trade, frankly, but maybe they would be willing to give up their nuclear weapons. The NDP certainly would not want those coming here. I am kidding of course.

I do not endorse trade with just any country. There are obviously cases where there would be potential concerns. However, we are talking about the Canada-U.S. relationship, and I do not think trade with the United States is comparable to trade with North Korea. In terms of creating opportunities for a more open border, the bill is in Canada's interest and reflective of Canadian values.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate many of the words by the member across the way. The question I have for my colleague is regarding the issue of privacy. I mentioned that we have taken a fairly proactive approach with the Privacy Commissioner. Do the Conservatives, as an opposition party, have any privacy concerns related to the legislation, or does he feel that adequate work has been done on that particular file?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we support the bill and see it through to committee. The committee will provide an opportunity to hear witness testimony with respect to some of the particular issues that have been brought forward. In general, and certainly at this stage, supporting the principle of the bill is good, then that further discussion will happen at that point.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. Since he knows a lot about how Parliament and the legislative process work, I would like to ask him a question. There have been a number of bills on important issues such as national security. Most recently, we examined Bill C-23 on preclearance at the border. Like Bill C-23, Bill C-21 contains provisions that give the minister a lot of discretionary power over regulatory changes that will be made after the bill is passed. Looking back, when Bill C-23 was being examined in committee, public officials were asked for a list of regulatory changes that would be made to implement the provisions of an agreement with the United States. However, they were unable to provide us with a comprehensive or even a definitive list.

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Does my colleague agree that the legislative process requires accountability and transparency, and that this is an unacceptable way of doing things? We understand the need for regulations, but when they are used to circumvent the legislative process, that can cause problems.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the balance between legislation and regulation is an interesting question, particularly in terms of what should be prescribed and what should be included. Obviously, it is not practical for every aspect of government decision-making to be contained in legislation. There are particular questions around the scope of regulations. There are well-established limitations on what can fit into the category of regulation.

However, the member's point, and one I strongly agree with, is that the government needs to be prepared to answer questions about what it is doing vis-à-vis regulations, what its plans are, and what elements of regulation would be required to achieve a desired outcome.

I had the great pleasure of serving on the scrutiny of regulations committee for a couple of years, and I would recommend it to the member if he is interested. Admittedly, it was frustrating on that committee trying to deal with what were sometimes very old files and to get information from the government about concerns the committee had with respect to things that were happening with regulations.

The regulatory oversight rule is very important for Parliament. Even though it is up to government to create regulations, we have an important role with respect to oversight, and it is important for the government to honour that role and work with the House and committees when it comes to responding to and dealing with regulations.

• (1600)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments.

Before we resume debate, I will let hon. members know that we have gone past the five hours of debate since the first round of speeches on this question that is before the House. Therefore, for the remaining interventions the time limit for speeches will be 10 minutes and the ensuing time for questions and comments, five minutes.

The hon. member for Newmarket—Aurora.

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in support of these legislative amendments proposed in Bill C-21, which would amend the Customs Act to enable the Canada Border Services Agency to collect exit information from all travellers leaving Canada.

We all understand the importance of collecting basic biographic information on people coming into Canada, such as who they are, where they are from, how long they are staying. That is just basic security, but there is also value in keeping track of travellers who are leaving Canada. In this regard, Canada is quite a bit outside the mainstream. In fact, we are laggards in this regard.

While most other countries collect basic information on everyone who enters and exits, Canada collects information on only a small

subset of people who leave our country. This means that at any given moment we cannot say for sure who is in this country. We know that they came in, but we do not know where or when they left, or if they ever left.

Consider that right now with no means of identifying precisely who is exiting our country, we cannot know if dangerous individuals may be leaving Canada to escape justice. Nor for example do we know whether we are expending valuable immigration enforcement resources trying to track down someone who has been ordered to leave Canada when that person may well have already left the country on their own.

Not collecting exit information also limits our capacity to respond to Amber alerts or suspected abductions in a timely way, among other shortcomings. This is an obvious and unacceptable security gap and one that many of our international partners have already closed. We need to catch up.

Let me be clear. We are not talking about the collection of reams of personal information from people leaving Canada. We are talking about basic biographic information, the so-called tombstone data that appears on page 2 of everybody's passport, including name, date of birth, citizenship, gender, travel document type, document number, and the country that issued the document.

The only other information that would be collected would be the location and time of departure, and the flight number in the case of people leaving by air, in other words, the same information that people volunteer when they enter Canada or any other country. That is it. No new information would be collected. Notably, no biometric data, such as photographs or fingerprints, would be collected or exchanged as part of the entry-exit initiative and travellers will not notice a difference. That is important.

This is how it would work. For people crossing the Canada-U.S. border by land, border officers in the country they enter will simply send that passport information and departure details back to the country they just left. In this way, one country's entry is the other country's exit and vice versa. The exchange of information in the land mode would occur on a near real-time basis following a traveller's entry to either country, usually within 15 minutes.

The exchange would take place through an existing secure electronic channel between Canada and the U.S., the same system that is used to transfer information between Canada and the U.S. under the Nexus, FAST, and enhanced driver's licence programs currently in place.

For air travellers, no new exchange of information between countries would be required. The information would come directly from airline passenger manifests. To obtain an exit record in the air mode, for example, the CBSA would receive electronic passenger manifest details directly from air carriers, with information on passengers scheduled to depart Canada aboard outbound international flights.

Government Orders

●(1605)

This information would be received up to 72 hours prior to departure to facilitate the identification of known high-risk travellers attempting to leave Canada by air. This is a key point for a number of reasons, not least of which is that it would help Canadian authorities recognize when someone with links to violent extremist groups was preparing to leave the country and stop them from travelling abroad to participate in terrorist activity. In fact, Bill C-21 would help border officials deal with a number of threats they currently lack the tools to address.

The CBSA is our first line of defence against threats originating overseas. It uses a system called “lookout” to identify persons or shipments that may pose a threat to Canada. Lookouts are based on information in the CBSA's possession or that may come from sources, including the RCMP, CSIS, Immigration officials, and local or international law enforcement agents. While lookouts are effective for identifying inbound threats, the absence of exit information means that they are not effective for identifying outbound threats. However, Bill C-21 addresses that shortcoming.

In a global threat environment with dangerous individuals leaving or trying to leave peaceful, stable democracies to join extremist organizations, collecting reliable exit information has never been more vital to support Canada's national security. We must equip the Canada Border Services Agency with the statutory authority to collect the same information on outbound travellers that it does on inbound travellers.

With the passage of these legislative amendments, CBSA's lookout system would be strengthened, allowing the agency to notify partners if and when a known high-risk individual intends to leave or has just left Canada. This information would close the loop on an individual's travel history and fill a gap that has been exploited by people trying to evade the law.

As a final note, it is important to recognize the care that has been taken to ensure that this initiative is designed to respect and comply fully with Canada's privacy laws and obligations. The communication and collaboration between the CBSA and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, and the design and implementation of the entry-exit initiative has been extensive, productive, and instructive in protecting privacy rights. The protection of those rights is paramount, and this bill would ensure that those rights are indeed protected. It is a shining example of the balance between security and privacy.

There is no question that this bill would enhance the security of Canada and its allies. I urge my colleagues to support its swift passage and ensure that the women and men of the CBSA have the resources and tools they need to do their job of securing our border and facilitating the free flow of legitimate trade and travel.

Trade, of course, is important to Canadians. This bill would help facilitate trade between Canada, the U.S., and our other international partners. Bill C-21 is required and necessary to close a gap to make sure that Canada is in line with our international partners. It is a good piece of legislation that would do good work. I urge all members to support this bill.

●(1610)

[*Translation*]

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

It is interesting, because one of the things he emphasized was the idea of combining this with other information to help intercept someone who is known to authorities. That would be just another piece of the puzzle. However, there is a problem with that. When we look at some of the human rights violations created by the Government of Canada, for example, in cases such as that of Maher Arar, the sharing of information was often one of the problems. In fact, sharing information, in certain situations where profiling occurs, can insinuate something about an individual and lead to horrible and tragic situations like the one that Mr. Arar went through.

When we look at the proposed system, to allow more information to be shared, I wonder whether the hon. member realizes how little we can trust the process, especially in light of the current administration. Simply increasing the sharing of information without really putting in place adequate accountability procedures, is a problem.

For example, the Canada Border Services Agency is one of the only agencies responsible for dealing with national security, and before Bill C-22 was passed, it did not have a review mechanism, let alone any oversight, because no real-time monitoring was being conducted. Obviously, we have complete confidence in the men and women working on the Canadian side of the border, but what is happening on the American side is a different story, considering the racial profiling that is going on there.

Is the member not worried about this exchange of information? Before he tells me that the Privacy Commissioner was involved in this work, let us remember that, in the speech the minister gave about this bill, he said that the Privacy Commissioner should conduct further assessments after the bill was passed. That hardly inspires confidence.

Does the member not agree that the most important thing is protecting human rights? The government does not have a great track record in that regard when it comes to information sharing.

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly for his question.

[*English*]

I share my colleague's concerns and respect for the privacy components of this legislation and for the privacy of all Canadians, but this bill strikes the appropriate and fair balance between security and protection of privacy. I hope that this legislation, coupled with the other Criminal Code provisions, the protections under the charter, and the many laws we have in Canada to protect the privacy of Canadians, will work in conjunction to ensure that Canadian information collected under this bill, and under any regime in Canada, is protected and not misused by the current Canadian government or any other government.

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I am happy my colleague raised these important concerns. However, these concerns are well addressed in this bill, in the legislation, and in the privacy regime that manages all interactions between private citizens and the Government of Canada and international governments. I am confident that this legislation upholds and addresses privacy concerns.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):

[*Member spoke in Cree*]

Thank you very much, my good friend from Newmarket—Aurora.

Mr. Speaker, as an indigenous person, I understand it is very important to make sure that we know who comes into the country and who leaves the country, because sometimes we can make friendships with people who stay for a very long period of time and we are very pleased to have them here. However, I wonder if he could talk a little more about why it is important for us to know who comes into the country, how long they stay, and when they leave the country. Why is it important to have that information?

Mr. Kyle Peterson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's translation of the Cree language so I could understand.

Being able to know who is leaving Canada is as important as knowing who is coming into Canada, for many reasons, most of all for security reasons. The gap between Canada and some of our international partners in collecting this information and in the ability to collect it was so glaring and so large that it obviously needed to be addressed. This bill does so fairly. It does so reasonably and with the collection of the minimum amount of personal information that is needed to serve its purpose. I think it is a fair piece of legislation.

I want to thank the hon. member for giving me the opportunity again to underline why I think this legislation is so important to the great people of his riding and all of Canada.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is my first speech in the House.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of Saint-Laurent for their strong support in the April by-election.

[*English*]

We are very lucky to live in the beautiful riding of Saint-Laurent, which is one of the most multicultural ridings in the country.

We live in peace, which shows what this beautiful country of Canada is about.

[*Translation*]

It is my great pleasure to participate in this important debate on Bill C-21, an act to amend the Customs Act. The amendments proposed in this bill will give us a more complete picture of the people leaving Canada. They will strengthen the integrity of our data on who is entering and exiting Canada by closing gaps with respect to individuals' personal travel history. I want to emphasize that this will in no way delay travellers. It will enhance our security, improve our administration, and strengthen our border without interfering with the efficient movement of legitimate travellers and goods.

I would like to provide an overview of how the existing system works. When the current phase of the entry-exit initiative was launched in 2013, Canada and the United States began to exchange basic biographic entry information on third-country nationals, permanent residents of Canada, and lawful permanent residents of the United States crossing at automated land ports of entry. The record of land entry into one country can be used to establish an exit record from the other.

Since this summer, Canada has also been providing the United States with basic biographic information on American citizens and U.S. nationals who leave the United States and enter Canada at land ports of entry. At present, our two countries securely share the entry records of nearly 80,000 travellers a day.

This exit information is limited in scope and is not intrusive. Basically, apart from the time and location of the departure, the only other information collected is that found on page 2 of passports. That information is already collected upon entry. This includes the name, nationality, date of birth, and the issuing authority of the travel document.

However, Canadian officials do not know everyone who leaves the country, because the sharing of information gathered by Canada does not affect Canadian citizens and is limited to the land mode. We need a full picture of people's travel history to manage our borders effectively. The changes proposed in Bill C-21 regarding the collection of current information on the movements of all travellers will improve security and the integrity of Canada's borders.

I also want to draw the attention of the House to the fact that no new requirement will be imposed on travellers for the collection of this data. Travellers leaving Canada by land will simply present their passport to the U.S. border security officer as usual and the United States will automatically send the data to Canada.

As for travellers leaving Canada by plane, airlines will gather the basic passport information that is on the passenger manifest and provide it to the Canada Border Services Agency before they leave.

Some will be surprised to learn that we are not already gathering this information. In fact, many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, keep track of people who leave their countries. It is time that we fill this security gap and keep pace with our allies.

There are countless benefits to this new legislation. First, it will help authorities react better to known high-risk travellers before or shortly after they leave Canada.

The RCMP or CSIS could ask border services officers to monitor individuals who are suspected of wanting to join a terrorist group or suspected of being involved in human trafficking. Border services officers would then communicate with the appropriate agency if one of the individuals is identified. Canadian and U.S. authorities could then collaborate on resolving the situation.

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•(1620)

Going after Canadians who take part in high-risk activities abroad is a key priority for our government. The collection of basic exit information will be a new important tool in preventing such activities.

Bill C-21 enhances our ability to prevent the illegal export of controlled goods, respond more effectively in time-sensitive situations such as responding to Amber Alerts, ensure the integrity of our immigration system, combat cross-border crime, and, by ensuring that we have more complete and reliable data on travel history, protect taxpayers' money by making it easier to shed light on fraud or misuse to the detriment of certain government programs.

It is important to note that people who receive benefits under the legislation will not be affected.

Naturally, proposals to enhance national security often come with concerns over privacy and freedoms. I know that the government takes its obligation to protect individual rights and freedoms, and Canadians' privacy, seriously. This is consistent with the underlying principle of our overall approach to security. We can and must protect Canadians, while protecting rights and freedoms.

Some privacy protections are built into the entry-exit initiative. Exit information will only be disclosed in accordance with Canadian law. The exchange of information within the country and within the United States will be subject to an official agreement in order to establish a framework for the use of information and mechanisms to resolve any potential problem.

I would like to remind members that the only information we are talking about is that found on page 2 of passports. This is information that all travellers voluntarily provide every time they cross the border.

The proposed changes in Bill C-21 will improve our security and help ensure our prosperity. It is important that we have a more accurate picture of the people who enter and leave Canada. Thus, we can improve the efficiency of the movement of legitimate travellers and goods while strengthening our border security. I strongly recommend that all members of the House support this bill.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allow me to pay my respects to our new colleague and congratulate her. It has been almost a year, or several months, anyway, since the member was duly elected in a by-election. I did my best to help defeat her, but unfortunately, I failed. I welcome her to the House. That is democracy. I want to congratulate her because this is one of her first lengthy speeches.

It amuses me that the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent is acknowledging the member for Saint-Laurent. People get our titles mixed up sometimes. If the member ever happens to receive my mail, I am sure I can count on her to forward it to me.

On a more serious note, this bill is very important, and we support it because it is the continuation of work our government did. Well, it is not our government's work specifically so much as the work of the Canadian government that was done while we were in power. The current government is following through on work that was done. We

agree with it in principle, but of course we are always sensitive to any spending associated with new bills.

Here is my question for my colleague: Is the government planning to invest in new infrastructure to facilitate the flow of goods, services, and people between Canada and the United States?

•(1625)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Louis-Saint-Laurent for his kind words and for his question. Obviously, if we want to improve the process at the border, we will have to put measures in place to improve the way things are done.

I would also like to point out that it is very important to work with the United States to protect our continent. We are very lucky to live in Canada and to have a good relationship with the United States. We can always work together to make things better and to protect all Americans and all Canadians living here.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too congratulate my colleague for her first speech in the House and look forward to hearing many more.

In regard to the bill before us, there is a very real concern that Canadian authorities are being asked by a foreign government, in this case, the United States, to hand over personal information of Canadians and that doing so should not be a responsibility of the Canada Border Services Agency. The latter's employees, of course, have been without a contract now for over 1,100 days, and the Liberal government absolutely needs to get on with that.

The Canada Border Services Agency's sole role is to protect Canada, not to hand over Canadian information to foreign authorities. I would like to hear the member's comments on that.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, although the number one priority at our border is to protect Canadians, working alongside our partner, the United States, is obviously a good idea. We want its co-operation as well, and it would help to protect both countries if we worked together and transmitted this information.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for her first speech to the House.

She mentioned the diversity of her riding in her opening comments. Could she expand on her thoughts about that diversity, which I know she is very proud to represent.

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Ms. Emmanuela Lambropoulos: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to represent one of the most multicultural ridings in the country. There are people from so many different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and religions, and a lot of the new refugees who have come to our country are in my riding. They are being welcomed by so many organizations there. It is a wonderful thing, because we get to see what our country has to offer, that everyone is so friendly and wants the best for everyone else. I have an exemplary riding, because people get to see how everyone lives together peacefully.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in this place. This is my first time rising in debate since we resumed sitting here in the fall, outside of question period, of course.

I think this is a very important bill. It was introduced in response to ongoing action by the former Conservative government starting in 2011 with the beyond the border initiative, an agreement put in place by former Prime Minister Harper and former President Obama. It has two purposes, which are basically to improve the security of both of our countries and to increase the economic competitiveness of both countries by amending the Customs Act in several key ways. It is good to see the work of this agreement continuing. We acknowledge that the United States is certainly a very important partner and ally for us in many regards, as we see right now with the ongoing NAFTA talks, as well as the continued discussions on shared areas of interest, such as defence and immigration.

I will speak in support of Bill C-21, but in the context of a situation that we have seen emerge in the last several months, which is the surge of asylum claimants and people who are illegally crossing Canada's border at various unofficial points of entry, and then, of course, making asylum claims. This is a situation that started in January this year. We saw a huge spike, and I believe the most recent numbers from August are that over 27,000 migrants have illegally crossed the border into Canada from the United States through unofficial border crossings. This is the highest number of crossings in many years. Therefore, I think the bill is an important step in the right direction in the context of that particular issue. However, I am not sure that it goes far enough.

What we have heard from border officials at the CBSA is that they have been absolutely overwhelmed by this situation. We have seen this evidenced by the Liberal government's having to set up tent refugee camps on the U.S.-Canada border, and basically scramble after months of inaction in failing to denounce this activity as unsafe, and failing to put in place any sort of plan that would prevent people from getting false hopes in crossing the border illegally and making asylum claims.

Since this crisis started, all of our immigration processes and services have become backlogged by this influx. Refugee claimants are being told that it will take many months to process their claims, and in some cases years. This is far too long. However, the bill would have a direct impact on this situation by amending the Customs Act so that basic information would be sent to Canada when a person leaves the country. Currently, this information is only recorded for foreign nationals and permanent residents who leave the country. The bill would close the gap in security that currently exists so that any time a person leaves the country, it would be noted.

There seems to be a consensus in the House between the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party of Canada that the bill is necessary. However, I ask my colleagues in the NDP to consider the bill from this perspective. If we want Canada's asylum claim system to be credible and to help the world's most vulnerable, we need to make sure that the finite resources our country has are applied to helping those people.

The proposed amendments to the Customs Act would ensure that it would be recorded when the individuals who stay in Canada beyond their authorized stay do eventually leave. Currently, immigration enforcement officials do not have this information, and have to waste time and resources conducting investigations of individuals who have already left the country without their knowledge. In a situation where immigration services are already backlogged, Canada cannot afford to waste time and resources on pointless pursuits. Bill C-21 would allow immigration officials to focus their activities and not waste time and energy where there is none to spare.

However, I want to make the point that while I am supporting the bill, I do not think that the government has thought writ large of how it is managing the backlog and processing burden that the illegal border-crossing crisis is putting on our border crossing and immigration officials.

• (1630)

This will help. I certainly do not want to see immigration officials having to track people who have already left the country. That seems like a giant bureaucratic waste of resources that could be corrected by this simple fix.

I also think that the government needs to have a long, hard look at how it is already resourcing and enforcing some of our laws, which are not being respected in Canada right now. I have certainly heard directly from CBSA officials, who have talked to me in confidence because they do not want to be outed to their bosses. There is a lot of fear of retribution by the Liberal government on this. They say that they simply do not have the resources to cope.

As a Conservative, to me the first instinct is not to say that we should dump a bunch more money into a situation. We should look at the determinants or reasons why things are happening, try to correct them, and then ensure that we proceed accordingly. In this situation, this is why our party has been making a strong case that the government needs to look at the component of the safe third country agreement that allow people crossing the U.S.-Canada land border through unofficial points of entry to make an asylum claim. We believe that this particular loophole should be closed.

To my colleagues from the NDP who are asserting that somehow this is not necessary, this information is readily shareable. I do not think it is very intrusive. I think it would make our immigration system and border agencies work a little more effectively, so that we can potentially be directing resources to those who need them the most.

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I want to emphasize that in the scope of this bill we are sort of remiss as a House of Commons if we are not looking at some of these other determinants such as the illegal border crossing crisis. There are a couple of other reasons for that.

This bill speaks to tools and the need to prevent human trafficking into this country. There is a lot of concern in the community, evidence, and certainly speculation of increased activity by human smuggling rings into Canada as the illegal border crossing crisis has picked up. There was a story published on CTV News entitled, "Saskatchewan woman faces human smuggling charges in connection with illegal border crossings". This woman was arrested after being stopped by the police with nine people in her vehicle. All nine individuals, originally from west Africa, had entered Saskatchewan at the northern portal Northgate crossing. They were taken into custody by the CBSA. Through the course of the investigation, the CBSA uncovered evidence to suggest that suspected smugglers were allegedly bringing foreign nationals into Canada from the United States by facilitating their illegal crossing between designated points of entry.

This is a huge concern. Earlier this year, with the Speaker of the House I had an opportunity to visit Mexico City. We visited one facility that assisted refugees who were coming from the northern triangle of Central America. The impression I was left with was just how dire the situation was and how many people were migrating from this area. I was also left with a concern that there was a significant amount of human trafficking resulting from this situation.

My concern is that if we are not tracking people exiting and entering our country in more effective ways, and making sure we are not facilitating these groups by leaving a glaring loophole such as the one in the safe third country agreement open, we are making it easier for these people to participate in these activities. My concern is that there is a disproportionate number of women who are affected in negative ways by this activity.

At the UN General Assembly last week, I believe the UN High Commissioner for Refugees talked about the need to ensure that women and their rights are protected in migration. We have certainly seen in the Middle East that over 70% of women who are migrating experience some sort of sexual violence. Certainly we do not want to see that happen across our Canada-U.S. border. Our efforts need to be expanded here.

• (1635)

I hope all members in the House of Commons will support the bill because it is a common sense measure to ease some of the burden on the CBSA right now. If that is the goal of the legislation, we need to look further and close the loophole in the safe third country agreement.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I extend my appreciation to the Canada Border Services Agency and the officers for doing a fantastic job, not only this year but also in previous years. Although there have been issues and an increase in numbers of individuals crossing the U.S.-Canada border, to try to give the impression that this is the only year where it has taken place is wrong, especially if we focus on Emerson. This happens every year. Our border control officers, RCMP officers, and

those who are involved have done a fantastic job in serving our citizens through the fine work they do.

I appreciate the support the member has for the legislation. My question is related to our Five Eyes nations, of which Canada is one. Would she not agree that this legislation brings us closer to being in tune with our Five Eyes allies, which is a positive feature of the legislation?

• (1640)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I will spend my time responding to the first part of the member's statement. I echo the sentiment that we appreciate the work of the CBSA. However, it is completely unfair and ridiculous to basically foist the responsibility of the House to deal with a problem that has become worse, not better, onto the operations of the CBSA, and that is the illegal border crossing crisis.

Earlier this month, the government received a briefing from officials that showed over 300,000 people in the United States were set to have their TPS revoked, who are similar to their Haitian cohorts we currently see entering the country through Quebec. Therefore, the indication is that this situation will be exacerbated, not corrected.

The member opposite needs to wake up and look at the situation. He needs to say that while we appreciate the work of the CBSA, we also need legislative tools, such as closing the loophole in the safe third country agreement, to allow it to do its job more effectively.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the issue of information.

The government is acting as though this information is trivial since it is just the information on our passports. However, the problem with this agreement is that it takes us down the rabbit hole. I would like to remind members that this is just the first step in a more integrated border with the Americans.

Take for example President Trump's immigration order that prevented certain people from entering the country. That, quite frankly, was a racist measure. Sharing the information from people's passports can be problematic because that includes information on their nationality. We have seen cases of racial profiling at the border that targeted Canadians who wanted to enter the United States.

The NDP and I are concerned about the fact that the government wants to share even more information with the Americans, even though there have already been problems and things will only get worse since that information can be used for harmful purposes.

Does my colleague really think that the planned safeguards are sufficient?

Does she not think that we should slow things down a bit and ask ourselves just how much information we are prepared to share to supposedly speed things up at the border?

*Government Orders**[English]*

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would make the assumption that people choosing of their own volition to enter Canada, taking a risk that certainly they are not recognized under any sort of official immigration stream, are entering a country that at some point is going to be interested in their exit. The argument the member opposite just made is somewhat moot in that he is implying there would not be consent or knowledge of information being shared, and that is blatantly false.

There is also an assumption in his statement that I would like to rectify, which is the United States is somehow not capable any longer of upholding its democratic principles and arm's-length immigration processes by which Canada and the United States have operated with for years. This is the underlying principle that people who are arguing for the removal or the whole revocation of the safe third country agreement are trying to make. I would argue that the United States is, and remains, one of the strongest democracies in the world and many of its processes with regard to immigration are the most generous and compassionate in the world as well. That is why we have the safe third country agreement to begin with.

Given that we see global forced migration, global migration, and economic migration publicly as one of the biggest policy concerns in the world right now, these sorts of tools will help us maintain the security of our borders and the social licence to operate an integrous and smart immigration system.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-21 is being introduced at a rather interesting time and pertains to a very sensitive subject, specifically, privacy. The bill proposes amendments to the Customs Act to allow the collection and sharing of exit information on anyone who leaves Canada, including Canadian citizens, with American authorities.

We in the NDP have to question the legality of this sharing of personal information on Canadians with American authorities, and we believe that Canadian officials should not be collecting this information for the United States or any other country. This should be the responsibility of the American border officials, who already collect data on travellers who enter the United States.

I agree that security imperatives must be taken into account and we must ensure the strength and effectiveness of the Canada-U.S. border, but this cannot be done at the expense of the rights and freedoms of Canadians.

Data gathered by the Canada Border Services Agency should never be disclosed to foreign agencies, except in exceptional circumstances. In such cases, police forces, such as the RCMP and CSIS, already have measures and practices in place that they can use.

In recent years, whistle-blower Edward Snowden spoke to us about U.S. surveillance programs, in particular NASA's program. U. S. President Donald Trump is a populist politician who is lawless, racist, unstable, and, unfortunately, the leader of the most powerful nation in the world. He wants to increase electronic surveillance and the collection of information about foreigners, whether they are tourists or U.S. residents.

Bill C-21 would increase the exchange of information between Canada and the United States. There has been a system to collect and subsequently share exit and entry information at the Canada-U.S. land border since 2011. In 2013, it was established that this only applied to third-country nationals and permanent residents. Since then, the information exchanged by our two countries has not decreased. Americans are always looking for more information.

After hearing this, should Canadians be concerned about their privacy? We believe that the answer is yes. The giant next door influences our policies. After assuring the international community that Canada is back, our Prime Minister is making our country bend once again to what the U.S. wants.

Are we going to again allow our neighbours to dictate their demands without worrying about the consequences for our lives, our freedoms, and our privacy?

Not content with invading the privacy of its own citizens, the United States now wants to invade the privacy of Canadians crossing the border. Bill C-21 would authorize officials to collect data about every individual leaving Canada, including Canadian citizens, and share it with U.S. authorities.

Why does the government think it has the right to decide that it will collect private information about its own citizens and share that information with foreign governments?

I do not have a problem with Canada sharing information with the United States. These days, we need to strengthen our international bonds. However, authorized law enforcement agencies, such as the RCMP and CSIS, can already exchange information in exceptional cases.

With this bill, the government will make information exchange routine regardless of the consequences and how U.S. authorities will use that information. We do not know how our information will be used or who will get it. I cannot fathom why this government wants to collect and exchange even more personal information absent adequate independent oversight by our national security agencies.

Canadians recently lost the protection that was previously afforded to them under the Privacy Act. In January, President Trump signed an order allowing the U.S. to access information on any individual, including Canadians, to verify their identity.

In other words, anyone crossing the border at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, which we are hearing a lot about these days, or at Stanstead can be asked by American customs agents to turn on their phone and give the agents their password for Twitter, Facebook, or any other social network. That is a complete invasion of our privacy. Our own Privacy Commissioner, Daniel Therrien, warned us about this initiative.

• (1650)

He said, and I quote:

The issue is that if you allow greater information-sharing, the legal standards authorizing this activity should be such that law-abiding Canadians, ordinary Canadians who should have nothing to fear from surveillance activities of the state, are not caught by the information-sharing regime.

The bill that is currently before us does exactly the opposite. Although we need to take into account security interests and ensure our safety and the smooth exchange of information at the Canada-U.S. border, as I was saying, we need to be careful and protect our rights and freedoms within Canada. The information that is collected by the Canada Border Services Agency must not be disclosed and shared with foreign authorities.

In addition to all that, it is important to keep in mind the Trump administration's disturbing actions. In light of the discriminatory immigration orders, which, as my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly mentioned, led to the racial profiling of Canadian citizens travelling to the U.S., it comes as no surprise that the right to privacy of non-Americans has been suspended. That is very worrisome. Now, more than ever, this bill poses a threat to the fundamental rights of Canadian travellers.

When will the Liberal government keep its promises and protect its constituents? If it does not set clear limits on the exchange of information and if it does not enhance protections, we will clearly end up in a position of weakness. This affects privacy, but also other areas. The other worrisome thing is how this data will be used. According to *The Economist*, information is worth more than oil. That says it all. I need not remind the House that many information giants are American, including Google, Facebook, and Microsoft, and that our Canadian and Quebec companies are competing in this environment.

Can we believe for a moment that the information shared with the Americans will remain in the hands of the Department of Homeland Security? There is nothing in this bill or in the government's interventions to indicate that the information that will be disclosed will be used for security purposes only. Economic intelligence gathering is nothing new; the practice is used by both our adversaries and our allies. We get the impression that the Liberal government is hoping that the Trump administration will keep its word.

Trump will swear to us, as he often spontaneously does, hand on heart, that his American administration will never allow that information to be misused for economic purposes. If anyone believes that, that would be the very definition of naïveté or gullibility. This is something of a recurring theme. The Liberals promised to be more transparent, and yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to access information. These days, there is a lot of talk about access to information regarding the NAFTA negotiations. We have no information about that. Confidentiality agreements have been signed for a four-year period. These negotiations will have repercussions on all Canadian workers.

The Liberals promised to remove from Bill C-51 any excessive transfers of power to security agencies. That has not yet happened. There was a very modest reform that did not correct all the problems in Bill C-51.

The Liberals also promised to respect official languages. We still do not have an official languages commissioner to investigate complaints and ensure that bilingualism in the House of Commons

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improves. That still has not happened. A number of promises like that have been broken. I could name several more.

In this case, promises were made about accountability and transparency, but Bill C-21 falls short of keeping them. We want to protect Canadians and the bill on the collection and exchange of exit data does not specify how this information will be used or who it will be exchanged with.

How can we trust our legislators if they cannot get their facts straight on the issue of privacy and how this bill will ultimately work?

• (1655)

In conclusion, we will be opposing this bill. The Liberals are going to have to start over.

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

What is particularly interesting about all of this is the context. This bill was problematic well before the arrival of Mr. Trump. Since his arrival, however, we have every reason to be concerned about the privacy breaches and the policy of profiling that seem to be entrenched in the procedures of border services officers, especially those in the U.S.

To reassure us, we are told that only the information appearing on a single page of the passport, such as date of birth, name, and nationality, will be shared. The problem, however, is around nationality. Given the reports of profiling and discrimination occurring at the U.S. border targeting Canadian citizens with dual citizenship who wanted to cross the border to work or visit family, for example, we have every reason to be concerned. When this type of information is shared knowing that this culture of profiling exists, we are on a slippery slope. Even if the information may be simple, the reality is very different.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about these concerns and Mr. Trump's other executive order under which American privacy laws no longer apply to non-U.S. citizens. That is another problem that can arise from this information being shared.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, in light of the current immigration orders, dozens of questions have been asked about the fact that, to cite one example, a University of Sherbrooke student on his way to compete in a sporting event in the U.S. was stopped at the border just because he came from a Middle Eastern country. It led to a complicated situation, and in the end, he did not even get to compete. This shows that there are already prejudices at work at the border, and this bill will magnify this type of incident.

People are always saying that crossing the border is taking longer and longer, but this bill could make things even worse.

It is also troubling that our privacy is no longer being protected. It is said that American authorities will be able to demand access to travellers' social media accounts. That is clearly a privacy violation. This is truly worrisome, because if the government is not going to do anything about it, who will?

*Private Members' Business**[English]***Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.):***[Member spoke in Cree]**[English]*

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre will need to provide the question in either of our other official languages so hon. members will have the opportunity to hear what the question is that has been posed. I will ask the hon. member to repeat the question in either English or French for the benefit of all hon. members.

*[Translation]***Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette:** Mr. Speaker, I understand.

I would like to know why no interpretation service is provided here in the House for a language as important as Cree, the language of native peoples of this land. However, I am happy to have the opportunity to ask the hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît a question. I appreciated what she had to say.

In her opinion, why is it important to know who is entering and leaving our country, as this bill proposes?

• (1700)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I would have loved to be able to answer him in Cree, but that is not possible for me, so I will answer him in French.

We agree on the fact that Canadian authorities need to gather information on every person entering the country in order to keep Canada safe. What we object to is being required to give the Americans or any other foreign authority information on Canadian nationals or travellers leaving our country. That is not our responsibility, and it should not be. It should be the responsibility of the country the travellers are entering. This bill increases the collection and sharing of data with foreign authorities but offers no guarantee of protection against searches of electronic devices, for example, or any protection regarding who will be using the data or what it will be used for. Before we share information with the Trump administration, which carries out racial profiling and does not protect citizens' safety, we need to ask questions and review our privacy safeguards.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Some hon. members:** No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.**The Deputy Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.**Some hon. members:** Nay.**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the yeas have it.*And five or more members having risen:*

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until the end of the time provided for government orders tomorrow, Wednesday, September 27, 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, September 27, 2017, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if you were to canvass the House, I suspect you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to see the clock at 5:30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

*[English]***VENEZUELA**

The House resumed from June 1 consideration of the motion.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to support Motion No. 128, put forward by my colleague, the member for Thornhill. The context in which I would like to speak in favour of the motion is that sometimes one has to stand up for something, and sometimes the world has to stand up for something, and what is happening in Venezuela right now should light the world on fire. If the world and Canada truly purport to stand for human rights and the support of the rights and freedoms of people, we should be seized with and seriously protesting the atrocities that are happening under the rule of the dictator Nicolas Maduro.

There is a large Venezuelan community in Calgary. I have had the opportunity to speak with many of them and to participate in many of their rallies, so near and dear to my heart is that these are people who are proud of where they have come from. They were proud of their country. Under successive, disastrous, socialist rule a once vibrant economy has been reduced to ruin. We are essentially seeing people starve to death as the rule of law disintegrates. Political dissidents are being jailed. This is a country that was once, very recently, very vibrant. It is an economic and political crisis that has descended into a humanitarian crisis. All members of the House should stand up and call it what it is.

Private Members' Business

Last week I had the opportunity to be at the UN General Assembly in New York. I was walking down the main hallway of the conference room and saw a large display by the Venezuelan republic. It was essentially a large propaganda piece. It said, "The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is fully committed to the rights of sovereignty and self-determination of peoples as fundamental elements of a fair and balanced international society," blah, blah, blah. I could not believe that this was advertised at the UN during the UN General Assembly week. It was such a poke in the eye to people who are trying to support the rights of people in Venezuela.

The reason I bring this up as an example is that I believe that Canada should stand up and take a position on this issue. I note that the Prime Minister was silent on the situation in Venezuela in his address to the General Assembly last week. He did not speak about the humanitarian crisis, and he did not provide a position on where Canada believes we should be going with regard to this crisis.

My colleague's motion provides the House with some very clear and practical direction in terms of telling both the Canadian people and the international community where Canada stands on this issue.

The first component of my colleague's motion says:

develop a plan to provide humanitarian aid directly to Venezuela's people, particularly with respect to alleviating the severe shortages of food and medical supplies;

I would like to bring to my colleagues' attention the fact that last week, when I had meetings with several high-profile human rights lawyers who are representing political dissidents who have been jailed or who have relatives who have been jailed by the Maduro government, an idea was thrown out that perhaps the United Nations should appoint a humanitarian coordinator for aid for Venezuela. This is something that could fall under this particular component of my colleague's motion. It is very clever in a couple of ways.

First, it would ask the United Nations to do something the United Nations should be doing, which is coordinating humanitarian aid. Second, it would force the UN and the global community to acknowledge that there is a humanitarian crisis there. Third, it would provide UN resources to address the fact that for many NGOs that are trying to deliver aid right now, the aid is either being turned away at the border or is being redistributed to members of the military or other supporters of the government in a situation where many people do not have anything to eat. I remember reading a story in the news that perhaps my colleague, the shadow minister for foreign affairs, will elaborate on. Basically, "let them eat rabbit" was the story coming out of there last week.

This is something the government could do.

I would very quickly also like to speak to the fact that this is a situation where the United Nations, in theory, could provide a lot of direction and administrative support to a country. We need to, as a global community, perhaps put a little more pressure on that body to act.

● (1705)

Right now only 2% of the United Nations' entire budget, if members can believe this, is actually directed toward ending human rights abuses through its human rights arm. I would like to see that

budget number increase significantly but be reallocated from other components of the budget.

If the UN were to appoint a humanitarian coordinator, I think aid could get in and a lot of lives could be improved quite quickly. When people have something to eat and their basic health needs are met, they can get to the task of rebuilding civil society. That is very important in Venezuela right now.

I want to speak to the second point:

condemn the continued unjust imprisonment and treatment of political opponents who, as reported by Luis Almagro, Secretary General of the Organization of American States on March 14, 2017, "fear repression, torture, and even death";

Many members of this House had the opportunity earlier this year to meet with Lilian Tintori, the wife of a jailed senior political dissident. She passionately and eloquently stated the need for the world to watch what is happening in Venezuela and to condemn the fact that political prisoners are being unjustly held.

It was our party that originally asked, in the House of Commons, I believe in May, that targeted sanctions be placed on human rights abusers in Venezuela. I think it is unfortunate that the government did not use the General Assembly speaking spot it had to reiterate the importance of other major economies following suit.

I am very concerned that if it can happen to a country like Venezuela, it can happen anywhere. If we are not at least talking about how Canada is going to react to this situation at a global body, then I think we have perhaps slightly lost our way, which is why this motion is so important.

The third component of my colleague's motion is this:

call upon the Government of Venezuela to respect the right of the people of Venezuela to hold a free and fair referendum to restore democratic rule in their country;

"Free and fair" are the key and operative principles in that statement. Members of the community in Canada, and I will not give their names, because I know that many of them fear for their families in Venezuela, have talked about the system of voting, called Smartmatic. There are concerns within the country that this particular way of counting votes is being used to potentially cheat.

As a parliamentarian in Canada, I would like to have more information about that. Should this motion be adopted, it is something the government would have a mandate, from the House, to investigate and to, again, speak to and advocate for in global bodies such as the United Nations.

The last component of my colleague's motion asks that the House:

recognize that Canada's foreign policy should always be rooted in protecting and promoting freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

This should be a no-brainer for anyone in the House. If we cannot agree on this, I am not sure what we can ever agree upon. This should be the principle of any foreign policy.

Private Members' Business

I will say this. If anyone on the other side of the House is going to speak in favour of at least that component of this motion, I would ask that in their caucus meeting this week, they bring up the fact that the Prime Minister missed an opportunity at the General Assembly to speak against the atrocities that are happening in Venezuela and in other parts of the world.

We will be having an emergency debate later this evening on the plight of the Rohingya people. We have spoken at length about the Yazidi genocide in this House. The fact is that under the government, it takes a long time to do anything other than state some pretty hollow words at the UN General Assembly. We need action.

I believe that what my colleague has presented to the House for support is a common sense motion that is very Canadian. If it is presented in a global format, it will embolden and spur other nations to follow our lead. It will send a message to the people of Venezuela that we support their right to have human rights and to live under the rule of law and that we condemn the actions of a failed socialist regime that has concentrated power in a few corrupt despots, to the detriment of the entire people of Venezuela.

Again, to close with what I started with, we have to stand for something, and this motion allows us to do so.

• (1710)

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Thornhill has distinguished himself in his human rights advocacy, and I would like to thank him for this important motion. I welcome the opportunity this debate affords to enhance our government's robust response to the crisis of democracy and human rights in Venezuela.

Much has transpired in Venezuela since we began this debate last spring, none of it encouraging. We support all the recommendations in Motion No. 128.

Canada's foreign policy seeks to support freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Latin America has travelled a difficult path and has paid a heavy price on its journey toward respect for human rights and democracy. These values are being gravely violated in Venezuela. Canadians will not stand by silently as the government of Venezuela strips its people of their fundamental democratic rights.

Last week's announcement of sanctions against the Maduro regime underscored our unwavering commitment to defending democracy and human rights in Venezuela. We have made it a foreign policy priority to maintain pressure on the Maduro government to restore democratic order, to respect human rights and the rule of law, to release all political prisoners, and to confront the self-inflicted humanitarian crisis.

Our government has repeatedly issued strong statements and continues to raise the issue of Venezuela's descent into dictatorship, with our hemisphere's counterparts working toward consensus on concerted actions. In addition to spearheading efforts multilaterally and within the Organization of American States, Canada is a very active participant in the Lima Group, a group of like-minded countries committed to working for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela. In Lima this August, Canada joined 11 countries of our hemisphere in signing on to the Lima Declaration, rejecting the

Venezuelan government's recent slide toward dictatorship and committing the group to concrete actions.

At the group's second meeting last week, on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was pleased to join her regional counterparts in reaffirming our commitment to remaining actively engaged on this crisis. Canada is playing a leading role within the hemisphere to maintain pressure on the Maduro government. We are pleased to confirm that Canada will be hosting the third meeting of the Lima Group in October.

We applaud the appointment of Canadian professor, and former colleague, Irwin Cotler to an independent international panel of experts convened by the OAS to examine evidence of possible crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela. If warranted, it will submit its findings to the International Criminal Court. We simply cannot afford to let international attention to this crisis wane.

Let me address the current situation. When Venezuelans took to the streets in April, following an attempt by Venezuela's Supreme Court to take over the powers of the democratically elected national assembly, they demonstrated their collective will to defend their democratic rights. During four months of protest, more than 5,000 Venezuelans were arbitrarily detained, hundreds of civilians were tried before military courts, and more than 120 Venezuelans were killed. At least 650 political prisoners are currently believed to be incarcerated.

A report released last month by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights contains disturbing findings, including the systematic use of excessive force, the arbitrary detention and ill treatment of demonstrators, and the targeting of journalists.

Disturbingly, the government of Venezuela's response to the courage of protestors was to further diminish their rights. On July 30, the political crisis in Venezuela reached a tipping point with the rigged election of a national constituent assembly, or ANC, to rewrite the country's constitution. This initiative proceeded without the matter being put to a referendum, as required by the Venezuelan constitution. In fact, prior to the ANC election, the opposition-led national assembly held an unofficial referendum in which 98% of more than seven million Venezuelans were against the creation of the ANC. In response to this vote, Canada and many countries issued a statement urging the Venezuelan government to respect the will of the people and to restore constitutional order.

• (1715)

Regrettably, these calls were ignored and the ANC's election proceeded amidst allegations of vote rigging and a boycott by the political opposition. The then attorney general, Luisa Ortega, committed to opening an investigation, but she was promptly dismissed and replaced by the newly created ANC. The company that supplied the voting machines had to flee the country after discovering that the government had tampered with the results.

The mass protests in Venezuela have quieted as the government's repression and persecution of opponents is ongoing with the help of the ANC's expansive control over all government institutions.

Private Members' Business

Along with rewriting the country's constitution, the body has formally stripped the democratically elected national assembly of its core lawmaking functions. It has also established an Orwellian-sounding truth commission to investigate those who were involved in the civil protests and to vet those who intend to run in gubernatorial elections slated to take place on October 15. Against this backdrop of diminished democratic freedom, rates of violent crime remain some of the highest in the world, and shortages of food and medicine are endemic.

We firmly believe that the long-term resolution to the current Venezuelan crisis must be rooted in respect for human rights and dialogue, and Canada stands ready to facilitate and support any negotiation process that is genuinely focused on a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

Faced with mounting international pressure, in mid-September, the Venezuelan government agreed to take part in a new process launched by the Dominican Republic to develop a framework for negotiations with the opposition. Canada hopes these efforts will bear fruit but reaffirms that a serious commitment by the Venezuelan government and concessions are required for the talks to be meaningful. Canada has been one of the leading voices in addressing this crisis, and we will continue to exercise a leadership role until a peaceful resolution is negotiated.

Despite our efforts and those of the international community, the Maduro regime continues to consolidate its authoritarian rule. The prospects for democratic restoration appear low. That is why our government has announced, this past Friday, September 22, strong targeted sanctions against 40 leading members of the Maduro regime who have played a key role in undermining the security, stability, and integrity of democratic institutions in Venezuela. These sanctions send a clear message that anti-democratic behaviour has consequences and those involved will be personally sanctioned. We will maintain pressure on the government of Venezuela to restore constitutional order.

We are also continuing to support those who defend human rights in Venezuela, including opposition leader and political prisoner Leopoldo Lopez and his wife Lilian Tintori, who has mounted an international campaign to defend the rights of Venezuelans. Canada's Prime Minister, Canadian opposition leaders, and other parliamentarians met with Ms. Tintori in Ottawa on May 16, when we reaffirmed our collective resolve.

The Government of Canada is focused on creating space for civil society to promote human rights and democratic governance, and our embassy in Caracas is very active on this front. While Canada's efforts have been substantial, we understand that a coordinated international approach increases their impact. As mentioned, we are committed to working with the Lima Group to take strong decisive actions.

At the Organization of American States, Canada is recognized as an active and constructive participant. The Minister of Foreign Affairs welcomed the opportunity to take part in a special meeting of foreign ministers in May to consider the situation in Venezuela and to further advance dialogue, at the OAS general assembly held in Mexico from June 19 to 21.

In conclusion, I believe it is clear that Canada's actions exemplify our shared commitment to protecting and promoting freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. A secure and prosperous future for Venezuelans is important not only for Venezuela and its citizens but for the entire hemisphere. The Government of Canada will remain fully engaged on this important issue.

● (1720)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today in debate on Motion No. 128, following great speeches on both sides of the chamber on an important issue that should and does bring all parties together.

I want to particularly compliment my colleague the MP for Calgary Nose Hill, who spoke on this issue and has advocated for it and, of course, my friend, colleague, and seatmate, the MP for Thornhill, who has long been an advocate for the oppressed around the world. He has seen it first-hand, in his career both as a journalist and as a parliamentarian. He uses the privilege we have in this place to bring forward the cause of people that most Canadians will not be able to see or encounter first-hand. As parliamentarians, we have an obligation, especially in Canada, one of the most free, diverse, and wealthy nations of the world to point out where there is abuse and suffering. This is why we are here today on Motion No. 128.

In fact, the motion's title is the official recognition of the suffering of the people of Venezuela. I think all parliamentarians have heard from the diaspora of Venezuelan Canadians who are greatly concerned about family members still there, about the tragedy, the corruption, and the loss of life, which has been staggering since 1999.

What makes it a true tragedy is that Venezuela is a country of immense potential. It is rich in so many ways, starting with its people, but of course extending to resources, agriculture, and the ability to produce and trade with the world, which that country was doing.

Parliamentarians need not go far from here to see the statue in Ottawa of Simón Bolívar, the big liberator of that part of the world. He helped establish the independence of Venezuela in 1830. The government of Venezuela dedicated that statue to its friendship with Canada in 1988. Many of us have seen that statue not far from here, down Wellington Street.

How sad that things have changed from 1988 to today, and how unfortunate that the sad situation of the plight facing the Venezuelan people did not make the Prime Minister's speech at the UN last week. There is a lot to speak on, and he did speak of challenges we have here inherently in Canada, but that general assembly is an opportunity to point out areas of the world that need global attention and global pressure to make sure that the oppression, corruption, and denigration of a people and a country will stop.

Private Members' Business

We need only look back to the start of the regime of Hugo Chávez in 1999. He had previously been a mercenary and someone trying to bring a coup forward in that country, and was able to form government. The dictatorial leanings of that person showed through immediately. Institutions started being eroded and filled with his cronies from his revolution. The constitution was changed to allow him to further his own personal interests, to suppress democratic debate, and to really crush his opposition. He then began to nationalize businesses and the economy in a way that has really seen the potential of that great country squandered through neglect, corruption, and evil in many ways. We should call it what it is.

We saw a rich, oil-producing country for a few years able to use the wealth that was created on a nationalized basis, but when the United Socialist Party of Venezuela took over a lot of levers on the economy, as we saw the economy falter, we saw hunger increase. As we saw foreign investment to that country dry up, we saw inflation begin to rise. As we saw a once strong quality of life and earning potential for that part of the world start to decline, we saw the rise of murders, crime, and the disappearing of opposition people. These are all hallmarks of a brutal regime that was intent on enforcing its will, suppressing dissent, and creating a corrupt state. It truly is a tragedy of epic proportions.

● (1725)

A stunning memory I have of our Canada 150 year was the day after Canada Day, when I took my children and a few of their cousins to WE Day on the Hill. I was coming down before the festivities began to see how we could get on to the Hill, and I ran into a family of Venezuelan Canadians wearing their proud Canadian gear. They recognized me and they asked me what Canada is doing to help the people of Venezuela. It struck me. We were on the lawn and about to celebrate the amazing parliamentary democracy we have here in Canada, the immense wealth, the immense opportunity, and this family, who was visiting from outside Ottawa, Canadians now, festooned in Canada 150 gear, wanted to talk first about how a parliamentarian could help their family back in Venezuela. This family is worried, because when the Chávez regime ended, it was picked up in 2013 by his lieutenant, his right-hand man, Nicolás Maduro. The Maduro regime has continued its corrupt and destructive path for those people. This family that stopped me on the Hill knew that Canada welcomed it and many others, both as immigrants and refugees, but wanted to know what Canada is doing to apply pressure.

I am proud to say that, in the last government and in this current government with some of its recent moves, we are trying to apply that pressure through the Organization of American States, with debates like this that my friend from Thornhill brought to Parliament, and by the sanctions announced by the minister last Friday with respect to freezing assets of people related to the regime. I want to see that continue, and there are a number of key ways we can see that continue now.

First is the debate we are having today on Motion No. 128. Second, and my friend from Etobicoke who spoke just before me supports this suggestion, is a rapid passage of the Magnitsky Act, which is a tool that would allow this pressure to continue on corrupt regimes by freezing their assets, by doing what the international community should be doing, which is calling out the despotic rule of

the Maduro regime, freezing its assets, trying to root out corruption, and showing our support for opposition leaders who in some cases are being detained and imprisoned. This motion starts the debate today. I would like to see quick passage of the Magnitsky Act.

I saw first-hand, when I worked for Procter & Gamble in Canada, how even a lot of the companies in Venezuela have been slowly moving operations from that country—companies like General Mills, Colgate, Pepsi, Ford, and others. It is not just the oil nationalization that started ruining the economy. The nationalization of the economy led to investment fleeing that country, to talent fleeing that country. Let us not lose sight of the fact that there is potential to bring that back if we see democracy in the future.

I will end by moving an amendment, seconded by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. I move:

That the motion be amended by replacing the word “referendum” with “election”.

● (1730)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It is my duty to inform hon. members that pursuant to Standing Order 93(3), no amendment may be proposed to a private member's motion or to the motion for second reading of a private member's bill unless the sponsor of the item indicates his or her consent.

[*Translation*]

Therefore, I ask the hon. member for Thornhill if he consents to this amendment being moved.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I give my consent with enthusiasm.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to this important motion by my colleague from Thornhill and for the first time on a foreign policy issue in my capacity as the deputy shadow cabinet minister for foreign affairs for our caucus. I look forward to working with our leader, and the member for Durham, as well as members of all parties on the important challenges facing Canada in a rapidly changing world. As I often say when I speak to students in my riding, our role in the opposition is not always to oppose the government. Rather, it is to support it when we think it is right, and to oppose it when we think it is wrong. On questions of foreign policy in particular, we will always seek to be constructive, while still being forceful and emphatic when we feel that its direction is at odds with Canadian values or Canada's interests.

In my speech today, I would like to cover some of the ground again on the situation in Venezuela. However, I will first articulate some of the underlying principles of our Conservative foreign policy that animate this motion and inform our particular recommendations in this case.

Private Members' Business

As Conservatives, when it comes to foreign policy our core conviction is that our approach to the world must start with a clear definition of our values and objectives, and that those values and objectives should reflect principled conviction. We reject the vagaries of post-modern relativism, the idea that morality or human rights may differ from nation to nation or from culture to culture. We hold that human beings are human beings wherever they live, and that human rights, which arise from nature as opposed to custom or state diktat, are the same, regardless of the willingness of state or cultural institutions to defend them. It is important to say that we reject extreme Wilsonian idealism, which suggests that the world can be easily remade perfect. We understand the importance of pursuing human rights advancements as a process, of pursuing realistic and pragmatic improvements over time, but we also reject the idea that the violation of human rights and human dignity is ever acceptable, whether justified by ideology, culture, or political expediency.

In this sense, our political tradition is both idealistic and pragmatic. It is the inheritor of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and of Thomas More's *Utopia*, the first of which invites us to eschew extreme revolutionary change that would present risk to the good of society, and the second of which invites us to imagine different possible realities that are far outside our present experience. We can hold fast to absolute principle while also believing that the only way to build a better world is to take modest and pragmatic steps. Still we must never allow ourselves to deny our principles or to step backward further into the mists of injustice.

We also believe in multilateralism and engagement, the multilateral engagement that is rooted in our values and our desire to work with partners to advance our convictions on human rights and human dignity.

Our view is distinct from that of this government, a government that believes we can ignore human rights abuses or even praise human rights abusers if it achieves some instrumental good. Most often the good the government seeks is the approval of other nation states and the election of Canada to the United Nations Security Council. As abrasive as it may sound, it is hard to deny that fact. We have seen the government champion closer relations with Russia and Iran, even talking about aerospace opportunities in Iran. It has ignored repeated calls from the opposition to prioritize a response to the ethnic cleansing of Muslim Rohingya in Burma. It applauds the legacy of Fidel Castro. It has praised China's political model. In the case of Cuba and China, it has parroted those regimes' myths. The former foreign affairs minister praised Cuba's allegedly low crime rate, and the Prime Minister has praised China's alleged commitment to efficiencies and environmental improvements.

A more honest reckoning would observe that those political structures are characterized by outrageously harsh punishments even for non-violent crimes, and yet still very serious corruption in both cases. Praising other states is likely about currying favour and getting on the UN Security Council, although perhaps in some cases it may unfortunately represent a genuine romanticizing of these regimes.

The government's response to our criticisms of their relativistic and one-track UN Security Council focused foreign policy is to sometimes accuse us of being isolationist. It is actually quite alarming that the government would speak in this way, that

somehow it believes that anyone who rejects their "go along to get along" approach is an isolationist.

Ours is a doctrine of principled engagement and selective multilateralism. We will work with any nation in a way that, and the extent to which that engagement, advances our values and our interests. However, we will not engage in a way that is contrary to our values and our interests. As I said, our core conviction when it comes to foreign policy is that our approach to the world must start with a clear definition of our own values and objectives, and that those values and objectives should reflect principled conviction. Those are the principles and convictions that animate our commitment in this particular case to the advancement of justice and human rights in Venezuela.

• (1735)

Venezuela has a particular significance for me, because my mother was born there. My grandfather was working as an engineer in the Venezuelan energy sector before returning to Canada, the country of his birth. It is important, I think, because Venezuela is a resource-rich country, full of potential. It was the sort of place where, at one time, Canadians like my grandfather might go to seek good employment and opportunity. It is hard to imagine that happening today, as a country of such potential continues to see that potential squandered by a cruel, hard-left, anti-democratic government.

Before his death in 2013, the revolutionary government of Hugo Chavez oversaw a dramatic economic decline and dramatic growth in corruption and crime. His successor, Nicolás Maduro, has continued his failed socialist policies. The public response to declining conditions has led the Maduro regime to institute repressive new measures and the population has responded with intensified demands for freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, recognizing that these things are also the basis of prosperity and well-being. People are courageously demanding free and fair elections. They are going to prison and even giving their lives in their fight to finally take their country back.

The Chavez and Maduro regimes were built on a revolutionary principle, one that believes that any evil can be justified as a means to advancing toward an idealized socialist utopia. This is a starkly different concept of utopia than the one advanced by Thomas More. More invited us to imagine a better possible future, but understood that getting there required us to always act with goodness and justice in the present. Socialism, on the other hand, in the name of utopia, is used to justify any present action, however unjust or evil.

I call on all members to firmly renounce any residual romanticism they may hold about these revolutionary socialist ideologies. It is a curious feature of our politics that some, even on the centre left, romanticize tyrants of the far left. The government has now sanctioned officials within the Venezuelan government, and for this we give it credit, but Venezuela is going down a path well trodden by China and Cuba. The Prime Minister said this about the late Cuban leader:

Fidel Castro was a larger than life leader who served his people for almost half a century. A legendary revolutionary and orator, Mr. Castro made significant improvements to the education and health care of his island nation.

Private Members' Business

About China, he stated he has “a level of admiration...for China”, and went on to say:

...their basic dictatorship is actually allowing them to turn their economy around on a dime, and say, ‘we need to go greenest, fastest—we need to invest in solar.’ I mean, there is a flexibility that I know Stephen Harper must dream about of having a dictatorship that he can do everything he wanted, and I find quite interesting.

This is a strange quote because it was not Stephen Harper fantasizing about dictatorial socialism. It was the Prime Minister, in this case, before he was the prime minister, expressing his explicit admiration for this kind of revolutionary socialism that we see in Cuba and Venezuela. The government is appropriately sanctioning Venezuela, but it is particularly rich in light of the Prime Minister's own admiration for extreme far-left revolutionary regimes. Our foreign policy must be rooted in consistent principle, principle that applies in all cases in order to be clear and credible.

The situation in Venezuela, along with the crisis in Burma, North Korea, and Syria, did not merit mention by the Prime Minister in his address to the United Nations last week. It was a significant missed opportunity for him to be on that world stage and fail to address any of these significant challenges with dramatic human rights implications. It was a missed opportunity to advance Canadian values and interests.

We know where we stand on this side of the House, firm in our commitment to universal human rights, democracy, the rule of law, universal human dignity, justice for all, and the prosperity and human flourishing that flows from a dedication to these principles. We believe that our foreign policy should reject revolutionary idealism and all-ends-justify-the-means thinking and, instead, champion fixed and unchanging principles, champion Canadian values and interests.

• (1740)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Madam Speaker, when I tabled brought Motion No. 128 with the House in the spring it was to urge the government to respond more actively to the ever-deepening crisis in Venezuela. This is a continuing crisis, not only in terms of the brutal denial of democratic process, free speech, free assembly, and the rule of law, but also because of the humanitarian tragedy that worsens by the day.

Let me offer congratulations to the government for finally acting to impose targeted sanctions against some of the worst abusers of human and democratic rights in the Maduro regime, starting with President Nicolás Maduro himself. The Canadian sanctions have been properly hailed by Venezuelans living under Maduro's increasingly violent oppression, and by the thousands of Venezuelans living in Canada who contribute so much to our society while dreaming of a day when democracy will return to their homeland.

I will come back to Canada's newest sanctions and the challenge of enforcing them in a few moments. First, I remind members that the extreme socialist policies, corruption, and cruelty of President Nicolás Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chavez have imposed incredible suffering on the people of Venezuela, once the richest nation in Latin America but now overwhelmed by inflation that the International Monetary Fund predicts will hit 721% by the end of this year, and 2,000% by the end of next year if this tragedy continues.

Extreme shortages of food and medicines, the result of the Maduro regime's imposition of extreme and often contradictory socialist policies, have resulted in chronic malnutrition among children and adults. At least 125 people have died in five months of increasingly deadly street protests in the capital of Caracas and in communities across the country.

The people have been demanding a new presidential and national election that would be internationally observed, freedom for jailed politicians and pro-democracy advocates, and humanitarian aid from the international community for the sick and hungry masses.

OAS Secretary General Almagro has announced the creation of a panel to evaluate ways of taking Venezuela to the International Criminal Court. It is worth noting that our former colleague and human rights champion Irwin Cotler is one of those panel members. As noted earlier by my colleague, the United Nations potentially has the clout to intervene, but so far the democracies among its members have limited themselves to verbal concerns and calls for reconciliation.

The United States imposed targeted sanctions against individuals identified with the Maduro regime repression some months ago. The Liberals, while saying then that it was impossible to follow suit under our existing dysfunctional sanctions regime, finally announced that they could. They did so late on Friday afternoon last week, though a day after the missed opportunity for the Prime Minister to tell the world at the United Nations.

It is true that Canada's new Magnitsky legislation will soon make it easier to designate and enforce sanctions against gross individual abusers of human rights, not only in Venezuela but around the world. However, first the Liberal government needs to heed the recommendations of the foreign affairs committee's report on much needed sanctions reform and not only name sanctioned individuals but also specify the reasons they are listed, and direct government departments and agencies to devote much greater effort and resources to monitor and enforce sanctions.

With regard to potential additions to the new list of sanctioned Venezuelans, I respectfully suggest to the government that it direct responsible agencies to investigate allegations made in testimony before the foreign affairs committee of the House last November 2 of the alleged movement and laundering of many millions of dollars of fraudulently obtained Venezuelan funds through an American company Derwick Associates, and a Canadian entity known as The O'Hara Group. The testimony, along with the names of alleged perpetrators, can be found in the foreign affairs committee transcript of November 2 last year and in testimony before the U.S. Senate judiciary committee in July this year.

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In conclusion, I call on all members to support Motion No. 128 calling on the government to actively work to develop a plan with our democratic allies in the Americas and around the world to provide urgently needed humanitarian aid and to support and demand free and fair elections in Venezuela.

• (1745)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93 the recorded division on the amendment stands deferred until Wednesday, September 27, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

EMERGENCY DEBATE

• (1750)

[English]

SITUATION IN MYANMAR

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely the situation of the Rohingya people.

[Translation]

Let me remind the hon. members that they do not need to be in their own seats and that, pursuant to the order made earlier today, the Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions, or requests for unanimous consent.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC) moved:

That the House do now adjourn.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Midnapore.

I speak from time to time in the House about my children. It is important for us to think about our own children and families when we think about the experience of families previous human rights abuses. People are people and children are children, wherever they are, whatever their colour, and whatever their faith.

The Subcommittee on International Human Rights had hearings about the situation facing the Rohingya community last week, and I want to read from that testimony. The subcommittee heard the following:

“...on August 27th. Around 10 a.m. Myanmar army soldiers arrived in Maung Nu Village....Some residents fled immediately, but a large number gathered at what is essentially the largest home in the village. It's a two-storey home owned by a prominent Rohingya family. The residents in this village thought perhaps they would be safe in this home. Each room of the house, which is relatively large, filled up with huddled masses of residents. According to survivors, women and girls were downstairs, and men and boys were upstairs.

“The Myanmar army surrounded this home, entered the home, corralled women and young girls to the house next door. One eye witness watched as soldiers dragged the men and boys out of the house including children as young as 12 years old. Some of the soldiers tied their hands behind their backs, and they tore veils off of women, and tied them over the eyes of the men and boys, and proceeded to violently interrogate them.

“Soldiers started beating the men and boys, screaming at them, and threatening them. After period of time the detainees were made to lay face down on the ground, and Myanmar army soldiers started executing them. Soldiers shot them and in some cases used knives to inflict fatal wounds to necks. One woman with whom we spent a period of time with witnessed soldiers shoot dead her father-in-law who was a local...her brother-in-law, and his two sons who were aged 16 and 18.

“The killing in this particular village on that particular day lasted for a period of about two hours. The victims ranged in age from 90 years old to 12 years old. Myanmar army soldiers in some cases wrapped bodies in tarps and dumped them in a military vehicle, and drove toward the local battalion referred to locally as the Pale Taung battalion. It's Battalion 564 of the Myanmar army.”

The same testimony and various other reports contain many more stories of atrocities and massacres. I struggled today, as I prepared for this, with which elements of the testimony to share and ultimately decided to stay away from the most graphic. However, I would encourage members to review the work of the subcommittee and the many media and independent reports out there, in particular, the testimony from last week.

We have here a clear textbook case of ethnic cleansing, of genocide against the Rohingya people in Burma. We are in the midst of a present escalation. The Conservatives have been raising this issue repeatedly in the House for the last year and a half, and we have asked the government to do more. In our view, the government did not start early enough and can do better now.

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In the context of these events, it is important for us to work together as much as possible, but also to continually challenge the government to do more to protect the vulnerable. I will speak more about what I see the Canadian role being later on.

I have shared one of many stories of massacres, but here is the situation in broad strokes.

The Government of Burma has, for decades, pursued a policy of denying the reality and legitimacy of the Rohingya claim to citizenship. The Rohingya people are, in reality, indigenous to western Burma. Their presence can be tracked back over a millennium. However, the government seeks to deny that reality and define them as “other”. Their right to be citizens was first denied them in 1982, and the Government of Burma since then has taken successive steps to deny their citizenship, push them out, and/or kill them. The goal is quite apparent: to rid the region of its indigenous Rohingya people.

There was once a great deal of hope for Burma after the military rule gave way to a power-sharing structure between the military and the elected government. There is still hope for Burma, but it will be a longer road than many people thought. The elected government has not shown an interest in improving the situation of the Rohingya community. In fact, the situation has obviously worsened.

Canadians will know well the name of Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of Burma and an honorary Canadian citizen. She bravely resisted military rule and fought for democracy, but now, bizarrely, is providing cover for the same military as it continues to delegitimize the Rohingya people, kill them, destroy their villages, and force them from their homes.

That Aung San Suu Kyi is providing cover is an important point. It speaks to her responsibility and need to do more, but it also speaks to the need to be specifically holding the military leadership and commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing responsible.

• (1755)

Despite calls to do so much earlier, the government failed to raise these issues with Aung San Suu Kyi until quite recently, but still has not, at least as far as we know or have been told, done anything to apply direct pressure to the military. There has been a dramatic escalation in the campaign of violence in recent weeks. The situation has now entered a critical phase.

Many of my relatives were victims of what Hitler called the “Final Solution”. Although we cannot know the twisted logic of those responsible for this ongoing genocide, it seems that they may be pursuing their version of what they would think of as the final solution in this case, that they want to drive out or kill those Rohingya who have hung on until now.

In response to incidents of genocide, it seems to me that the world follows a familiar pattern: ignore it while it starts, start to notice it when it happens, and then wring hands after it is over, while promising to never let it happen again. This seems to repeat itself over and over again.

After the fact hand-wringing may have a useful function but it is often somewhat disingenuous. Many of the same world leaders

involved in that after the fact hand-wringing then go on to pay limited attention to subsequent atrocities.

For those of us who might look back and ask why people did not do more in the context of the Rwandan genocide, in the context of the Holocaust, we have an opportunity now to ask ourselves why we are not doing more. Our children and grandchildren will ask us the same question.

Let us make “never again” meaningful. Let us act with the same urgency we would as if these Rohingya children were our children. They are no less human.

It is of course well and good to say that we should act. However, addressing situations like this require us to do more than express solidarity, but to act in a specific, effective, and sustained way.

Let me identify a number of things I think the government should have done and has not done unfortunately, but then, more important, identify some things the government should do going forward.

First, the government should have prioritized human rights in Burma and, in that context, answered direct questions that were posed to it on this in the House much earlier. The government should have engaged with military and civilian leadership, including Aung San Suu Kyi but also Min Aung Hlaing much earlier. The Prime Minister should have raised this issue during his speech to the UN General Assembly last week.

We cannot change the past. We feel that time has been lost already. However, going forward, the government must do the following.

First, the government must review every aspect of our present relationship with Burma. Burma is a major recipient of Canadian development assistance, for example. We must review that, yes, to get resources to vulnerable people, but we should review any government-to-government aid, and it seems there is a substantial amount of bilateral aid going to Burma.

We should forcefully raise this issue publicly and privately with military and civilian leaders, and do it in a sustained way.

We need to prioritize this issue in multilateral fora. It should be Canada's voice in all multilateral fora, asking what is being done about the situation in Burma.

We cannot change the past with respect to the Prime Minister's UN speech, but going forward, we should, and we must, prioritize discussion of this issue in multilateral fora. We must put pressure on our allies to end any elements of military co-operation with Burma, and to ramp up that pressure in every way possible. We should be imposing sanctions on all those individuals who are responsible.

We can do this. The Government of Canada can make a concrete difference in this situation if it ramps up the emphasis, if it ramps up the pressure and it prioritizes the issue fundamentally, and if it takes those specific concrete steps that I have mentioned.

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I want to respond to some of the criticism I have received on this issue. It has not been much, but the Government of Burma has tried to muddy the water somewhat by suggesting it is responding to stereotypes. It has frankly sought to play on negative stereotypes about Muslims to delegitimize the legitimate demand for fundamental human rights.

Let us be clear. These are significant crimes being undertaken by the Burmese military against civilians. Nothing ever justifies that, even if this were the middle of a war or some kind of active guerilla campaign.

The reality is, though, that this is a completely asymmetrical situation of a Burmese government that for a very long time has seen no kind of violent response from any elements of Rohingya society and has still consistently sought to delegitimize the Rohingya people's presence, to deny the reality of their long-standing presence in that area.

For those who play on these stereotypes, it is unconscionable because the facts in this case are clear. We need to take action. We need to hold the Burmese government accountable.

The world is watching. Canada can take action here. The situation must change and we have to do our part.

• (1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we appreciate the need for us to have this discussion. I know the Minister of Foreign Affairs and parliamentary secretary, among other government members and the caucus, are very much sensitive to what is taking place.

One of the things that is important as we move forward is to recognize that Canada can and will continue to play a leadership role on the national scene in doing what it can where it can.

Can the member across the way precisely indicate what he personally believes the Government of Canada should be doing in the immediate coming days?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the question is something I specifically addressed in my remarks. What should the government have done? It should have prioritized human rights in Burma—I answered direct questions on this—engaged military and civilian leadership earlier, and addressed the issue in the UN speech.

What the government should do going forward is review every aspect of its relationship with Burma, especially the aid dimension, but also other dimensions of that relationship; forcefully raise this issue publicly and privately with military and civilian leadership; prioritize this issue in international fora; and reimpose sanctions on all those responsible. That is what the government can and should do, and it would make a difference.

• (1805)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, with heartfelt gratitude I thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for bringing forward this very important emergency debate. I believe it propels us forward when we have this kind of meaningful discussion that can be captured and seized by the government when it hears some of the very real and tangible ways

we think we should be responding as a real personality in the international community. The member has described that very well in his speech thus far.

I would like to read a brief from the commissioner of international human rights so the member can maybe helpfully flesh out some of what is being responded to here. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein, condemned the situation in Rakhine State as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, noting that the situation could not be fully assessed because human rights investigators have been denied access. He condemned the Government of Myanmar’s “complete denial of reality”, which he saw as doing “great damage to the international standing of a Government which, until recently, benefited from immense goodwill.”

I would love to hear the member's comments on that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, there is so much there that I could pick up on. I guess I will just pick up on the last point in terms of the denial of reality by the Burmese government. When the State Counsellor says things like 50% of the villages are intact, it is quite a point of denial, but it is actually a point of admission as well. When one says that 50% of the villages have not gone through these kinds of terrible abuses, it makes one ask about the other 50%.

I am not saying that comment is even correct. What satellite images show is that about 50% of villages have been absolutely brutalized. That is what we can see from satellite images in terms of the changes on the ground. Of course there has not been any kind of meaningful international access, so we just cannot see what is going on.

That this is a textbook case of ethnic cleansing is a quote we have heard before, and it just underlines the tragedy that we have seen this pattern over and over again. Unfortunately, I think there has been a pattern in terms of the international non-response to these kinds of events over and over again. The international community too often prioritizes other kinds of considerations over these issues of fundamental human rights.

This House of Commons, the government, this country have an opportunity to make that difference, to lead on this issue, and we should do it.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan not only for splitting his time with me and thereby allowing me to speak to this very serious issue but also for bringing the genocide of the Muslim Rohingya to the attention of this House. Indeed, I do not think we would be having this debate tonight if it were not for the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

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Certainly the Liberal government has deliberately ignored opportunities to make it clear that Canada does not tolerate this type of systemic attack on any people, especially by their own government. At the very least, the Prime Minister could have raised this ongoing ethnic cleansing in his recent speech at the UN, but he chose not to do so. This is beyond disappointing. The Myanmar military is attacking, killing, and raping its own people, and our own Prime Minister will not even speak up to denounce it. In fact, my colleague has asked very specific questions in this House about the Rohingya genocide time after time. The Liberal members across the floor like to claim that they are committed to protecting international human rights and that they consider it a priority to protect the rights of linguistic, religious, and ethnic minorities, but when they are asked to actually prove it, they deflect, delay, and defer. This is shameful.

During testimony at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights last week, the Canadian outreach coordinator of the Burma Task Force Canada told parliamentarians that nearly half of the Rohingya population, over 400,000 people, have been displaced in less than three weeks, and over 200 villages burned. Mr. Ahmed Ramadan warned that the Myanmar Army is mobilizing troops again in preparation for another onslaught. He pointed out that the human rights organization and the United Nations have documented and presented Suu Kyi's government with facts regarding ongoing abuses by Myanmar's military. In fact, 52% of female refugees interviewed by the UN in Bangladesh reported having been sexually abused by Myanmar forces. The Myanmar military is now laying land mines across the border where people are crossing into Bangladesh. Clearly, the goal is not just to push people out of their own country; it is to eliminate the Rohingya people.

It has been widely confirmed that what is going on right now in Myanmar is genocide. The French President, the Malaysian Prime Minister, the President of Nigeria, the President of Turkey, and the Bangladeshi foreign minister are all calling what is going on at present a genocide. The Rohingya still in Myanmar are being systematically isolated from food and aid, with the result that they will starve to death while we watch. The Rohingya in internment camps—some of them there for years—are not receiving food either. We are told that humanitarian groups have been kicked out of northern Rakhine State, leaving thousands of children without food or medical assistance. In Bangladesh, where almost half a million have fled from the violence in their own country, there is also severe need for aid. My Conservative colleagues and I call on the government to encourage the Government of Bangladesh to allow humanitarian aid to reach these refugees as well because, we are told, conditions in these camps are also destructive.

I want to speak a bit about the report on the Rakhine State tabled in August by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan.

Mr. Annan and his advisory commission held a year of consultations into the challenges facing Rakhine State and put forward specific recommendations aimed to prevent exactly the type of situation that we are seeing today. The commission recognized the importance of socio-economic development for local communities. Most notable to me is that it called on the government to ensure that local communities benefit from natural resource extractions in the

state. The commission stressed the importance of providing compensation for appropriated land; investing in infrastructure, including roads, electricity, drinking water, and Internet access; providing vocational training that prioritizes women; reducing red tape to promote business; and of the urgent need for the government to strengthen the capabilities of communities to adopt climate-resilient options and to improve the state's irrigation systems.

The commission also stressed the very important matter of citizenship. Muslims in particular are often left stateless due to deficiencies in the national legislation. One of the recommendations is that the government set up a process to review the current law, and that pending such a review, the government should ensure that existing legislation is interpreted and applied in a manner that is non-discriminatory. Both Rakhines and Muslims face movement restrictions, although Muslims, in particular internally displaced persons, are particularly affected.

• (1810)

Mr. Annan and his colleague asked the government to ensure freedom of movement for all people, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or citizenship status, and to introduce measures to prohibit informal restrictions, including unofficial payments and arbitrary roadblocks.

As Mr Annan said:

Unless concerted action—led by the government and aided by all sectors of the government and society—is taken soon, we risk the return of another cycle of violence and radicalisation, which will further deepen the chronic poverty that afflicts Rakhine State.

Indeed, short days after this report was published, we saw exactly that.

Before I finish, I want to point out that since 2000 Canada has provided over \$180 million in official development assistance to Myanmar, with \$95 million being disbursed in the last four years, after Canada lifted most of its sanctions on the country. Should we continue sending money to a nation that is violating basic human rights, such as the right to religion? Should we continue sending money to a government, if not actively participating, is condoning genocide by its inaction? This is something the House must consider.

I look forward to hearing from my colleagues on these questions, as well as hearing their thoughts on what Canada can do and should be doing to help the Rohingya people.

Most importantly, we must recognize that ethnic cleansing is taking place. We must take action as a nation to condemn it and encourage our Prime Minister, who has failed to condemn it, to do so.

• (1815)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I did not quite understand the last part of the member's speech.

Does she want to reduce humanitarian aid to Myanmar? When she was talking about sending less money to Myanmar, did she mean less humanitarian aid as well? Or does she think we should increase humanitarian aid to those in need in Myanmar? It was not clear.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I think the most important thing is that we need to be sure that these donations are used in a manner that is consistent with our values, which is what the Conservative government did from 2010 to 2015. That is the most important thing.

When we give money, it is really important that the money be used in a manner that is consistent with our values. That is what we, the Conservatives, the official opposition, feel is the most important thing.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, Burma has a power-sharing government. There is the military and then there is the democratically elected component. Many people who are following this debate will know the name Aung San Suu Kyi, and I think will recognize the importance of engaging her. It is important that we underline for the government that it needs to be engaging her as well as the military leadership. It is important that we recognize that neither has been performing in a way that is consistent with the fundamental human values that we would like them to support. The government needs to engage more, and it needs to engage with both of those key elements of the Burmese regime.

I wonder if the member could talk a bit more about what we need the government to do, especially when it comes to engaging all of the different elements of Burmese leadership and putting on full pressure to bring about a change in direction.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, my response would be very similar to my response to the previous question. We must make sure that we are living our Canadian values in the international realm. This includes democracy, freedom, and of course basic human rights. We must make sure that we are encouraging these fundamental human rights of democracy, freedom, and safety within the international arena and that our nation, our government, and our Prime Minister are including these rights within all of our words and all of our actions and interactions with the other international players.

Presently, we are not doing that. We must be very sure that all of our actions and all of our words follow our Canadian values, which support human rights. Right now, this is not the case.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thanks to my colleague for her participation in this debate this evening, as well as to my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for raising this important matter as he has many times.

Certainly I appreciate hearing the member opposite ask that we continue to espouse Canadian values and work with countries around the world to build their capacity as it relates to respect for human rights, peaceful pluralism, and the rule of law. Canada has been seized with this issue and, on those very aspects of this, has been front and centre in the international sphere. We have made strong statements. We have worked with partners through the UN,

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through specific bilateral meetings at the UNGA, and delivered specific humanitarian aid, as well as sanctions on the regime.

Would the member opposite acknowledge that Canada has played and can continue to play a leadership role in helping resolve this situation?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I feel the greatest display of democracy, of freedom, and of justice was by the previous government. Its actions lived up entirely to the values. Certainly if ever there were an opportunity to express these values, which the hon. member across from me indicates that the government is doing through its meetings, it was not previously demonstrated by the Prime Minister at the recent UNGA meetings, which is very disappointing for all Canadians.

• (1820)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for York Centre.

Let me start by being unequivocal and firm. Our government clearly condemns the human rights violations of the Rohingya and the violence and persecution that has forced almost 480,000 Rohingya to flee. In a matter of weeks, nearly half the population has left its home out of fear of persecution and as a result of acts of violence. This is unjustifiable. This is ethnic cleansing.

Make no mistake. The plight of the Rohingya is a priority for Canadians, for the Prime Minister, for our government, for me personally, and for our officials in Yangon.

[*Translation*]

As many members know, this tragedy is just the most recent chapter in a long and complex history of violence in Rakhine State.

For decades, the Rohingya have been the victims of widespread, systematic discrimination and human rights violations in Myanmar. The Muslim Rohingya are an ethnic and linguistic minority. The government does not consider them one of the country's official ethnic groups, and as a result, Myanmar does not grant them citizenship. They are mainly considered economic migrants from Bangladesh and commonly deemed to be illegal Bengalis. That is why Canadian aid programs are trying to get these people recognized and ensure that their status in Myanmar is respected and valued.

In Rakhine State, tension has been brewing between the Rakhine Buddhist majority and the Rohingya for a long time. Unfortunately, that tension often leads to acts of violence. For example, in 2012, inter-ethnic unrest led to the forced displacement of 120,000 Rohingya, who have since been living in makeshift camps where their movement is restricted and they are entirely dependent on humanitarian aid.

In October 2016, things got even worse for the Rohingya when police officers were killed during attacks attributed to the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army at border posts in northern Rakhine State.

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The security operations that followed were grossly disproportionate, and the Rohingya suffered many human rights violations, including arson, rape, and torture. Tens of thousands of people fled to nearby Bangladesh or were displaced within the country, which has led to today's humanitarian crisis.

[*English*]

Canada has taken every opportunity to advocate for the Rohingya people, including in conversations with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the commander-in-chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing.

The Prime Minister and I personally conveyed this message in meetings with Aung San Suu Kyi in June 2017 during her official visit to Canada.

On September 16, I attended and addressed a rally organized by the Burma Task Force in Toronto. At that rally, I echoed the remarks by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights that the situation in Rakhine State “seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, and I condemned that.

On September 18, my colleague the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie attended a round table on Rakhine State hosted by the U.K. foreign secretary at the UNGA.

In recent weeks and at the UNGA last week, I have spoken about the plight of the Rohingya with my counterparts from Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, United States, Kuwait, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Turkey, and the EU. I have also spoken with Kofi Annan, whose report was discussed earlier in this House, and the Prime Minister spoke very clearly about this issue with Aung San Suu Kyi on September 13.

When I spoke about our concerns about the plight of the Rohingya with Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, I told her about conversations I had had with Canadian Rohingyas at this demonstration. She said that Canadians are so amazing, that we have in our country refugees from every country in the world. That was a very poignant remark, because I think we Canadians do feel a special obligation toward persecuted minorities around the world. I think one of the reasons is that, apart from the indigenous peoples in Canada, all of us originally came here from somewhere else.

I am so proud that we are having this debate tonight. I am so proud that the voices on all sides of the House are raised in support of the persecuted Rohingya. That says something about us as a country, and I want to commit to Canadians that we are fighting that fight.

I also want to say that our government is very aware that it is a Muslim minority that is being persecuted. We supported a motion opposing Islamophobia in our country, and we are very aware that in the world today, both in Canada and abroad, many Muslims are a particular focus for persecution. That is something Canada speaks out against.

Our goals today are very clear. The first is to end the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. The second is to work very hard to allow Canadians and Canadian humanitarian assistance to be provided to the persecuted Rohingya, to see with Canadian eyes what is

happening and to support these deeply suffering people. The third is to work in concert with our international allies to do everything we can to allow the Rohingya to return to their homes in Rakhine State and to live there free from persecution and fully enjoy their human rights.

It is important for all of us to hold Aung San Suu Kyi to account. That is what the Prime Minister has done in his conversations with her. That is what I have done in my conversations with her. That is what we have done in our public statements.

It is especially important for all of us to also hold to account and put pressure on the military leadership of Myanmar. It is very important that the military in Myanmar understand that the world is aware of the military's role in this ethnic cleansing and that we will not stand for it. That is something the government is doing as well.

I want to assure Canadians and all members of this House that Myanmar currently faces an arms embargo from Canada. That embargo is very firmly and clearly in place.

Finally, I want to reiterate the extent to which I personally, my colleagues, the Prime Minister, and our government welcome the opportunity to have this debate, welcome the opportunity to have this conversation, and really welcome the very strong show of support that we, collectively, are giving to the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority by, all together, with one voice, stating that we stand for them.

● (1825)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her remarks, her expression of solidarity, and also her report on some of the activities she has undertaken recently. Our view as the opposition is, to be frank, that some of these activities could have, should have started earlier. However, I appreciate nonetheless what the minister has shared.

I wonder if she could report specifically about engaging the military leadership as well, because she has talked about its importance. Has she spoken with General Min Aung Hlaing, the commander-in-chief in Burma? I wonder if she could report some of the context for those discussions in terms of what happened, what was said, and what the response was. I think the House would be very interested in hearing.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his engagement on this issue and for his engagement in having the debate tonight in this House. As I have said, I think it is very important for us to be showing our cross-party support on this issue.

As I said, I think we very much share the view that it is important, even as we hold Aung San Suu Kyi to account, that we also put pressure on the military leadership of Myanmar, and our government has definitely been doing that, including directly to the military leadership.

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• (1830)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. minister for giving us a very aspirational description of how we are going to move forward in terms of ending the situation of ethnic cleansing now, allowing that humanitarian assistance access to the actual problematic areas, and allowing that full enjoyment of human rights for the Rohingya population now and moving forward.

It is very aspirational, and I would ask the hon. minister if Canada will be increasing its humanitarian funding for this situation, to achieve these goals.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, it was an aspirational list of our goals. I will be candid, because I think it was implicit in the question, that these are hard goals to achieve. I recognize that. I think it is important for all of us, even as we advocate strongly and fiercely for the Rohingya, to be clear that this is hard, this is difficult. It does not mean that we should not try to do it, and we do need to be working hard. I certainly have felt that, in my conversations with our international colleagues, we can at least hope that this concerted international pressure may be starting to have an effect.

As for increasing our humanitarian support for the Rohingya refugees and humanitarian support for those in the region, that is certainly something that we are very urgently looking into.

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my riding of Markham—Thornhill, one of Canada's most diverse ridings, has a strong Muslim community, which has shown great concern toward the human rights atrocities faced by the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. I have met with many of my constituents, who have called on Canada to uphold international justice and take a lead in humanitarian intervention.

I am very proud of the steps that the hon. minister has shared with us on what our government is doing already to address this crisis. I would like the minister to inform this House, moving forward, on what steps our government intends on taking toward addressing the ethnic cleansing that is taking place in Myanmar today.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Madam Speaker, one thing I want to tell people is that many of the foreign ministers I spoke to last week and this week recognize the Canadian leadership, particularly those from the Muslim world, who said they were glad to hear Canada's voice raised on this issue.

On the steps we are taking, as I said, we are urgently looking at humanitarian assistance and seeking access for our diplomats to the Rakhine State so that we can see first-hand what is happening. Also, in concert with our allies, and I talked about this with Rex Tillerson last night, we are thinking about ways that we can step up that pressure on the military leadership.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I stand tonight in the House to speak on the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar and their brutal oppression at the hands of the Myanmar government.

Thirty-five years ago in 1982, the Rohingya, who are a Muslim minority in a Buddhist majority country, were stripped of their citizenship. Even before that, the Rohingya experienced the severest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination.

Through concerted government and local efforts they have been one of the most persecuted peoples on earth. This situation has only worsened over the past 35 years.

I am honoured to sit with six other members of the House on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the foreign affairs committee, and I am honoured to have been elected as chair of that subcommittee. Our subcommittee has done extensive work on the human rights situation facing the Rohingya and I would like to highlight some of our work to give members an idea of the tragedy that these people have faced.

In November 2012, the subcommittee studied human rights in Myanmar. The report studied the gradual dismantling of a military dictatorship and the birth of a nascent democracy with cautious optimism. The peaceful election of Aung San Suu Kyi as a member of parliament in a 2012 by-election and the election of other candidates from the NLD, was promising. Myanmar, it seemed, had emerged from 60 years of repressive military rule, characterized by grave human rights violations, an absence of the rule of law, persistent internal armed conflicts, and low levels of human and economic development.

Given the obvious challenges this new democracy faced, no one expected progress on human rights in Myanmar to happen overnight. I think as Canadians, and as elected representatives ourselves, we were glad to see a democratically elected civilian government led by individuals who we thought were committed to democracy and human rights.

Last year, after the election of the NLD to government and Aung San Suu Kyi's rise to State Counsellor, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights did an updated report on the plight of the Rohingya as its first order of business during this new session of Parliament.

The witness testimony was gut-wrenching. Throughout this study, our subcommittee heard that the Rohingya remain the target of hatred and violence in Myanmar, led by Buddhist nationalists and exacerbated by an environment of impunity and official complacency.

Those same 2015 elections that saw a civilian government finally elected also saw the Rohingya lose their right to vote. A Rohingya member of parliament testified about his Kafkaesque experience of being told that he was not a citizen and therefore could not run for the very position he was currently holding by the same immigration department and election commission that had approved his paperwork and candidacy for the 2010 elections.

When we drafted that report and made our recommendations, we understood that the situation of the Rohingya was dire, but we did not think it could get worse. In October of last year it got worse, much, much worse.

On October 9 last year, a group of Rohingya armed themselves and killed nine police officers in Rakhine State. None of us in the House condone the use of violence, but it is the responsibility of the Myanmar government to exercise restraint in the maintenance of peace and security and the exercise of justice.

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Unfortunately and unsurprisingly, Myanmar security forces carried out a ruthless and disproportionate response to the violence in Rakhine State. Satellite evidence showed that Rohingya villages had been burned to the ground. The Government of Myanmar expelled humanitarian workers, international observers, and western journalists, deprived the 100,000 Rohingya confined to camps of food, medicine and other aid, and emptied the region of witnesses to the violence. Let me reiterate that this was not last month or last week; this was last year.

The Myanmar military's attacks on thousands of innocent Rohingya civilians, including women and children, were inexcusably brutal and disproportionate. Security forces and mobs of Rakhine villagers set fire to houses with families still inside. We heard reports of members of the Myanmar military using widespread rape and sexual violence as a form of torture, targeting women and girls of all ages.

• (1835)

These are the same horrors we hear when we recall Rwanda or the plight of the Yazidis. They are stories of neighbours murdering neighbours, of families slaughtered, and women and children brutalized in the most horrific way. We looked at the situation from last October and said it could not get worse. It got much worse.

Last week, the subcommittee heard a horrifyingly familiar update on the current situation facing the Rohingya. Just last month, the Myanmar military launched a disproportionate operation against the Rohingya following deadly attacks by extremists. Make no mistake, these events were brought about by an enduring policy of cruelty towards the Rohingya. The rise of violent extremism was both predictable and preventable in light of years of persecution at the hands of the Myanmar authorities. In what the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has labelled “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”, Myanmar authorities and Buddhist extremists have burned entire Rohingya villages and shot at fleeing civilians.

We heard from a witness just last week who described how he calls what remains of his family every day to check whether they are still alive. The night before our meeting, his nephew in Myanmar told him: “Uncle, if we do not die, if we do not get killed by the army or the attacks with them, we will die here without food.” This is the risk they face. If the Rohingya who remain in their homes or are confined in camps in Myanmar are not murdered, they are being starved to death by the atrocious conditions forced upon them by the Myanmar government.

Since August 25, around 3,000 Rohingya are estimated to have been killed, tens of thousands of Rohingya remain stranded in northern Rakhine State without access to basic supplies such as food and water, and almost 400,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar into Bangladesh. In case anyone questions the intent or brutality of the Myanmar authorities' response, I have this to say. According to information collected by the international campaign to ban landmines, credible witnesses saw an army truck arrive on the Myanmar side of the Myanmar-Bangladesh border on August 28 from which soldiers unloaded three crates. They saw the soldiers take antipersonnel landmines from the crates and place them in the ground. One does not lay landmines to maintain public safety. One lays landmines to murder indiscriminately. The alternative conclu-

sion to the cruel act of laying mines to prevent Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh from returning to their homes is the barbarity of laying those mines to murder Rohingya fleeing violence.

This is the point that we are at, where we all know that ethnic cleansing is happening in front of our eyes. It is clear that the blame for these atrocities lies at the hands of the Myanmar government. Myanmar is among the youngest democracies. Its constitution mandates military control of key ministries, and effectively gives the military veto power over constitutional amendments, but this situation does not excuse gross human rights violations. One cannot advocate for democracy and peace with one side of one's mouth, and demonize and murder minorities with the other.

Aung San Suu Kyi must show leadership and denounce these crimes. The political reality she faces in Myanmar does not absolve her of the responsibility to speak up for the principles she once stood for, the hope she gave to so many, the Nobel prize she won, and the honorary Canadian citizenship she holds. The world recognized Aung San Suu Kyi for her leadership advocating for the rights of the oppressed. She is complicit in her silence.

Lastly, we must not forget to recognize that it is the military leadership in Myanmar that orders, undertakes, and oversees the brutality. Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces, bears direct responsibility for the atrocities committed by his military. Myanmar security forces must end all violence, and the rights of all citizens of Myanmar must be immediately recognized and protected.

As I close, I want to return to my earlier point, which is that whenever we heard of the atrocities the Rohingya have faced, we thought it could not get worse. We look at the scope and scale and the brutality of the attacks today. We look at the victims and the international outrage, and we say that it cannot get worse, but we know it can get worse. We know that if it gets worse from this point, from the ethnic cleansing and the massive displacement of Rohingya from their homes, then we know what this will become.

• (1840)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member said that we all know what this will become but did not say the word that I think was on the tip of his tongue, and that is “genocide”. I cannot think of what comes next after ethnic cleansing. We cannot even debate whether the line between ethnic cleansing and genocide is a fuzzy one given that clearing people from their homes, destroying their villages so they cannot come back, freeing up that land for use by others, and making a return to their homeland impossible are all features of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

Was “genocide” the word that was on the tip of the member's tongue?

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Mr. Michael Levitt: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that it was the word on the tip of my tongue. We see the tragedy facing these people. We see the spiralling of this situation that has become more and more dire. Even as we have examined this over the last couple of years, it has continued to trend downhill. We have seen it happening, as I mentioned in my speech. We know what happened to the Yazidis. We know what happened in Rwanda and it is up to the international community to ensure that these people are not subject to genocide.

• (1845)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from York Centre for his very passionate presentation and showing us the brutality of regime against the Rohingya Muslims. We have been talking to a lot of communities and these concerned communities have said that the words “ethnic cleansing” do not get it. There is no legal repercussion for that terminology.

As my hon. colleague across the aisle suggested, we should call it a genocide, but they have also suggested a few other solutions. These include setting up an international task force that would be allowed to go inside Myanmar and see the situation for themselves. Second, there are refugees that are in the centre of Myanmar and cannot leave. Those who are near the Bangladeshi border can leave and cross over the border. The others are left to be murdered.

What are your thoughts on Canada airlifting them or supplying some assistance to Bangladesh, which can ill afford these 800,000 refugees and the 70,000 women who have been raped and are pregnant?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am not going to give you my thoughts. I am assuming that you wanted to do it through the Chair.

The hon. member for York Centre.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Madam Speaker, one of the first recommendations we made when our report, “Sentenced to a Slow Demise: the Plight of Myanmar’s Rohingya Minority”, was tabled in June 2016 was to urge the Government of Myanmar to allow access into Rakhine State, to allow humanitarian access, to allow international observers in. As I said during my remarks, one of the problems is that we do not have witnesses there on the ground to try to resolve what is happening now and to try to intercede, and also to be able to document and hold to account those committing the crimes against and murder of these Rohingya men, women, and children.

I do think there is an opportunity now to work with our allies, to work with multilateral organizations, to get more assistance to Bangladesh. The world has woken up. Everyone has woken up to what is going on there. With light now shining squarely on this part of the part, it is now the opportunity to make sure that we are working together with international partners to make a difference and end the violence now.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Madam Speaker, in fact, I was rising to ask my colleague if he believes that we should immediately increase our humanitarian aid given the

horrors he described. However, I will have the opportunity to speak a bit more about this in my short speech.

I will be sharing my time with the member for Hamilton Centre.

It is true that the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar and those who have fled to Bangladesh is truly horrible. It is a situation that should concern all of us. We absolutely must discuss it. It is for that reason that I am truly pleased to have the opportunity provided to all of us this evening to speak to this issue. I know that several of my colleagues have taken this situation to heart and would also like to speak.

Since August, over 430,000 Rohingya have fled Myanmar. People often forget to mention that this is on top of the 300,000 others who had already left. Out of a population of a little over one million people, that is an absolutely staggering proportion. It is as though 15 million Canadians fled somewhere else. They are fleeing situations of extreme violence. We have all seen the images on television of villages burning and people setting fire to the roofs. Houses are sometimes burned with entire families still inside. People are fleeing this violence, knowing that it will be very difficult for them to ever return, since their villages have been completely destroyed. We have seen executions. We have seen so many things that are unfortunately all too common in these kinds of situations. Rape is used as a weapon of war. There have been reports of decapitations, which brings back terrible memories.

As my colleague mentioned a little earlier, there have been very credible reports from various sources stating that Myanmar’s military forces are laying anti-personnel mines along the Bangladeshi border. As we know, Myanmar is not a party to the Ottawa treaty to ban landmines, although Bangladesh is. Initially, Myanmar refused to remove landmines within its borders or work towards that. Now, not only is it not removing them, it is laying new ones. We are familiar with the long-term damage this can cause.

We could go on at length describing the atrocities happening there, but I think what sums it up best is the fact that more and more people are talking about the ethnic cleansing occurring in Myanmar right now. It sends shivers up the spine. It is important to note that there are many children among those fleeing right now. These people are arriving in Bangladesh exhausted, starving, often sick, and almost always traumatized.

Poor Bangladesh does not have the means to take them in and has problems of its own. Bangladesh itself has a large population, and on top of that, this is typhoon season. The serious humanitarian situation triggered by the Myanmar government’s actions combined with environmental and economic issues in that part of the world is a recipe for disaster. It is absolutely terrible. That is why talk is not enough; we need action.

Earlier, the minister talked about showing support, which is all well and good, but endless expressions of support are not enough. We have to take meaningful action, and I have some suggestions for the government in that regard.

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• (1850)

As other members mentioned, this situation calls for diplomatic pressure. We have to work with our partners to achieve a number of objectives. The violence must stop. Landmines must no longer be deployed, and those that have been must be removed. The Myanmar government must let humanitarian groups and investigative teams in. We can talk all we want about crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing—some people have even spoken of genocide this evening—but to find out what really happened, evidence must be collected on the ground. We must pressure the authorities to let investigative teams in, and we must provide technical support to those teams.

We must also end immunity for the violence committed there. I was talking about investigating the crimes and horrors committed there, offering our expertise, and ensuring access to teams who conduct fact-finding missions, but we can also use things like satellite imagery to immediately start monitoring, as much as possible, what is happening on the ground. According to Amnesty International, there were still villages burning on September 22. That needs to be investigated.

We have to think about sanctions imposed with our partners against the military authorities of Myanmar. They might be modelled after the Magnitsky Act or take the form of a travel ban. There is also a need for humanitarian aid, not next week or two weeks from now, but immediately. Refugee camps are stretched to the limit. There are camps for displaced persons within Myanmar, but we can act and help the people in the camps in Bangladesh. UN authorities talk a lot about “the most urgent emergency in the world”. People are crammed together, some already sick and exhausted. There could be an outbreak of disease. We must act now.

We also have to think about the long term. As I was saying, there are many children among those fleeing the violence. We have to think about their education and their mental state, because some of them are traumatized. We have to consider the possibility that there will be no immediate return to Myanmar in the coming weeks, as the villages have been destroyed.

The United Nations will be quick to increase its requests. It has already asked for \$77 million, but this is not the type of emergency where a one-time donation will do because this is an ongoing crisis. We must continue to donate, and with the growing number of refugees, we have to donate even more.

Lastly, we will have to consider the possibility of receiving Rohingya refugees. Earlier the parliamentary secretary was talking about building democracy and good governance. True, that is important for preventing similar situations from happening again in the future. To get there, however, funds need to be committed to international aid, and it saddens me that the Liberal government has reduced Canada's contribution to international development.

• (1855)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was intrigued by the idea of satellite images, so I would like to hear my colleague expand on how that could help improve the situation in Myanmar.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, satellite images are a tool we can use to find out what is happening on the ground.

One of the problems we are facing is that the authorities in Myanmar are currently blocking access to humanitarian aid. A ship has been blocked. The authorities are refusing to let in teams who could act as neutral observers of what is happening on the ground. For example, when there are reports of villages being burned down, even if no team is able to travel there, the satellite images let us at least see what is happening. They are an important source of information.

There is an urgent need to put pressure on the government and deliver humanitarian aid, but there will come a point when we will need to put an end to impunity and immunity. There will come a point when we will need to come up with concrete measures for dealing with the people committing these crimes, and to do so, we will need very detailed, accurate information.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her work on foreign affairs issues and human rights. In particular, it is a pleasure serving with her on the foreign affairs committee.

In my speech I mentioned some specific action items that I feel the government should take, and I want to ask her to respond to see how the NDP feels about these specific action items: number one, reviewing every aspect of our relationship with Burma, especially the way in which we deliver aid; number two, forcefully raising these issues publicly and privately with military and civilian leaders; number three, prioritizing these discussions in international fora; and number four, reviewing sanctions, and certainly re-imposing sanctions, on those responsible.

Maybe there is not time to address all of those points, but I wonder if my colleague wants to address some of them.

• (1900)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

My colleague raised some of the same points I raised in my speech, including the need for effective sanctions. With respect to aid, I know some groups have talked about redirecting more assistance toward humanitarian aid. We agree on those issues. There is also diplomatic pressure.

In my short speech, I did not go into detail about the various kinds of diplomatic pressure we can bring to bear in connection with many different issues, but I did cover some of them. This is not just about pressure to end the violence; it is also about pressure to allow access for aid agencies and put an end to the threats against NGOs so that humanitarian workers can do their jobs. I think our suggestions are quite compatible with those of our colleagues, actually.

Let me reiterate, however, the urgency of helping the people in these refugee camps who need humanitarian aid right now, not next week.

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[English]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her passion. I was wondering whether any thought has been given to the surrounding countries, especially countries like India. We are far away from the situation, but countries like India that are there on the ground, that are democracies, can influence neighbouring countries. What sort of pressure should we put on those countries so that they can bring pressure to bear on Burma?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I am not saying that India cannot help, but regional issues are always so complex. That is why it is important to work with all of our partners and not limit ourselves to partners in the region itself. Generally speaking, there can sometimes be existing tensions within certain regions. We have to figure which partners are the most appropriate in a given situation.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity, although, like many others, I rise with a very heavy heart, given what is happening to fellow human beings about whom we care.

Unlike most who have spoken, many either have a direct connection with Myanmar, Burma, or are on the human rights committee, or are on the foreign affairs committee, I am none of that. Therefore, I will not get into the details of what is going. It has been quite adequately put out there, certainly by the minister and my colleague, our critic.

However, unlike most people, I have the distinct honour of having met Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma, in Myanmar. It was under the auspices of a committee put together by the former minister of foreign affairs, John Baird, who had a particular interest in this area. He put together and funded a small group of parliamentarians, and I think we had senators and a couple of clerks, to go over as an outreach, as we often do, Parliament to Parliament.

Part of the focus was on public accounts. Since that has been one of my mainstays here, I was asked if I wanted to go on that. What a great honour it was. That happened in February 2013. It is even more difficult when one has actually met the lady, has shook her hand, has looked her in the eyes, has had her look back, has talked with her, and has realized how special she really is.

Again, that is why it is difficult but important that even though many of us hold her on a bit of pedestal that there is also an obligation to speak out when something is wrong. Not only is what is going on in Myanmar, Burma, wrong, but the response of the government is wrong.

We find ourselves, those of us who care about the people of that country and the future of it, realize she is still by far the greatest hope they have. However, regardless of what party we carry in our pocket, the fact is that we are now looking at ethnic cleansing, or some call it genocide, or some say we are not quite there, that it is legal. I do not know that it matters what we call it at this point, given how many people are being slaughtered, how many people's homes are being

destroyed, and how many people are being forced out of their own country. Whether we call it ethnic cleansing or genocide, the fact is that it is another horrible situation. That is why we are standing here tonight.

At the very least, this Parliament has to go on record as speaking out, holding our government to account to ensure it does absolutely as much as possible. To be fair, I enjoyed the minister's remarks. I thought the criticism that came from colleague was well placed, but it in no way took away from what the minister said in her remarks about how Canada viewed this.

I had no problem applauding the minister's remarks, particularly when she talked about the fact that Canadians were in support of the Rohingya Muslim minorities. She also said that we would hold Aung San Suu Kyi to account, but we would also ensure that the world would know that we held the military to account because we all understood exactly what was going on.

We understand the difficulty that the lady has. My heart breaks for that situation, but I have also had the opportunity to be in the same room as Nelson Mandela, although I did not get to meet him. I cannot imagine Nelson Mandela taking the politically expedient way out in any circumstance, not when it was this important.

● (1905)

To be fair, the whole lot of us did not put too much pressure on that issue when the election was coming up, for the very same reasons I suspect she is not saying what we need her to say right now, and that is that there is a broader purpose, a broader goal. The democracy and future of Burma, of Myanmar, is at stake. We understand that. However, when we hold someone out that special, there are certain expectations. While her title is State Counsellor, we all know she is the defacto president. We also know she has very little influence let alone control with the military. It is a tough spot.

However, we need more from the lady. We need more from the world. We need just a smidgen more from the Canadian government. This is the time when we go to the speeches.

I have also been to Rwanda. Any of us who go to Holocaust events, or to Rwanda events, or if people have been to Rwanda, begin to understand the dimensions of that kind of death, violence, hate, and inhumanity. Every time we go to those events, every one of us says "never again", yet there is always another again.

At the very least, I want to thank our Speaker for agreeing to this emergency debate. This is Canada. As difficult as it is to speak out against an ally, Aung San Suu Kyi, the issue is so important, particularly to the Rohingya Muslim minority who want to know whether they matter. We are here tonight in the Canadian Parliament to say, yes, they matter. They matter like every other human being. When atrocities happen, we will stand and we will do what we can. We are not the biggest, most powerful country in the world, but we do have some influence, and we are prepared to put some of that credibility on the line. We are doing that tonight.

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The lady put out a statement on September 5, which really shook me. She used the term “fake news”. Really? I agree with our friends who put out a statement today. It was put out by quite a list of really credible, important human rights organizations and individuals. I will not read it now because I am running out of time, but they go out of their way to pretty much say it in much better, tight, concise language than I did. It is pretty much that same argument, that we need more, that we expect more. We understand the circumstance, but this is “never again” territory.

On September 19, Aung San Suu Kyi, instead of going to the UN, gave a political briefing in Myanmar. She closed it this way:

As I said earlier, this is a diplomatic briefing....But in some ways, it is more than just a diplomatic briefing. It is a friendly appeal to all those who wish Myanmar well. A friendly appeal to help us to achieve the ends that I think, you would agree are desirable, not just for this particular country, but for countries all over the world.

I think we stand behind that desire on the part of Aung San Suu Kyi for her people, but it is important for us to stand and hold everyone to account when we are either on the brink or in the midst of ethnic cleansing.

I wanted to add my personal remarks and experience, and to recommit my efforts and myself to the interests of Burma, particularly to the Rohingya Muslim minorities who are being slaughtered. Somehow Canada has to do both. We have to stand with the country, we have to criticize when necessary, and we need to provide moral leadership by example on this file. If we do not, this Parliament and other Parliaments are going to hear over and over “never again”, yet it happens again. At some point, as a humanity, we have to mean it.

● (1910)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting that the member brings in the juxtaposition between Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi. In an article, Don Marmur, said that it was possible that the euphoria that we got from Nelson Mandela we transmitted onto Aung San Suu Kyi and thought she was the human rights champion. However, were we really hoodwinked, is the question I have in my mind. If she was the last hope for the Rohingya, when she was asked a question as to what she was doing against the atrocities of the military, she stated that these were “terrorists”. As a Muslim, I take offence that terrorism is the first opt-out label.

I would like the member's thoughts on that. Also, with an attitude like that, should we remove her honorary citizenship?

● (1915)

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, all I can give is my opinion, and it is not a learned one. This is my own experience and my own heart. Do I think she hoodwinked us? No. Having spent time alone with her in a room with maybe six or eight people where we talked, no. I think what she has done is act like an ordinary politician, like us, and we expected more.

In the ramp up to the election, whenever this subject came up, the lady remained very quiet. We all saw what it was, those of us who are politicians, but we did not say anything either.

Again, we have to watch what kind of pedestal we climb on. However, I do think she is wrong, and it hurts to say that. I did have the same feelings about her that I have for Mandela, and I thought

that was who she was. Maybe that means she has to be a better politician, or a better human being, or a better leader. I do not know, but better is required.

Do I think she is a fraud, that she hoodwinked us, and that is not really who she is? I hope I never have to eat these words, but I do not think so. I think she is the real deal. I think she is just showing that she is human, and it is up to us who care about her and love the country to respectfully put that pressure back on her, but ensure we tell the world that we know it is the military. She has a role, but we know that it is the military, and we will keep that focus on there too.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians have always protected human rights. Rohingyans are an ethnic, religious minority in Myanmar, and they are currently facing ethnic cleansing. I would ask the member if he agrees with that.

Also, the Conservative Party, particularly our member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, has raised this issue multiple times in the House over the last year and a half and has spent time trying to ensure this issue was brought to this place so Canadians would hear about it. Finally, we have been given that opportunity, and we thank the Speaker for that, but we also call on the government to take action.

It is one thing for us to talk grandiose in the House, but it is another thing for our Canadian government to actually act. The Conservatives have been calling on the government to clearly and forcefully raise this issue both publicly and privately. We know the Prime Minister made a choice not to raise this ethnic cleaning when he was at the United Nations.

Will the member and his party join us in ensuring that force is placed upon the Liberal government to finally act in the interest of these human rights atrocities?

Mr. David Christopherson: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed the member wants to make this partisan. Most of us have tried all evening to not make this debate partisan. This is about Parliament. This is about Canada. It is not about Liberals, NDP, or Conservatives. It is about the Burmese people and what they are going through. I am not interested in going there, quite frankly, with all due to respect to the hon. member.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Compton—Stanstead.

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I rise today to take part in this important debate on the violence and persecution being faced by the Rohingya community in Myanmar and to add my voice to the call for strong action by the international community to put an immediate end to the violence.

I have been following the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar for some time and, unfortunately, the circumstances on the ground have only been getting worse. When I sponsored an e-petition on this issue in January, which I then presented in the House in May, the situation of the Rohingya was already dire. The Rohingya people had been termed by the United Nations as the most persecuted minority in the world. They are documented victims of ethnic cleansing, rape, violence, and constant persecution. At that time, more than 100,000 Rohingya were in camps for internally displaced persons, where they face poverty, violence, and persecution. Many had fled across the border to Bangladesh, which is ill-equipped to deal with this massive influx of refugees. As bad as things were in the spring, as we go into the fall things have only gotten worse, with more violence, more killings, more villages burned, more communities displaced, and more Rohingya trying to flee across the border into camps in Bangladesh.

We can trace the roots of this crisis back to the actions of the Myanmar military, which has been conducting a campaign against this defenceless minority, which our government has rightly termed “ethnic cleansing”. According to United Nations figures, more than 400,000 Rohingya have fled for their lives to Bangladesh in just the last few weeks. There have been extra-judicial killings, entire villages have been burned to the ground, and landmines are even being planted to prevent people from fleeing across the borders to safety. This systematic killing of an entire people cannot be justified as a legitimate national security operation. No security concerns justify rendering a population stateless, burning their homes, and the systematic killing of an innocent civilian population.

While we suspect that the political leader of Myanmar, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, has no real control over the Myanmar military, her complete abdication of her responsibility to the Rohingya and to humanity is unacceptable. Let us be clear: the Rohingya should legitimately be citizens of Myanmar. They were stripped of their birthright and rendered stateless due to racism and intolerance. Whatever their legal status, they are as much her responsibility as every other citizen of Myanmar.

However, that should not matter. We often talk about the Rohingya Muslim minority, but these are not just Muslims. This is not about race or ethnicity or religion; this is about humanity. The Rohingya are being wiped out of existence and we, as human beings, as citizens of this planet, have a moral responsibility to stand up and say, “This is wrong”, and to demand an end to the violence. That is the least we should expect of each other, and we should surely demand more of a woman who is a recipient of the Nobel prize for peace, a woman who built a career as a champion of human rights, a woman whom we named an honorary Canadian citizen.

Ms. Suu Kyi's public comments have been unworthy of those honours. She has gone beyond her earlier cowardly silence to outright lies about what is happening on the ground. She claims this is an internal security matter.

However, gone are the days when tyrants and despots could act with impunity within their own borders, free from the eyes of the international community. We know what is happening in Myanmar. We know what the Myanmar military is doing to the Rohingya, the crimes that Ms. Suu Kyi is complicit in. We do not believe her lies. When she calls herself a champion of human rights, she apparently means only those of some humans. Whatever moral credibility Ms. Suu Kyi once had is now dead. When the time came to choose sides, she stood with the very despots she once opposed.

● (1920)

I appreciate the actions our government has taken to date. We sent Canada's ambassador to Myanmar, to Rakhine State in February and March. The Prime Minister and foreign affairs minister met with Ms. Suu Kyi when she visited Ottawa in June and pressed her on the Rohingya. In recent statements by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of International Development we have strongly, forcefully, and unequivocally made Canada's position clear that the violence must end.

I also appreciate the announcement of increased aid assistance to help those refugees who have fled their homes, including those in camps in Bangladesh. I urge Canada to continue to be a strong voice, to exercise moral leadership, and to lead the charge for substantive international action.

While we have been generous, I would like to see more humanitarian aid and assistance provided to help those displaced in the region. We should also support the generosity of spirit here at home. I have met many members of the community in my riding and elsewhere who wish to make donations to assist humanitarian agencies helping people on the ground. I call on our government to encourage this by matching on a dollar-for-dollar basis donations made by Canadians to registered and approved aid groups supporting the Rohingya.

I also call on our government to send a delegation of officials and parliamentarians to Bangladesh to visit the refugee camps first-hand, to meet with displaced Rohingya, and to help recommend further actions that Canada can take.

We must demand stronger action by the United Nations and the UN Security Council, including a referral to the International Criminal Court for possible war crimes and crimes against humanity. The international community must be allowed access to Rakhine State so that diplomats, aid groups, and NGOs can see the situation on the ground for themselves and to bring aid and assistance to those who are suffering.

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We need a whole-of-government approach to examine what resources Canada can bring to bear and how we can work with our allies to multiply the effect our resources can have. I have heard the demand for action loud and clear from my constituents. I have held round tables in Scarborough with community leaders, and attended several protests in Toronto where thousands of ordinary Canadians have come out to raise their voice. Canadians are deeply concerned about the violence the Rohingya are facing.

I thank Canadians for their passion and activism. I bring their voices here to Parliament, and I add my voice to theirs. This is a time for members of the international community to stand up and be counted. The time to act is now. The Rohingya need our help. We cannot fail to act.

• (1925)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her impassioned speech, especially given how important this situation is and the emergency this crisis is bringing home to the world and to people in our country, where we are concerned about what is happening in Myanmar.

I am joining my colleagues in the NDP and all others to unequivocally condemn the ongoing violence in Myanmar, the violence that is directed almost entirely at the predominantly Muslim Rohingya people.

Given the scale of the crisis and the urgent needs that have been identified by the United Nations and humanitarian partners, will Canada be increasing its humanitarian funding for the situation? Is Canada prepared to accept Rohingya refugees? If so, what efforts has the government made to begin that process? It is important that we hear from the government about what its plans are.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, Canada has done a lot this year. To date in 2017, we have announced \$9.18 million in humanitarian assistance, including \$2.55 million on September 15 to help address the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, northern Rakhine State, and its impact on Bangladesh. Canada has done a lot, but more needs to be done.

My point is that what is happening is an act against humanity and we need to make sure that we raise our international voices to make sure the violence ends now. That is the most important thing right now because it is a violation of human rights that is happening. We need to do everything to raise our voices to make sure that violence ends now.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I know the member for Scarborough Centre has been seized with this issue. She has had a lot of community consultation and has done a very good job in meeting with communities to ensure that their voices are heard. I understand that she has some short-term and long-term solutions that were given to her by the community.

Has the member shared this with the minister, and what are some of her thoughts on the short-term goals and on what the government is doing to meet those goals?

• (1930)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Don Valley East for all the concerns she has raised about the Rohingya. Last Sunday we were together in Scarborough to meet

with community leaders and talk about this important issue. Yes, I held many round tables to hear the concerns of the community.

I have written a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and have been educating her and her predecessor, Stéphane Dion, about the issue of the Rohingya. Humanitarian aid has been announced by Canada, but I think there is a desire to do more.

People in my community are looking forward to having dollar-for-dollar matching funds because Canadians want to do something for the Rohingya. I want to thank them for their enthusiasm and the activism they have shown on the Rohingya case. They have been raising funds, and that is what they are looking for.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is extremely concerned about the ongoing crisis in the Rakhine State in Myanmar and the collateral effects it is having on the country's neighbour, Bangladesh. Continuing violence against the Rohingya and other minorities considerably limits humanitarian access. Every day, it threatens and limits the delivery of vital aid for the victims of this ethnic cleansing.

[*English*]

In Myanmar, significant numbers of people, both Rohingya and Rakhine, are currently displaced in northern Rakhine State. In addition, more than 120,000 Rohingya people remain in camps, displaced by the violence of 2012. Many of these individuals rely heavily on humanitarian assistance to survive, but have been without this lifesaving assistance for many weeks. The humanitarian needs become exponentially more urgent every day.

[*Translation*]

Canada commends Bangladesh for its efforts to assist those who are fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar. Bangladesh is currently facing considerable challenges in offering basic services to a huge number of people, many of whom have urgent humanitarian needs.

Without additional international aid, another catastrophe could develop amidst this crisis. There is a heightened risk of outbreaks of infectious diseases and those spread through contaminated water. What is more, there is also a possibility that the tension and violence will intensify in refugee camps.

Canada is continuing its tradition of providing rapid humanitarian aid that responds to needs on the ground. In reaction to the crisis, on September 7, the government made an initial contribution of \$1 billion to respond to emerging needs and help our humanitarian partners quickly ramp up existing operations.

As the number of asylum seekers continues to grow, we made an additional contribution of \$2.55 million on September 15, for a total of \$3.5 million, in order to respond to this crisis. This contribution covers the delivery of food, dietary supplements, and temporary shelters. It also helps to provide clean drinking water and to set up sanitation infrastructure in order to prevent the spread of disease.

Our assistance is targeted specifically at the needs of women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health, particularly to help those who have suffered sexual violence and who too often fall through the cracks in situations of humanitarian crises.

Along with that contribution, Prime Minister Trudeau announced \$4.3 million in funding last June to support peace and stability in Myanmar. These contributions will help protect human rights, support peace building, and promote women's participation in the national peace process.

At the same time, it is important to point out that Canada has been contributing annual humanitarian aid for several years in order to help meet the needs of people affected by conflict in Bangladesh and Myanmar, including the Rohingya.

Earlier this year, Canada contributed \$5.63 million in humanitarian aid to its partners in Myanmar and Bangladesh specifically to address the needs of the Rohingya people. Overall, Canada has contributed over \$9 million in humanitarian assistance this year alone to those affected by the crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh. We are prepared to do even more as the situation on the ground evolves over time.

Earlier, I spoke about sexual and gender-based violence. I would like to comment further by reiterating that we are especially concerned about the effect of the current crisis on women and girls. They represent about 70% of the asylum seekers. Many of the women who have just arrived at these camps are pregnant or recently gave birth. Although we recognize the urgent need for basic humanitarian assistance, I want to point out to the House the importance of not neglecting sexual and reproductive health rights and services.

During my missions, I saw just how desperately these women in crisis situations need these services. Sexual and gender-based violence is very real. It leaves scars that we can never entirely erase, but that we can diminish if we are prepared to meet the specific needs of women and girls.

Last week, at the UN General Assembly, we asked the international community to give priority to the protection of the rights of women and girls and to ensure that sexual and reproductive health services are part of our response to this crisis.

Canada plans on being a leader in developing a feminist approach to international aid.

• (1935)

[English]

Humanitarian assistance, however, does not address the underlying conditions that contribute to crises such as discrimination against minorities, tensions between communities, and disproportionate responses of security forces. It cannot substitute for responsible political decision-making and military action. Alleged reports of the security forces imposing collective punishment upon ethnic Rohingya communities in northern Rakhine, including the unlawful killing of civilians and the burning of villages leading to mass displacement, are unacceptable.

Canada, along with partners in the international community, call upon military and civilian leadership to fulfill their responsibility to

protect all civilians and respond to their basic needs in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

[Translation]

We remain very concerned about the threats against humanitarian workers in Myanmar. That is why we are asking all parties to respect the safety of those helping the vulnerable, regardless of their religion or their ethnic origin. Beyond the threats weighing on the humanitarian workers, the situation of humanitarian access in Rakhine State is especially difficult. Canada is calling on the military and civilian authorities in Myanmar to allow the quick, safe, and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief, in accordance with international law.

Humanitarian access is necessary for assessing the needs on the ground. To be able to intervene quickly in the crisis, humanitarian organizations, the international community, and the Government of Myanmar must have a full and impartial understanding of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State.

Promoting and protecting human rights, which includes freedom of religion or belief, is an integral part of Canada's leadership in the world. Canada shows that leadership by actively supporting the international fact-finding mission being independently led by the United Nations and mandated by the Human Rights Council in March 2017.

Ethnic cleansing in Myanmar underscores the continued need to shed light on the events in Rakhine State. Unfortunately, the Government of Myanmar is slow to fully co-operate in the fact-finding mission by giving it full and unfettered access.

During the United Nations General Assembly, I met with ministers from the main countries concerned about the situation in Myanmar. I clearly reiterated Canada's position on the current crisis, citing the tremendous repercussions it is having on women and children. I stated that the Government of Myanmar urgently needed to put an end to the violence and allow humanitarian access. I also brought up the need to come up with long-term solutions that will guarantee the basic rights of every citizen of Rakhine State, including the implementation of the recommendations developed by the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State.

• (1940)

[English]

We remain in regular contact with our humanitarian partners and other governments as we stand ready to respond further in light of the conditions on the ground.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to assure the House that the situation in Rakhine State is being taken very seriously. The goal of Canadian assistance is to preserve and elevate human dignity, and that is why we will continue to apply pressure to ensure safe, unhindered humanitarian access.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind members not to refer to other members or even to the Prime Minister by name, but rather by title or by riding name.

S. O. 52

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for being here and for speaking. I want to ask her a question I had asked earlier that may not fall directly within her portfolio, which was the role, if any, the Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion is taking in the context of Burma. I would be curious to hear her response to that at some point.

However, I would in particular like to hear from the minister with respect to the bilateral aid that Canada is giving to the Government of Burma. I have some figures that show the bilateral aid in 2016 was close to \$20 million, which is a significant increase over previous years. I believe it is important for us to be engaged in that situation in a humanitarian way, but I would like to hear from the minister if she thinks it is appropriate for us to be doing government-to-government aid in light of the government's activities in this case. Also, is she willing to undertake a complete review of the aid we are giving directly to the Government of Burma, recognizing that it is very likely that it would not be going to those who are clearly the most vulnerable in this case? I would like to hear what kind of reviews have been undertaken or will be undertaken, and whether the minister thinks it is appropriate to be doing government-to-government aid in the context of the current situation.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

When we support a government in any kind of transition towards democracy and peace, we do this through trusted international partners that have been completely and thoroughly vetted before any contract is awarded.

Obviously, we are doing follow-up on these projects promoting good governance and democracy as needed through our ambassador on the ground and our usual checks and balances.

I want to reassure my colleague that we are taking every possible action to ensure that no money is given directly to the government that could be diverted for any reason whatsoever and that could compromise the safety of certain communities in the country.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her speech, and for the steps taken by the Canadian government on the issue before us tonight.

I have a concern I would like to ask her about. The resources allocated to international development have diminished over the years. A development institute has put a proposal on the table, but it would not be involved in this kind of emergency relief.

Does the minister ever fear that the reduced budgets going directly to international development, including for the situation we are debating here this evening, could prevent Canada from properly carrying out its mission?

As we know, international development is not charity work. It is about our duty to contribute to the quest for world balance.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his sincere interest in international development and humanitarian aid.

As members know, we held broad consultations with 15,000 people, primarily Canadians. These consultations were held in 65 countries and I met several of my counterparts from developing countries and also from other donor countries. I can say that Canada was asked to provide three things: leadership, a good policy, and, naturally, money, with which I absolutely agree.

There are different ways to provide leadership for the values that we protect such as human rights, the rights of women and girls, and sexual and reproductive health. I would even add climate change. We provide leadership in these three very important areas.

Second, we need to have a good policy, specifically a feminist policy. Our objective is to always focus on poverty reduction or elimination, based on the goals of sustainable development. The best way to achieve this is to use a feminist approach and to enhance the power of women and girls.

Third, we must give more money to international aid. In addition to official development assistance, this is one of the areas that I will pay more attention to. I agree that we could give more, but it is important to look for new partners, both Canadian and private sector partners and also partners from other countries that are not inclined to donate. Therefore, we must use Canada's contribution and leadership to do more and to attract more money.

At this time, official development assistance totals \$140 billion. To attain the sustainable development goals, we must collect between \$5 trillion and \$7 trillion, with each trillion being 1,000 billion dollars. Yes, we need more official development assistance, but it is even more important that we use our leadership to identify new donors.

● (1945)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Many of my colleagues, of all political stripes, have risen here tonight to outline the extreme, dire humanitarian crisis the Rohingya people are facing in Myanmar. What is up for debate tonight is Canada's response.

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What is disappointing to me is that many people in the House are aware of the situation, but we just missed a huge opportunity. That was the Prime Minister's speech at the United Nations General Assembly in New York last week. As the minister just mentioned, the Prime Minister purports to have a feminist policy. He purports to stand up for human rights, yet when in front of the world, he failed to mention this crisis. The entire world was gathered in New York. This was the opportunity for Canada to raise this issue and to put forward a strong, coordinated response that many people in the world would look to from Canada to follow. That did not happen.

I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Sherwood Park, for raising this issue in debate in the House tonight, and of course, the Speaker, for granting it.

The question really becomes where we go from here. First, I want to express my extreme disappointment that this did not come up in the Prime Minister's speech to the UNGA. I do not know why he bothered, to be honest. This is one of the most dire humanitarian crises facing the world, and he failed to mention it in his speech.

Second, a lot of people have raised the question of whether Canada should seek to revoke the citizenship bestowed on one of Myanmar's senior political leaders by Canada.

I would hope that at the end of this debate today, we would agree on two things. First is that the Liberal government would take it upon itself to immediately encourage her, and not only her but the entire global community in echoing the sentiment, to allow observers, journalists, and aid workers into Rakhine State to adequately assess the situation. We are only hearing a smattering of what I think is the full picture of the atrocities that are happening there. Aid is not being delivered appropriately. We should impress upon the government of Myanmar that this is the absolute least it can do. We should also shame the government. If the government has such deeply held racist beliefs that it cannot be delivered to their fellow humans, then the entire world is ashamed of it. That would be ask number one that I hope we would agree on.

Second, a lot of the situation, but not all of it, is due to the fact that in 1982, there was a law passed in Myanmar that stripped the Rohingya people of their citizenship. This left them without the same protections and safety nets that those living in Myanmar with citizenship have access to. Allowing the Rohingya to have the same protection as others by giving them their deserved citizenship would signal to the international community that the Myanmar government is ready to end this persecution.

This discriminatory and unjust law passed in 1982 must be repealed immediately. This is something the Liberal government, through Justin Trudeau, should be asking the global community to put pressure on the Myanmar government to undertake.

These are two simple things I think there would be a lot of consensus on in the global community. These two actions I think would begin the path of providing needed assistance, understanding the true scope of the humanitarian crisis, and allowing the Rohingya people to become full participants in their society.

The Minister of International Development mentioned her feminist policy. I want to speak specifically to something I believe is an element of genocide, not just ethnic cleansing, in this particular

case. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has rightfully called the acts against the Rohingya a textbook example of ethnic cleansing.

• (1950)

There is something further I would like to highlight tonight. It is a policy of Myanmar that sheds light on the full persecution of the Rohingya Muslims in the state. It was noted in a 2014 report by an organization called Fortify Rights that since 2005, Myanmar has imposed a two-child policy on the Rohingya in two particular townships in northern Rakhine State. This policy has been described as a violation of human rights law. This policy, known as regional order 1/2005, is not only concerning because of its violation of human rights but because of the effect it has had on women and their reproductive health. Reports have shown that because of this policy, women have had to undergo illegal and unsafe abortions. These have led to health problems and even death, in some cases. Frankly, if Canada truly cares about protecting women's rights, and if the Prime Minister truly is a feminist, he will do something now to end this injustice.

Not only is this an injustice toward women and their rights, it is an element of genocide. When one removes the ability of a people, a specific ethnic or religious group, to have children to prevent them from propagating, that is an element of genocide. It is trying to end their race. To me, this is something the world and the Canadian government should be drawing attention to, given the severity of the impact it has had and will continue to have on the Rohingya people.

Many stakeholder groups in Canada have asked for specific declarations of action from the Canadian government, and I would like to echo them here, into the record, today. These organizations are calling on Canada to condemn the human rights abuses in northern Rakhine State and to call on State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to provide access to Myanmar, including Rakhine State, for the Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission. This should have been mentioned by Canada in the statement to the UN General Assembly last week.

We should also continue to call upon both the State Counsellor and military commanders to protect all civilians and to grant the restoration of full humanitarian access to northern Rakhine State as an issue of urgency.

I want to re-emphasize the need for the repeal of the 1982 citizenship law so that these people can participate fully in their society and their economy with the same rights afforded to other people in their group.

In situations like this, I think North Americans are so blessed. Certainly there are elements of extreme poverty and things we need to overcome in Canada, but sometimes I think we really forget how bad it is.

I would like to read the testimony of someone in the region. This is why it is so important for us to act beyond pretty, vacant words, as we saw at the UN this week.

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"I gave birth to my daughter 10 days ago, but she's starving and I've not eaten for four days. The day after she was born, I came to Bangladesh, along with my family. There are eight of us under one tarp now. The army cut people and raped women. It happened to my close relatives in our village. All women are fleeing to protect themselves from being raped. My husband also told me the army is not sparing pregnant women. The army is killing and slaughtering people everywhere so that our full family ran away carrying only our clothes, leaving all of our belongings behind. They are shooting people in groups, with women being threatened at gunpoint. I heard they are throwing bodies in the river. I saw a pile of dead bodies. In the daytime, we hid behind trees far from the house when we heard the army was coming and returned in the evening. The day after we left, we heard our house was also burned. My child was born only hours after getting on the boat."

This testimony was provided to an aid agency in Canada that asked me not to use its name for fear of being associated with the testimony of this group and not having access there. That is how bad the situation is.

We cannot purport to stand for human rights in this country without acknowledging the atrocities there and demanding that the world act. I would also like to see the government, in the spirit of the UN Secretary-General's call for UN reform this week, go further, on a more macro level, and request that the United Nations' budget, of which only 2% goes toward protecting human rights, be allocated so that we have more direct funding through this very bureaucratic organization to help the people we are discussing. The UN should not be about cocktail parties. It should not be about hollow speeches to empty chambers. It should be standing up for what is right. That did not happen in New York last week. The government has an opportunity to rectify that this week through this debate. I echo my colleague's call for action on this very terrible and dire humanitarian crisis.

● (1955)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before going to questions and comments, I realize that this is an emergency debate, but I want to remind hon. members that the same rules apply to the House during an emergency debate as they do in regular sessions in the House. We cannot name members in the House, only their titles or ridings.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Fredericton.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly we recognize the dire situation, ongoing in Myanmar, of the Rohingya. This government, this Prime Minister, and our Minister of Foreign Affairs have been clear that the responsibility for solving this issue and this crisis falls squarely upon the shoulders of Aung San Suu Kyi and the military leadership in Myanmar.

There were specific discussions, led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in her meetings with allies at the UN last week, including with the EU, Indonesia, Turkey, Germany, Bangladesh, Sweden, and Norway, as well as with Kofi Annan. We have asked for permission for our ambassador to have access to Rakhine State. Before that, we heard the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie deliver a comprehensive overview of the significant humanitarian aid Canada has stepped up to provide to Myanmar to

help relieve this crisis. We have been clear in our focus on ensuring that the human rights of the Rohingya are upheld. Canada is there to act.

I would ask if the member opposite would acknowledge the role Canada has played, is playing, and will continue to play in this situation and in other crises the world faces.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, it is important for the government and the Prime Minister to perhaps be more vocal, more formal, and more structured in their requests in this matter. There is much conversation in the international media as well as in international human rights circles right now about what actually can be done in Myanmar, given the complexity of the situation. The reality is that when ethnic cleansing is occurring, and I think a case could be made for genocide, the words "never again" begin to ring hollow when we see months of unending discussions without action.

I would like to see the Prime Minister raise, in a formal international forum, a request to the global community as well as to the Government of Myanmar, again a formal request, to enter the state, both in an observer capacity and from a coordinated aid-delivery perspective.

Something more tangible that will perhaps lead to a solution over a longer period of time would be a repeal of the 1982 law that renders the Rohingya people stateless and without citizenship and unable to access the same services and laws that their countrymen have, simply because of their faith and their ethnicity. I also think the government needs to be stronger in its language about what is happening in the area with regard to ethnic cleansing and needs to acknowledge the atrocities committed under the two-child law, as I described earlier in my speech.

● (2000)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to remind the hon. members as well that if they want to ask a question, they have to be in their seats. They cannot be in another's seat.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have seen the member for Calgary Nose Hill rise repeatedly in this House on human rights issues. I certainly appreciate her work on the persecution of the Yazidis and on making sure that we in this House are well informed about the situation there.

We know that we have to work actively with like-minded states for a political solution. We know we have to do that collectively in this House too, across political lines, to bring forward a political solution to help end this terrible crisis in Myanmar.

The member outlined some of the ideas she has on how we can move forward, take action, and be influential in leading this charge. Maybe she could touch more on that. Would she be willing to, in the meantime, increase humanitarian aid to deal with this crisis? Would she also be willing to support accepting more Rohingya refugees, in light of the situation they are in and the immediate threats the people are facing in those refugee camps?

S. O. 52

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I did ask several human rights lawyers in New York last week what their suggested approach would be on resettlement as a tool to assist in this situation. Many expressed the sentiment that they are concerned that should the world focus on resettlement at this point in time, it would essentially be carrying out the ethnic cleansing, in a lot of ways, for the Myanmar government, because they would be removing people from a situation rather than reinstating their rights. It is a difficult situation.

Certainly Canada needs to look at how it brings internally displaced persons to Canada. There are calls within the broader Canadian community to have a specific standing committee in the House of Commons on internally displaced persons. That is something I would support in Parliament, given the number of cases like this we have seen escalate over the last 10 years.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Just to clarify, before we go to the next speaker, I believe I owe hon. members an apology. According to Standing Order 17, you can be anywhere in the House. I just wanted to clarify that. I did not want to mislead the House.

The hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I would like to thank my colleagues on the subcommittee for national human rights who have been seized with the issues in Burma, particularly the Rohingya, since 2012, as well as my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, who was the former chair. He was actually the chair when we produced our first report in regard to Burma, or Myanmar.

For decades the military has ruled Burma and has sought to make the entire population ethnically, homogeneously Burman, with Buddhism being the official state religion. Although there was room for optimism with the words that were coming out of Burma, some initial actions, along with favourable election results—in particular, the election of the honorary Canadian citizen Aung San Suu Kyi—there is sufficient evidence now that this may well be a well-orchestrated plan to get the western world on side, along with the accompanying dollars, without ever establishing an international standard of human rights or, for that matter, a real democracy.

I take exception to the government's response to our June 2016 report, entitled "Sentenced to a Slow Demise: The Plight of Myanmar's Rohingya Minority". The notion that Burma has changed significantly is profoundly overly optimistic and flawed at best, and at worst it is purposely out of touch.

I will go farther. Without assigning blame to anyone specifically, I believe we were blinded by our optimism, our western hopes and dreams for the Burmese people, and did not see the very evident signs that the mechanisms were either put in place or kept in place to ensure that the ruling military class, along with its many supporters in the Rangoon Buddhist communities, would be the ones that profited from an image of a new democratization.

However, these benefits would never extend out to the broader population of the Kachin, the Chin, the Shan, the Wa, the Konkang, the Karen, the Karenni, the Kayan, or the Mon, all of which, it should be noted, have fought for their aspirations of autonomy within Burma and have a history of armed conflict against the

Burmese state since 1948. Not so with the Rakhine and the Rohingya, with whom there is little history of armed conflict.

To my previous point, let us look at the evidence.

Many political prisoners still have no complete amnesty, as they were released under a statute that makes them susceptible to rearrest.

The military answers to no civilian authority, and the police continue to act much the same way, with unjustified detentions and with corruption running rampant.

The judiciary is still one of the most corrupt institutions in Burma and still gives jail sentences to citizens who show public dissent toward the government.

Extrajudicial killings, even for those close to the government, are also part of today's Burma. Human rights defenders are under constant threat in Burma. On January 29, 2017, Ko Ni, a Muslim lawyer known for his stance in favour of religious tolerance and a legal adviser to Aung San Suu Kyi, was assassinated on his way out of Rangoon airport.

Most Burmese minorities are not allowed to form political parties, and in the case of the Rohingya, they cannot even independently run for office.

Racism is rampant, systemic, and institutional, with only ethnic Burmans enjoying a modicum of rights and freedoms, which exist primarily in the capital of Rangoon.

Little to no effort has been made to have a free and fairly represented parliament. Instead, the constitution still holds that 25% of seats must be set aside for the military, virtually assuring that remnants from the former repressive regime always hold ultimate power. Such a structure ensures that there never will be a civilian democratic government.

There has been no move to correct any history of persecution of minorities. No peace talks have taken place to assure a lasting, durable peace amongst any of the minorities I listed above. Since 1962, statutory and administrative measures have continually eroded the rights of, in particular, the Muslim population, and there has been no attempt to repeal the abhorrent legislation that has left the Rohingya as the largest stateless group of individuals on the globe, sanctioning them to a continual state of poverty, uncertainty, and persecution.

Not only has this persecution continued against Burmese minorities, but in the case of the Rohingya it has reached the stage of ethnic cleansing. Such credible organizations such as Fortify Rights has said that it sees evidence on the ground that would support that the crime of genocide is taking place.

● (2005)

They are being persecuted so severely through violence, torture, rape, and murder that hundreds of thousands have fled to nearby Bangladesh.

S. O. 52

I will read testimony that was given just days ago to the subcommittee for human rights. I would like to warn my colleagues that this is very graphic testimony. This is the testimony of Ahmed Ramadan. Although Mr. Smith did give you some description of how bad it is there, I wanted to share with everyone testimony that was submitted to the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal that is ongoing right now in Malaysia on this situation in Myanmar. This is one of the testimonies that was submitted. It is very graphic, but I want to show how serious, how bad, how horrifying the situation really is. The witness interviewed states:

My sister had just given birth in her house when the Myanmar soldiers came into the village. We all ran away, but my sister couldn't. I returned and found the dead bodies of my sister and her baby. They had taken off her clothes and cut into her vagina. They had cut off her breasts and put the dead baby on her chest. The baby had been stomped to death. Its stomach had burst open and its intestines had come out. They had put the breasts next to each other on the pillow beside her. She was lying in her bed. They had stuck a rifle in her vagina.

Next I would like to read from a document from the UNHCR, quoting a statement by seven special rapporteurs in regard to Myanmar. It states:

"There have been credible allegations of serious human rights violations and abuses committed against the Rohingya, including extrajudicial killings, excessive use of force, torture and ill-treatment, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced displacement, as well as the burning and destruction of over 200 Rohingya villages and tens of thousands of homes," the experts said.

"We understand that State Counsellor Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi in her diplomatic briefing on 19 September had encouraged the international community to learn along with the Myanmar Government the possible reasons behind the current exodus from Myanmar to Bangladesh," the experts said, noting that about 430,000 people had reportedly crossed into Bangladesh in the past few weeks.

The experts stressed: "No one chooses, especially not in the hundreds of thousands, to leave their homes and ancestral land, no matter how poor the conditions, to flee to a strange land to live under plastic sheets and in dire circumstances except in life-threatening situations. Despite violence allegedly perpetrated by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), the whole Rohingya population should not have to pay the price."

By the way, I really think that is a sham of a piece of evidence.

Finally, I am going to skip down the report because of time. The rapporteurs say:

"UN member states need to go beyond statements and start taking concrete action to stop the military and security forces from accomplishing their so-called 'unfinished business' of getting rid of the Rohingya minority from Rakhine State," the experts concluded.

I would like to finish with this: all I am asking is for the Government of Canada to do exactly what the rapporteurs are saying and take action. Stop this violence right now. We have the capability, we have the political capital we have invested in Myanmar, and we should take every action, including threatening to cut off money.

By the way, there was a statement made earlier than no government-to-government money was made. Forty-two million dollars was given to the Burmese government in order to build democratic institutions. That should stop, and we should make it clear. Even in regard to the humanitarian aid, right now we are not allowed to deliver it. We need to make sure that any money that we put toward humanitarian aid is allowed to be spent to support the Rohingya needs, not only in Myanmar but also in Bangladesh.

God bless Canada and God bless Burma.

● (2010)

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I want to acknowledge the hon. member's commitment to this issue. I have the honour of sitting with him on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. He has been a strong advocate, not just for the last couple of years but well before, for the plight of the Rohingya. I want to acknowledge that during this emergency debate.

We had an opportunity to hear from a broad swath of people who have been impacted by the current policies in Myanmar and by the conditions in Rakhine State. We have seen the conditions continue to trend downward. Can the member provide us any sort of insight from maybe the international community and from a multilateral point of view about how we can begin to address making a real, sustained effort to impact the situation on the ground and provide real relief and cover for those most affected?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his kind words. It has been an honour to serve with him on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and to work as partners to try to bring about real change.

I am grateful for the question, because the discussion needs to happen at the Security Council. I think that the United Nations forces are very amenable to this kind of service, to being there as a protective force. The military does not answer to the government of Burma. They really take their own direction.

As I mentioned before, racism is endemic in Burma. The only way to end that is to make sure that there is protection for minorities—not just the Rohingya, but the broader minorities, although the Rohingya are the ones who are severely persecuted right now—and to demand that the Burmese government get to the table and negotiate a lasting peace for all of these minorities.

For the Rohingya, we must make sure they repeal the legislation that leaves them stateless and begin the process of re-identifying them and giving them proper credentials so that they can participate as any democratic citizen would in a free state.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his speech and for his work on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights as well. I know that we did hear very disturbing and very graphic details with regard to this situation for the Rohingya. I do not want to just keep repeating these atrocities and make it a sensational issue. I want us to be moved by them so that we can move forward.

If my hon. colleague remembers when that very graphic testimony was taking place, the young man also talked to us about how important it was to have a safe zone and to let the humanitarian aid in. I wonder if the member would like to expand on that as being one of the concrete ways we can move forward tonight decisively.

● (2015)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her work on the subcommittee as well as for the question.

Obviously there are a number of options we have that would have to be negotiated by the United Nations. I mentioned a protective force. Certainly if we did not have the capability of deploying a force that big, then certainly it should be a force that would allow humanitarian aid to get through. That would be a gauntlet-style force to make sure the supply lines can get through with not only food but also medicines and proper facilities for people to live in. Right now that is not happening.

Many of these people, as we heard in previous testimony from another colleague, are not concerned about the Burmese military killing them; they are going to starve to death anyway.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Don Valley West.

I want to begin with the words of former senator and Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire:

The warning signs preceding genocide in this case are ever present. The Rohingya have often been referred to as “illegal Bengalis”, with many of Burma's Buddhists demanding that they ‘go back to where they belong’, be it in Bangladesh or elsewhere. Generally they are forbidden from owning land, from inter-marrying with Buddhists and from having more than two children.... the international community must take early preventive action now in order to reverse Burma's current trend towards catastrophe and possibly genocide.

Mr. Dallaire wrote that on March 24, 2014. He rightly called for the restoration of full citizenship. He called for the immediate authorization and deployment of international police units to Rakhine and an education campaign to counter the racist propaganda.

I recently met with Ahmed Ullah, alongside a number of my colleagues. Mr. Ullah is a Rohingya refugee who was born in a refugee camp and came to Canada in 2009. In a recent interview, he noted that his mother receives calls from family members stating, “We might not see the next daylight or we may not survive the next hour.”

John Packer, a professor of law and human rights at the University of Ottawa, recently pointed to the unadulterated racism towards the Rohingya and wrote that now is the time to stand up on the side of human rights and fully inclusive democracies.

Just as others have noted, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has called the exodus a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”

As Mr. Dallaire noted in his warning years ago, the state of Myanmar has persecuted the Rohingya for decades. It has denied their citizenship, history, and identity; placed restrictions on families, education, and mobility; and engaged in arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, all with the cumulative intent of denying their participation in society, driving them out, and destroying them.

This decades-long campaign of cultural genocide has recently turned to genocide. Myanmar's military has raped and murdered Rohingya, burned villages of predominantly Rohingya ethnic minorities to the ground, and triggered a mass exodus. Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh, with over 400,000 refugees entering Bangladesh over the last few weeks alone. Two hundred ethnic Rohingya villages now stand empty.

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As the chair of the Canada-Bangladesh Parliamentary Friendship Group, I extend my deep gratitude to Bangladesh for the assistance it has provided, especially in the face of the floods it has been experiencing, with two-thirds of the country underwater. Bangladesh has exhibited compassion. When we look at Canada's efforts to take in refugees in the last two years, taking in over 45,000 refugees last year and committed to taking in 40,000 this year, our effort pales in comparison to the efforts under way in accommodating Rohingya refugees on the Bangladesh border. Canada has contributed over \$9 million in humanitarian aid to this cause, but we need to do more.

Before coming here tonight, I was cutting mushrooms. I was in my kitchen in my apartment with my wife and my 13-month old. My 13-month old walked up behind me and bit my leg. It hurt and I was not particularly happy at the time, but I have to say, in the context of this debate, in the context of all of the horrible news, it is also a reminder of how lucky I am to live in Canada.

Abdul Hamid, who is 12 years old, is one of thousands and thousands of stories. He saw his father shot in front of him. When his father did not die, the soldier slit his father's throat in front of him. He and his mother and four younger siblings then hid in the forest for days, and then walked for two days to reach the safety of Bangladesh.

I do not have the answers. Sanctions, aid, multilateral forces, I do not know. However, I cannot stress enough the importance of intervention in the name of human rights. The international community has a responsibility to protect ethnic minorities in the face of genocide and to assist the nation of Bangladesh in their efforts to help them.

● (2020)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the situation we are debating tonight is unbelievably heart-wrenching, and I am searching for tangible, concrete things that we can recommend that the Government of Canada do, admitting and acknowledging that much is already being done.

One area that I want to focus on, and I ask the hon. member if he agrees, is the fact that the army in Myanmar has been using land mines in contravention of the Ottawa Treaty. Bangladesh is a party to the Ottawa Treaty and some years ago had an agreement with Myanmar to allow the removal of all land mines in the border lands between Bangladesh and Myanmar. In the last few weeks and months, the Myanmar military has been adding more land mines with the deliberate purpose of killing people as they flee.

Given Ottawa's leadership in developing the land mines treaty and the fact there is an existing agreement between the states of Myanmar and Bangladesh to remove land mines, would it not be a very useful thing for Canada to provide the funds and technical assistance for Bangladesh to remove the land mines in those border lands?

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I had not turned my mind to that solution, but it seems that it may well be an effective one.

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I would note that in my discussions with human rights advocates and from listening to their advice, their principal concern is that human rights observers be allowed on the ground and permitted to document and investigate the atrocities. This in and of itself would put pressure on the military authorities to stop what they are doing. Again, I do not know how effective that would be, but that is the advice I received.

However, whether it is funding for humanitarian aid or pushing at the international level for the Security Council to take decisive action, certainly acting where we have expertise and a history of engaging, namely on land mines, makes perfect sense.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that I do not always agree with my colleague, but I know that he is very thoughtful.

I would ask the member for his thoughts on the broader question of how we respond to cases of ethnic cleaning and genocide. It seems to me that if we look at the last 100 years of this repeated pattern of events, we do not really pay enough attention to them while they are happening and wring our hands after the fact and think why we did not do more. Then the same events happen again.

How can we as an international community get into a pattern of always consistently responding in the moment? How can we really anticipate these problems, respond in the moment, and address them so that we do not go through this repeated after the fact hand-wringing? How can we change the way we behave as an international community? I would appreciate his thoughts on that.

• (2025)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for being a vocal advocate on this file in particular.

It is depressing in some ways to hear “never again”, again and again, which is why I started my comments with the words of Mr. Dallaire from more than three years ago. I would also note that if we go back to February 2017, there were reports of thousands of killings and the international community did not act in the face of that news.

As to the answer of how we would get the international community to take notice and act, I think when we look at the Security Council, its makeup, and its inability to take decisive action, we see that this is a real problem.

Romeo Dallaire has said about Rwanda that “If I had had one reinforced brigade—5,000 men—well trained and well equipped, I could have saved of thousands of lives.” Maybe it takes a small standing army of some sort, a multilateral force, to at least be deployed quickly and easily in situations such as this on the ground. Certainly, just as in Rwanda, I do not think we would have seen the atrocities had a small deployment of police forces that Roméo Dallaire was calling for in 2014 been authorized and deployed at that time. I do not think we would see the atrocities we see today.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin tonight by thanking the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for requesting this emergency debate on this very serious situation affecting the Rohingya people in Myanmar. I want to let him know that I did have a letter drafted and written, ready to go to request this, and I have no resentment whatsoever. Rather, I have only respect for him and the fact that he was able to request this

debate. I am glad this debate was put forth and that members from all parties have engaged in it with competence, compassion, and great concern.

This is Canada's Parliament. It is the House of the people, and in the House of the people we take time to debate matters of great concern, as well as urgent matters. Tonight we are developing a narrative on all sides of the House that is lifting up the concerns of Canadians about the atrocities being experienced by the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

The people of Don Valley West have spoken to me about this. Last weekend I met with several hundred of them in a park, where they were raising funds for the Rohingya people. They asked me to bring their concerns to the House of Commons. I am grateful that we have the opportunity to do that tonight. I need to say that I am outraged and that I am expressing the outrage of the people of Don Valley West at another situation in the world that needs to be stopped. We, as Canadians, need to call upon leaders in this country and around the world to engage in a new way of doing world politics.

[*Translation*]

Like all Canadians, I am very concerned about the persecution of the Rohingya.

According to reports emanating from the region, a campaign of ethnic cleansing is being carried out against the Rohingya. The Prime Minister has said that the responsibility for resolving this crisis falls squarely on the shoulders of Aung San Suu Kyi and Myanmar's military leaders.

It is important to reiterate our condemnation of this situation and urge Aung San Suu Kyi to have security forces put an end to the violence and protect civilians.

We will continue to support the Rohingya people. The way they are being treated is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue.

[*English*]

The sentiments that the Prime Minister expressed on this issue are profound and important. In his letter to the State Counsellor, he called upon her to live out the expectations that Canada had when it offered her honorary citizenship. In a very strongly worded letter, he demanded that she absolutely condemn the violence taking place in her country and find ways to bring together the peoples of that country in peaceful, just, and long-lasting ways.

The Rohingya people are recognized by the United Nations as probably the most persecuted minority in the world. In recent months, 214 Rohingya villages in Myanmar have been torched to ashes. Human Rights Watch estimates that 50% of all those villages have been destroyed, according to satellite pictures taken by Amnesty International.

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Since August 25, 400,000 refugees have fled Myanmar into Bangladesh, according to the UNHCR. More Rohingya refugees have fled to Bangladesh in the space of four weeks than refugees from Africa fled by sea to Europe in 2016, and 80% of the 400,000 refugees arriving last month were women and children. Among the women, a United Nations' survey found that 52% had been raped. Bangladeshi officials have said that land mines have been planted on Myanmar's side of the border, posing a threat to every single Rohingya, who are facing terrorism and persecution and are trying to save their lives.

The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by Kofi Annan, recommended in its final report:

...urgent and sustained action on a number of fronts to prevent violence, maintain peace, foster reconciliation and offer a sense of hope to the State's hard-pressed population.

This important report, in addition to dozens of other reports by several international groups, has repeatedly condemned the actions of the Myanmar security forces. I am pleased that Burma Task Force Canada has taken time to educate us.

Many of us are new to this issue, newer than we should be. I know that the subcommittee on human rights has looked at this issue. I know that the foreign affairs committee has looked at it. I know that others have raised a concern. However, we have not done enough as a Parliament, and I say that our government has still not done enough.

● (2030)

I commend them for their strong condemnation of the actions of the military. I commend them for their strong exhortation to the State Counsellor to live up to the expectations of our Canadian citizenship. I commend the Minister of International Development, who is offering aid both in Bangladesh and to those who may have to flee to other places. However, we can still do more.

The Canadians who live in Don Valley West have told me that they want the government to consider matching grants. They want every charitable dollar that is raised in Canada to be matched by the government. I hope we can raise that issue with the government tonight so it can consider that as well.

As we express our outrage, we recognize that we could spend a lot of time debating the language we use around this. I want to say to the House, and to the people of Canada, that I do not have time for debate on the issue. What we have to do is save lives, find a way to garner peace, and be humans in a place that has increasingly become inhumane. I would ask the House this. Did we not learn the lesson from the Armenian genocide to stand up and do everything we can to stop this atrocity? Are the scars of the Jewish Holocaust not profound enough for us to learn to stand with vulnerable people who are being raped, killed, or driven from their homes? As humanity, we have faced this again and again. However, we do not seem to learn the lessons. I have heard from all sides of the House that we need to find new solutions for international crises like this, as well as the domestic crises that are happening within countries' borders. We are not there yet. We need to act. We need to find ways to act multilaterally and bilaterally. We need to encourage Canadians to reach into their pockets to make sure we can provide humanitarian aid as we need to.

I am not totally new to this issue. When I was first serving as a member of Parliament a number of years ago, I had a young man come to see me about several development issues. His name was Raess Ahmed. Raess engaged with me in conversation as a smart, bright, young student at the University of Toronto. As the conversation ensued, I asked him where his family had come from before coming to Canada. He said it was a long story. I asked him to tell me the story. He told me of the Rohingya people. He told me the story of his family leaving their homeland, stateless, their citizenship having been revoked, of finding a home in Bangladesh and then making their way to Canada as refugees. He told me the story and it broke my heart. I recognized how little we know in Canada about the Rohingya people. It is estimated that there are only 400 people in Canada of Rohingya background. However, there are 35 million Canadians who need to stand with the Rohingya people. We are doing that tonight. As we gather in this place, we talk, we offer our words, we debate, we offer sentiments, and we offer our outrage. We now call upon the government to keep pressure on the State of Myanmar, on the military forces that are running that country, and on the multilateral partners who need to work together with us. We need to find a way to ensure this never happens again.

I am again thankful for the opportunity we have tonight to express Canadians' outrage, and to gather in this place with commitment, not only in this case but in every situation where human beings are at risk and where humanity is not living up to what we would call each other to.

● (2035)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see there is a lot of support for having the emergency debate and for putting pressure on the government to continue to move forward.

One of the challenges with generating a strong response to this in other countries is that there is sort of a window in which these things get attention in the media. That is the nature of news. They talk about an issue for a while, and then something else comes up. However, there is a whole run-up period to where we are now. The problem will likely continue in some form going forward for a substantial amount of time.

My question is this. We need to have sustained attention for this. The government should have had more engagement earlier on this issue. However, now we need to ensure that its engagement continues beyond just this window of time when people are paying a lot of attention to this issue. How can we maintain that pressure? How do we ensure that our government is continuing to engage in this over a long period of time? Yes, absolutely, it is in the immediate circumstances, but how can it maintain that pressure on not only the military but also the civilian government in a sustained way?

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Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question and again for his leadership in this debate. He asked the most important question. As we gather here today, we know that there are parts of the world that are hot spots all the time and our attention is driven elsewhere. I understand that Canadians are preoccupied with our economy, their own lives, their families. We are preoccupied as lawmakers, as legislators in this place, with our own concerns.

It is very interesting that George Bernard Shaw, in his play *St. Joan*, has a grand inquisitor asking if an innocent person must die in every generation for those who have so little imagination. The answer has to be no. The answer has to be that we take a step back and recognize that we need to see the signals. As former senator Roméo Dallaire has said, we need to see them and they are not that hard to see.

We have had a debate over the last two decades around the concept of responsibility to protect and the ability of the international community going into a situation and finding a way to bring about a change so that we do not have people die. We do not have an answer on this. This is going to take a concerted effort. I am so pleased that all the debate tonight has been non-partisan. If we can find a way to express ideas and find a new pathway toward a way that people will respect each other, I think it starts by respecting that we are different.

In Myanmar we see minorities that are not being respected. We have to respect the minorities that exist in every country and perhaps that is Canada's role, to say we live in this country with first nations, with indigenous peoples, with founding peoples, with newcomers, respecting the way they live and trying to find a way to do it. Then we have to find international bodies that can do it better than they have been doing it so far.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Don Valley West for, as always, his incredibly compelling words. I am very moved that, in this chamber this evening, it is very clear that, when all of us are here speaking for our constituents who are writing to us, phoning our offices, and asking what Canada can do, what Canada should do, we are all speaking unanimously that this is something on which we need to act.

The situation with the Rohingya people is an incredible tragedy, horror, and atrocity that is happening there. I have lived in countries that are living with the legacy of that kind of atrocity, and rebuilding is so much more difficult than trying to stop it from happening.

The hon. member mentioned that we need to do more. I know that our government and our Prime Minister have been very eloquent on this in condemning it. There are sanctions. We have put over \$9 million into humanitarian aid, including for women, children, and pregnant women.

We need to come up with other solutions. Could the hon. member talk about what other kinds of things we could be doing?

• (2040)

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Speaker, we have to find a way of being present. Witnesses to peace, witnesses to atrocities on the ground in countries have to be regularized. It is not what we would call peacekeeping forces, but it is a force that has an ability to be

witnesses to give us the truth and tell us. We count on international NGOs to do that. I commend Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UNHCR, and other not-for-profits that are in the region. We have to find ways to support them, to fund them, to encourage them, and to respect them when they give reports.

I do not think we can do it from this distance, so we have to increase our diplomatic presence. We have to find ways to do multilateral military presence at times to make sure we have a peace to keep. We need to find a way to have Canada more present in those countries with our partners.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Shepard.

We heard in debate tonight about how well we are all getting along here, and I do not want to change the tone too much, but we need to talk about the fact that the government has been naive right from the beginning. When Stéphane Dion went to Myanmar in 2016, he gave it \$44 million, and we were told that was intended to go toward building democratic institutions. If the government at the time had been paying attention to what was going on in Myanmar, it would have known there were already serious problems there. The election had been held a little earlier and there was no indication from the election that any of the parties were going to take seriously this issue around the Rohingya.

I understand it is a long-lasting issue, which I will go into in a few minutes, but the reality is that the government that was elected in Burma was not taking this issue seriously. The Canadian government said it was going to give it \$44 million, and there has been little accountability for that money. If I go on the website international.gc.ca tonight, under “Canadian international assistance in Myanmar”, it is still the government's position that Myanmar is moving toward an inclusive parliamentary democracy and negotiating ceasefires after decades-long civil wars. I guess we can understand that it has not kept its websites up, but it should, because this is an important issue and one that the government has misfired on right from the beginning.

The second place the government made a mistake was last week when the Prime Minister was in New York. He had an opportunity to show some international leadership and chose to talk about, as much as possible, whatever dirty laundry he could find from our country rather than taking leadership on international issues. This would have been an excellent issue for him to have shown some leadership and statesmanship on.

We have talked tonight about members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights who have been talking about this issue off and on for the last year. They worked very well together on the issue, but government leadership needs to start paying attention to these kinds of issues. The Prime Minister had the chance to do that and did not take it. It seems that, until it hits the editorial page in Canada, the government pays little attention to it. Because of that, it has little influence. It does not have the capacity to influence in the way it should.

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We know a little about the Rohingya issue. It has been going on for a long time. It is a group of people who, within the last several hundred years, have moved into the area on the border of Bangladesh and what used to be called Burma but is now called Myanmar. They can be shown to have a heritage that goes back for several hundred years in that area. In 2015, their population in Myanmar was about one million people. There has been a long and drawn-out persecution of them. It started many years ago, but there were military crackdowns in 1998, which chased a whole pile of the Rohingya people out of Myanmar and into Bangladesh. When they came back in 1981, when they started moving back into the area that they had occupied and lived in for so long, the government turned on them and brought in a series of citizenship laws that basically removed their citizenship. There was another round of persecution in 1991 and 1992, then renewed pressure in 2012, and then what we have seen in the recent past.

I would like to back up and talk a little about the problem, which is centred on these 1982 citizenship laws. Basically, in the past, the Rohingya had been citizens of the country, and the government just made the decision that it was going to remove their positions as citizens. It came in with a law that said that citizens need to be part of a recognized national race, and the Rohingya were not a national recognized race, so right off the bat they did not have an opportunity to reaffirm their citizenships.

The law also said that they had to be able to demonstrate that their families had settled there before 1823, which was when the British came. The records and other things made it very difficult for people to establish the fact that they were citizens. They were basically left stateless in 1982 by those changes. There has been pressure over the years on the government to try to get it to change that position so that these people would be considered citizens again, but that has not been successful. The government disqualified them and made it impossible for the Rohingya to qualify as citizens.

Those who were citizens were impacted in 2015 around the election, and I will talk a bit about that later because I know personally someone who was impacted by that. In 2015, there were some other changes made as well, called the race and religion protection laws. Four laws were brought in, and each actually directly impacted the Rohingya minority that exists in Myanmar. There was a monogamy law that ruled out polygamy, which is practised in certain areas of that country.

● (2045)

It had a religious conversion law and an interfaith law. People who wanted to change their faith needed to get approval. They needed to go through interviews and wait between 90 to 180 days before they were allowed to convert, and in many cases they were not allowed.

The third law restricted the marriage of Buddhist women to non-Buddhist men, so it put restrictions on them.

The fourth law was a population control law, which was targeted at minority areas where couples were only allowed to have one child every 36 months.

These, piled on top of the citizenship laws, left the Rohingya without representation and without any political strength.

Further restrictions were placed on things like employment, education, freedom of movement, and religious freedom as well.

These violate the basic rights of people in so many ways.

I want to tell the House about a specific case from 2015. I had the chance to be part of an international group of parliamentarians, which was formed around the issue of religious freedom. We were in Oslo in the fall of 2014, and signed on to a charter called IPPFoRB. A gentleman named Shwe Maung, was from Myanmar, was there. He was a member of parliament for Burma. He signed on to this charter. The network now has 150 to 200 members from around the world. He is a full citizen. In 2010, he had citizenship. When they came to vote in 2015, the electoral commission decided his parents had not been citizens and he was not a citizen either, so they removed his citizenship.

There were 500,000 Rohingya in the same situation who were struck from the electoral rolls. These people voted in one election. Leading up to the next election, the electoral commission of the central government made a determination that they were not citizens anymore. Mr. Maung went from representing his country as a member of Parliament to finding himself completely stateless. He is in the United States now, with an arrest warrant out for him. This is the kind of pressure the Rohingya have been under in Myanmar.

On August 23, Kofi Annan came out with his report. On August 25, a small group, a strange group of people, with perhaps some Rohingya in it, attacked a number of government and police officials. A number of people were killed. This caused a retaliation from the military and the start of all we see now.

I want to talk a bit about the fact that the government's response by the 28th was to begin laying mines. We have a news release from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which specifically mentions mines being placed. On the afternoon of August 28, an army truck arrived on the Myanmar side of the border. Three crates were unloaded, which contained anti-personnel mines were removed. They were placed in the ground between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. It talks about the areas where they were placed. It talks about subsequent to the daytime operation, the Myanmar army brought in trucks at night to continue laying mines. This could be seen under the lights. This has all been confirmed by Bangladeshi authorities as well. This has taken place against basically every international protocol that exists in the world.

We need to find some solutions, quickly.

First, the Rohingya people need immediate help. We were told at subcommittee just a few days ago that people were being kept in compounds. They have eaten all the food. They have eaten trees and branches. There is nothing for them to eat. They need immediate assistance and help from outside or they will starve to death. Starvation is imminent. Earlier tonight we heard about the rapes and the killings. We need to insist that the military stop its campaign.

We also need to be clear and do a solid investigation into which foreign powers are funding and radicalizing these individuals. Where is this small group of people, which, by the way, is killing Rohingya Muslims as well, getting its backing in order to cause the disruption?

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We need to insist that the four race and religion protection laws are replaced and those 1982 citizenship laws are revoked.

The government needs to take its place as a leader. It needs to quit the show and start supplying the goal. Up until now that has not been the case. Canadians need value for the \$50 million that have been spent there. The government needs to be accountable. It needs to step in and show the leadership the Rohingya and the Myanmar people need in order to move forward.

● (2050)

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the course of the past year, my constituents have written to me and have called me about this issue, constituents who belong to the Islamic Society of North America, the Association of Progressive Muslims, Christians, and people from all walks of life, faith based and from other circles in our community. They have expressed outrage that there is yet another community, the Rohingya in a relatively forgotten part of the world, subject to such atrocities, to such slaughter. They have asked me to step up and show them what we can do as parliamentarians.

My colleague from Cypress Hills—Grasslands spoke of leadership. In just a few weeks, the 137th assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union will take place in St. Petersburg, Russia. Traditionally, upside of 120, sometimes 140 or 150, parliamentary delegations from around the world meet to discuss issues like democracy and human rights. What does my colleague think international fora such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union could contribute to such an acute crisis such as the crisis of the Rohingya, and what opportunity could the House of Commons have with a united voice to inject itself into that dialogue?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, these international fora are an incredibly important part of where we need to be addressing these issues. I mentioned the United Nations last week. We missed an opportunity. I would not like to see that same issue missed at the IPU.

I had a chance to go to Myanmar a year ago last August. It was obvious from being there that really no one was interested in solving this problem. It appeared that the government was not all that concerned with solving it. We met with some of the national politicians from Rakhine State, and they were definitely not interested in taking the Rohingyas' side on this thing. Therefore, it is going to take strong international leadership to convince the Myanmar government.

We need to mention as well that 25% of the seats in that parliament, and I have been in the parliament and watched, are given to the military. There is an entire section with nothing but military uniforms. There is a section for the opposition and then a section for the government. There needs to be pressure applied not only on those people who have been elected democratically but also on the military, to create some situation where they will do better than they are doing right now.

We had people saying at committee the other day that this was a genocide. It fits the conditions for genocide. We asked if they were trying to push them out. That was exactly what it looked like. They could get them on the other side of the river, they could mine that side of the river but they could not come back. From the Myanmar

government's perspective, that takes care of this issue. We need to do better and we need to let the international community know that this is not acceptable.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to clearly put on the record the fact that the Prime Minister discussed solutions to the situation in Myanmar in his meetings with counterparts at the UN last week. I have heard a number of colleagues talk about how this was not the case. It needs to be clearly stated that significant and serious conversations were had at the UNGA by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs about how Canada could continue to play a leading role in helping to find a solution to the current crisis with the Rohingya in the Rakhine State. Canada was one of the first countries in the world to step up and provide assistance.

At the same time, the support that Canada is providing to see Myanmar democratize and to embrace pluralism is important. That should be a stated goal of Global Affairs Canada. I would hope the member opposite would share the view that we should be doing everything we can to help Myanmar work toward democracy and embrace diversity, inclusion, and pluralism. Does the member have a comment to that effect?

● (2055)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it is not good enough for the Prime Minister to be silent publicly on an issue that is so critically important around the world. When we speak out, that demonstrates the leadership we need to see and we need to have.

We talked a bit earlier about funding going to the Myanmar government. Some of the member's own colleagues, perhaps even the minister, talked about the necessity of ensuring that money was accounted for, but perhaps not going directly to the government because we did not know where it would be spent. Perhaps it should be given to NGOs that right now have an incredible humanitarian need for food and medical assistance in those camps that are on the border rather than given to the Myanmar government until we are absolutely certain of how it will use that money. Clearly, the \$44 million went somewhere and we do not seem to have any accountability for where it is. If the government has a good idea and can explain that, we would certainly be glad to hear it.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to join the debate at this late hour today.

First, I want to thank the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands for his contributions and his intervention. He kind of laid out some of what Canada was doing that it should not be doing with respect to grants still being given to the Myanmar government despite its actions or inactions it was taking.

I also want to thank the member of Parliament for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan. Over the past two years, he has raised consistently in the House the issue of the human rights violations against the Rohingya people in the western parts of Myanmar. Of any member in the House, by far he has the most credibility on the human rights violations, having spoken up repeatedly to draw the attention of the government to this case.

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It is sad to say that it has taken two years for us to have an emergency debate caused by the current situation with the military activity in the province where most of the Rohingyas are.

Like I have done before, and I always do it, I have a Yiddish proverb. This proverb describes exactly what the government is doing, and actually describes what a lot of western governments are doing. It is not just the Canadian government not doing enough; it is the entire western world that is standing by. The proverb goes, "Hoping and waiting makes fools out of clever people." We have a lot of clever people in the government. We have a lot of clever people in the House and across a lot of the western democracies. Again, we are hoping and waiting for a solution to simply happen, just like we were hoping and waiting for a good outcome to what was happening in Rwanda before the western governments reacted and took action.

Again, we are also hoping and waiting in other parts of the world. I drew the attention of the House just this week to the human rights violations against the Sindh people in Pakistan. I have been championing the cause of the Kurdish people in northern Iraq, Iran, Syria, and in Turkey. There are minority groups all across the world, indigenous peoples to the lands they are in who do not have a voice in government, who do not even have a voice in the administration of the lands on which they live. They do not even have autonomous governance of the areas in which they live. They are imposed upon by a larger ethnic group, by a larger conglomeration of people who determine for them, typically through a non-democratic process, what the laws, customs, and culture of the land shall be.

In Myanmar we see the unfortunate effects of military action being taken against a lot of very innocent people who did not ask for this to be dealt upon them. They did not have a choice. They have simply lived there for generations upon generations in a land they simply call home.

Now, again, we stand and we watch. The important thing the government should be doing is taking concrete steps. I know the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands mentioned some of them. It could be a simple thing, like cutting aid money that goes directly to the Myanmar government, not directly to the people. It could be putting more pressure on NGOs that are assisting the Myanmar government in one way or other. We could be adding certain individuals in the government to our sanctions list.

Just saw last week the government, finally, after years upon years, put 40 members of the Venezuela regime on Canada's sanctions list, including the president of the Republic of Venezuela.

Things can be done, especially when public pressure is placed upon the government. It is unfortunate that it may take another two years before the government chooses to react and do something. In the case of Venezuela, it might have had something to do with the electronic petition I tabled with over 4,500 signatures on it, and then the motion of my colleague for Thornhill, which comes up for a vote tomorrow. It deals specifically with the Venezuelan crisis.

However, on the Rohingya crisis, we cannot wait another two years to see concrete actions, a signal from the government that is more than a really tersely worded press release that most western governments have become really adept at, with very carefully

worded language. It is like we have become central banks when it comes to human rights and monetary policy. There is very carefully worded language so as not to offend anybody, but which does not really indicate anything more than we are unhappy with someone. Just like the central banks put out very confusing press releases about the future of monetary policy, we do the same thing on human rights.

What to do? Hoping and waiting is what we do. Again, in this situation, the Prime Minister has reached out to Aung San Suu Kyi and expressed his concern, but so much more could be done and so many more actions could be taken. This is not new. It is not as if this Parliament and the government, and the broader Canadian society, have not heard about this. I have a graphic from a data team, to which I am will to refer. It shows all the ethnic cleansing that has happened over the past 20 years. The last time people in the provinces affected where the Rohingyas are, 600,000 people were forced to flee from their homes. Today it is 422,000.

● (2100)

Rwanda was 2.3 million people. Iraq was 1.4 million people. Kosovo was 900,000. Syria was 5.5 million people. They were all for different situations, typically involving a dictatorship, and all had accompanying massive human rights violations: rape, murder, and the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

I also want to draw attention to the political context of the conflict. Sectarian violence between Buddhists and Muslims in Myanmar has raged sporadically for nearly a century, so it is nothing new to the international community. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League For Democracy is not avowedly a Buddhist or ethnic Burmese party, but it still effectively exists as one. The junta has declined, the military government has declined, and Aung San Suu Kyi has risen in power. They still depend heavily on the support of Buddhist monks, as William McGowan wrote in 2012 and since then.

Various leading members of the NLD have made disparaging statements about the Rohingyas. I draw attention to one of their spokespersons, who said in 2012, "The Rohingyas are not our citizens." As the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands said, in fact they have had their citizenship cancelled, in many cases. They are not even citizens of their country. They have been robbed of the right to basically govern themselves and decide who will lead them and make decisions on behalf of the community.

The province in question is on the western side, which is probably one of the reasons this conflict has grabbed so much attention. They are being streamed straight into Bangladesh and into international waters, where they are fleeing this conflict.

One thing Canada could be demanding is access for international monitors. I do not mean just United Nations monitors. I mean that any willing third party should have free and fair access to the region with the certainty that they can go in there freely, without the government imposing any minders on them.

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I mentioned that this Parliament has dealt with this before. In fact, there is a June 2013 parliamentary report written by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, chaired by the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, of the foreign affairs and international development committee, chaired by the member for Niagara West. The headline is “Conflicting Realities: Reform Repression and Human Rights in Burma”. It is a 99-page report, and it details every single issue. It is not edifying or uplifting reading in any way, because it details the human rights violations; the violations of the rule of law; how freedom of expression, assembly, and association have been restricted; and forced labour. It describes the conditions political prisoners were living through. It goes on to describe the armed conflict and the humanitarian crisis in Kachin State and Rakhine State, where a large number of Rohingya live today. This is nothing new for our Parliament to be dealing with.

The sanctions imposed on the regime at the time were partially based on good future behaviour, so Aung San Suu Kyi was released and then allowed to lead her political party in a fairly free, not entirely free, election to power. A lot of the international community was hoping that the human rights situation would improve and that free and open access to Myanmar would improve for international investment to improve the lives of the people there. They have done some of that, but the repression has very much continued. Although we have a kind of figurehead leader that many western democracies were looking for and campaigned for, we do not have, in reality, on the ground, a situation that would avoid the kind of ethnic cleansing we are seeing.

The June 7 meeting the Prime Minister had with Aung San Suu Kyi was an opportunity to raise the issue of the treatment of the Rohingya. I have heard some members and others say that in fact he has done so. However, more than words and press releases, we need action. I have described some that could be done. I know that the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands have done the same. We can do things. We have done it in the case of Venezuela, and we can do it again.

I am looking forward to the questions and comments from other members and am looking for an opportunity perhaps to give the government some ideas on what it could actually do to better the situation.

• (2105)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tonight is a really important night. I would like to thank the member who proposed the motion, because it is important for all of us to be taking the time to discuss this.

What has come up repeatedly is that there are things that have been done. There have been sanctions, and aid has been provided to help people who are fleeing. It seems to me that in each circumstance, we are faced with these emergency situations that have come up in different countries over time. We have talked about many of them over the past day. Are there any ideas as to maybe some type of plan we could come up with for faster action when these issues come up in different countries around the world, something we can put in place when we have a situation that is clearly ethnic cleansing that we can ramp up to have a steady response?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, that is obviously a question of realpolitik. What can we do in particular situations?

In the case of what I would call a middle power like Canada, our means are pretty limited. What we do have control of is what happens in Canada and the international reputation that has been built up over the past 10 years by the previous Conservative government and the two years the Liberals have been there. It is time to cash in that political capital with world leaders to get them to do more than send out tersely worded press releases, such as sanctions, a demand for international monitors, cutting aid, cutting grants, and actually putting pressure on governments. That is the way governments actually react. In the case of Venezuela, I think it will bear fruit eventually. It is just a shame it has taken two years in that particular situation. I just hope that in 2019, when we are coming up to the next election, we are not debating this issue again asking what we could have done or if we could have imposed sanctions then.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have mentioned this once before this evening but would like to mention it again, because I think it is tangible and direct, and I do not know if the member for Calgary Shepard has a view.

Given that there is an agreement now between Bangladesh and Myanmar for the removal of landmines in the border countries, and given that the Myanmar military is placing more landmines all the time to make it ever more hazardous and deadly for the Rohingya to vacate across the border to escape to Bangladesh, would it not be a useful thing for Canada to provide funds and expertise to Bangladesh to help it clear the landmines?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, to the best of my knowledge, Myanmar is not a member of the landmine treaty, which is the first part I should mention. The second part is that as far I know, it is still one of the countries that gets quite a bit of military support from the Chinese government.

I like the idea of looking at what Canada can do in the type of foreign aid or foreign support we could be providing. We have expertise in demining operations. However, we cannot do that during an active military operation across the border when there are people still streaming over it fleeing from the conflict.

First we have to focus on the conflict. Once peace is restored in some measure or a truce is called, we can begin the restoration of the Rohingya to their villages.

• (2110)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about the importance of allowing observers into the situation. I would like him to comment on the importance of documenting the human rights violations, why it is important that we have the capacity to do that, and how that may change things a little later and impact the resolution of this conflict.

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Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I support the collection of information, such as detailed evidence, because it builds two important cases. One is for the future prosecution of people who target civilians and commit criminal acts, crimes of war, atrocities, and ethnic cleansing. That is one purpose. The other part is documenting acts such as these for future generations to learn from them. I think one of the great benefits post-World War II was the heavy documentation of the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing. It has given us an opportunity to learn from our past mistakes and to say that never again would we allow this to happen.

Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Nepean.

Yesterday marks one month since recent acts of inhumane and barbaric violence erupted in Myanmar against the Rohingya Muslims, killing thousands of people and sending an estimated 480,000 civilians fleeing from their homes, deprived of their basic human rights. Many of them are especially vulnerable: children without parents, pregnant women, and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. They did not choose to leave their homes. There was no choice.

This is in stark contrast to Rakhine State's population at one time of over a million Rohingya, who identify their roots among western Myanmar's indigenous communities from over a thousand years ago.

Last Sunday I heard from more than 300 concerned residents who gathered at the Islamic Foundation of Toronto in my riding of Scarborough North to discuss the dire circumstances faced by the Rohingya people. Joined by the members for Don Valley East, Don Valley West, Scarborough Centre, and Scarborough—Rouge Park, I heard calls for an end to the violence and killing in Myanmar.

Under the guise of routing insurgents, Myanmar's military forces and extremists have engaged in what the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights calls "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing". Going one step further, French President Emmanuel Macron has used the word "genocide" to describe the killing of innocent Rohingya victims, committing to work at the United Nations Security Council to condemn the horrific atrocities being committed.

At last Sunday's meeting, a representative of Burma Task Force Canada encouraged our government to call it what it is, a genocide, and to invoke the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. What I heard most clearly was the outrage expressed by countless residents about the killing of innocent civilians. I heard calls for Canada to increase its humanitarian assistance with the aim of supporting a stable, safe, and inclusive Myanmar.

The road to the unfortunate situation before us today has been long. For decades the Rohingya people have been denied citizenship in their own country, thereby rendering them stateless. As one of the most persecuted minority groups in the world, they have endured decades of discrimination and injustice. It would be ignorant to say that the recent massacre could not have been predicted or prevented.

Our Prime Minister recently spoke to Myanmar's State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi, stressing her role as a moral and political leader. Our Prime Minister emphasized the need for an immediate end to the

violence, for the protection of civilians, and for access by the United Nations and humanitarian partners. There is a moral obligation for Myanmar's State Counsellor and military leadership to address this humanitarian crisis in a responsive, collaborative, and compassionate way.

All of this leaves us, as global citizens, deeply concerned. As Canadians, let us stand together as a nation committed to the inclusion, safety, and security of all peoples and the protection of human rights. Let us stand together as a nation to call on the authorities in Myanmar to take immediate and appropriate measures to end the senseless killing. Let us stand together as a nation prepared to support in these efforts.

Canada has long championed peace, democracy, and humanitarianism all around the world. In 2015-16, Canada contributed \$27.47 million for development assistance in Myanmar through such organizations as the Joint Peace Fund, including \$4.3 million in humanitarian aid for displaced peoples, including the Rohingya. This year Canada has, to date, committed \$9.18 million in humanitarian assistance to address the ongoing crisis in Myanmar.

Last Sunday I heard calls for Canada to do more. Concerned Canadians want to help through financial contributions to our partners in Bangladesh and Myanmar, and they are asking our government to match their donations dollar for dollar. They also want to help resettle Rohingya refugees in Canada, opening their hearts and offering their homes.

● (2115)

First and foremost, Canadians want to see an immediate end to the violence. Some have suggested the creation of a safety zone while others have spoken of their vision of peaceful resettlement in burnt down villages. Canadians are reaching out and encouraging our government to continue to take a firm stand against the atrocities occurring in Myanmar.

We must continue to work together with our partners in Bangladesh and Myanmar to protect civilians, provide humanitarian assistance, and strongly uphold the human rights of the Rohingya who have been persecuted for far too long.

This is not a local Rohingya Muslim issue. It is a matter that should concern every human being. As Canadians and as global citizens, we have an obligation to speak up against these atrocities against humanity and to stand together with our Rohingya brothers and sisters.

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Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the questions I have asked members of the government before is whether the new Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion has been engaged at all on this issue. When that office was announced, my understanding was that dealing with issues like this, certainly any kind of issues of persecution of religious minorities, would be something that the office would at least be commenting on and engaged with in some way, and perhaps involved in the program and response to it. I would like to ask the member for his comments on that.

Second, is he satisfied with the timeline of the government response? In spite of the calls for over a year and a half for its engagement in this, the government response began only relatively recently in response to the most imminent escalation.

Mr. Shaun Chen: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing this debate to the House. I know that throughout the events that have transpired over the past four weeks, our government has taken very quick action in its statements condemning the ongoing violence and in expressions of concern directly to the State Counsellor.

I know that our Minister of Foreign Affairs has engaged in bilateral meetings at the United Nations with the European Union, Indonesia, and Turkey on this issue. I know that our parliamentary secretary has spoken to the Bangladeshi High Commission here in Canada. We have been very proactive. We are requesting that our ambassador be granted access to visit the affected area to make sure that Canadians know first-hand what is happening and that we have our eyes and ears on the ground.

More important is the support that we will continue to provide the Rohingya people through our contributions to our partners in Bangladesh and Myanmar, including the recent funding in 2017 of \$9.18 million in humanitarian aid for the region. We will continue to advocate for an end to this violence and continue to support the people on the ground who deserve not to endure this horrific violence.

• (2120)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for speaking so eloquently about how we should be coming together to respond to this issue. He set forth quite well how he has reached out in his own community and what he has heard.

Having set out what we have been doing thus far, what does he see as the next steps? That is what we are discussing today. What is our response to this?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Toronto—Danforth for her continued advocacy on this issue and her participation in tonight's debate.

I want to reiterate the importance of Canada's role. Canada is known as a compassionate and caring community, one that stands up for human rights, and I know that our government will continue to champion the human rights of the Rohingya people.

I know that Canadians, especially the many who have reached out to me and whom I met at the recent meeting last Sunday in my riding, have said that they want to help. I know there is a delegation

being organized by the Islamic Foundation of Toronto, which is looking to travel to Bangladesh to help provide assistance and aid to those affected. They have been actively fundraising.

One of the asks I heard from the community is that they would like our government to match donations dollar-for-dollar. I hope these considerations will be looked at by the government in the days and weeks to come and I know that Canadians will continue to open up their hearts and their pockets to help support those who are in need in the region.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, given that my hon. colleague talked about donations and Canadians matching them, is he at all concerned that our priority needs to be demanding that the Myanmar government allow effective human aid inside the country and that we have to establish a safe zone working with the United Nations?

Mr. Shaun Chen: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely essential that the appropriate humanitarian assistance be provided to people on the ground. There are so many vulnerable populations at stake—children, pregnant women, and those who have suffered sexual and gender-based violence—that we need to be very specific in how we reach out to them, ensuring that we are providing assistance through partners who are going to help those in need.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canada is gravely concerned by the continuing crisis in Myanmar and its impact on neighbouring Bangladesh. Since the August 25 attacks by domestic militants on security outposts, almost 480,000 Rohingya have fled the northern Rakhine State to seek safety in neighbouring Bangladesh, adding to the hundreds of thousands who have made the crossing over recent decades. Arrivals over the past few weeks have largely comprised women and children, including pregnant women. As many as 1,500 children have been born during the last 20 days in the Rohingya camps.

With the help of the international community, including Canada, the Government of Bangladesh is temporarily hosting the tidal wave of displaced persons from what is called “ethnic cleansing” in Myanmar and the violence propagated by anti-Rohingya sentiment in the Rakhine State. I have personally received countless emails and calls from my constituents and from people all across Ottawa and Canada voicing their concerns about the violence in Myanmar.

I would like to highlight two organizations that have shown support for the Rohingya people. Human Concern International and the South Nepean Muslim Community, SNMC, in my riding have been working to raise awareness and funds for managing the ongoing crisis. Additionally, a protest on October 1 is being organized on Parliament Hill by several organizations in Ottawa.

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One of my constituents, Mr. Richard Harmston of South Asia Partnership Canada, sent me a long list of civil society organizations that have delivered a very important message on this pressing issue of the Rohingya refugees and the plight of the Rohingya in Burma, now Myanmar. These organizations include the Burmese Muslim Association, the Canada Tibet Committee, the Canadian Federation of University Women, the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada, the National Union of Public and General Employees, the Public Service Alliance of Canada's Social Justice Fund, the Rohingya Association of Canada, the Unifor Social Justice Fund, USC Canada, and World University Service of Canada.

As of September 25, the new arrivals are being accommodated in makeshift settlements or camps in host communities and in spontaneous new sites springing up mainly in and around Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. All of them are in urgent need of food, water, shelter, sanitation, medication, and other basic necessities of life. Lack of hygiene is a great challenge needing prompt attention, lest it contribute to disease, including an outbreak of cholera that is threatening. Substantial relief efforts are under way by the international community, including NGOs and the Government of Bangladesh, to help these vulnerable people.

Imagine for a moment having to look after the population of Halifax showing up in the span of just four weeks. Without all hands working together, this humanitarian crisis has the potential of becoming a major disaster. Bangladesh's hospitality is laudable, especially when one considers that this country is one of the most densely populated nations in the world, with more than 161 million people on a land mass about twice the size of New Brunswick. It is a least-developed country, with approximately 30 million people living on just \$1.90 U.S. per day. The majority of people live in rural areas and the countryside is prone to natural disasters, such as cyclones and severe flooding.

● (2125)

Canada has been active during this time of great need in Bangladesh, a country it was among the first to recognize at independence in 1971. Moved by the scale of the current catastrophe and the imperative that countries should not face a crisis of this magnitude alone, Canada has stood by Bangladesh in its pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the violent situation and as it provides succour to the displaced Rohingya.

Politically, Canada has been unequivocal and seeks a voluntary return of the displaced Rohingya population to their rightful homes. We have called for the immediate cessation of hostilities in Myanmar and have urged the military and civilian authorities to fulfill their responsibilities to protect civilians and respond to their basic needs. We have also called for immediate access to Rakhine State for humanitarian actors and the timely implementation of the "Final Report of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State", chaired by Kofi Annan, in order to address the root causes of this current crisis.

Given the scale of humanitarian need in southern Bangladesh, the Government of Canada was quick to respond with an initial allocation to help meet the life-saving needs of the newly arrived asylum seekers. This includes \$3.35 million to our humanitarian partners in Bangladesh to address the most pressing needs of those

affected by the crisis, including access to nutrition, shelter, water, and sanitation. This brings Canada's 2017 humanitarian assistance response to crisis-affected people, including the Rohingya, to a total of \$9.18 million in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Our assistance is aimed at helping all those in need in accordance with the local context, regardless of ethnic or religious identity. Canada stands ready to respond further, as is appropriate and possible in light of changing conditions on the ground.

Canada has had a long-standing development relationship with Bangladesh. The country is one of our most important development partners, with Canadian contributions amounting to over \$4 billion to date. Bangladesh has made important development gains with Canada's and other donors' assistance. The incidence of poverty has steadily declined, and the gross domestic product growth rate has averaged a healthy 6% per year.

Bangladesh has further made considerable progress in health and education, and it is a top performer in reducing maternal and under-five mortality.

Canada's development assistance in Bangladesh has focused on strengthening the delivery of health and education systems and promoting governance and human rights. Our efforts have also supported reducing child, early, and forced marriage; addressing climate change; and food security-themed programming.

Major Canadian non-governmental organizations have been working in Bangladesh for many years and have established long-standing partnerships that will continue to serve us well beyond the support we have already provided, addressing violence against women, needs of the disabled, civil society and democratic participation, community development, agriculture and food security, higher education, and microfinance.

In conclusion, Canada firmly believes that a modern state must promote, protect, and serve the interests of all of its nationals and build societies that respect human rights, religious freedoms, and inclusive governance. We will continue to work with the Government of Bangladesh and international donors to help ensure that the shock of this most recent humanitarian crisis will not derail the progress to which Bangladesh has committed itself in terms of providing prosperity and democratic freedoms for all of its people, of achieving middle-income status in short order, and of asserting its role as a progressive force in the community of nations.

● (2130)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, although not all of it was directly on the topic we are discussing tonight. Nonetheless, I appreciate his participation in the debate.

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When we are talking about aid, one of the important things we need to analyze is the humanitarian assistance to those who have fled, but there is also the question of Canadian aid dollars that have gone into Burma, where those dollars are going, and whether or not they are actually getting to those in greatest need. There is the problem of even getting humanitarian access to the Rakhine area.

The member spoke about the aid issue. I think the figure was about \$44 million, give or take a couple of million, that was committed by the last minister of foreign affairs to democratic development in Burma. I wonder if any of that involved direct government-to-government aid, and what that money was spent on.

Does the member agree with me that we need a significant review of the aid dollars going into Burma to see if we are actually making a difference for the most vulnerable people, in this case in Rakhine, but also considering other issues of minority rights? I am curious about the member's thoughts on this specific aspect of aid to Burma.

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, the aid that Canada gives should of course go to the intended recipients.

Whether it is Myanmar, Bangladesh, or any other countries that receive aid, we have to ensure that it goes to the people it is intended for. We are working to ensure that this happens.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tomorrow we will be seeing the inauguration of the national Holocaust memorial here in Ottawa. It is a stark reminder of the fact that this is an issue that comes up and that we must find ways to respond as a country. We must find ways to properly address these issues.

Having looked at this issue and seeing that it is an urgent issue, what are the member's suggested responses? Is there a broader arch to respond to these issues when they come up in other countries to make sure that we stop people from dying?

• (2135)

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, of course it is a timely reminder that tomorrow is a very important day with the Holocaust memorial inauguration.

At this juncture, we have to recognize that what is happening in Myanmar should not turn out to be a much greater tragedy than what it is already. We have to ensure that this is stopped, and that the people affected are taken care of at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be dividing my time with the illustrious member for Durham.

I want to divide my comments into three assertions. Assertion number one is that the catastrophe going on right now is of enormous proportions. Assertion number two is that this is not a new thing. The precursor to this crisis was a human rights tragedy that has been in play now for a number of years. The third assertion is that we as a country and as a world as a whole have not been paying due attention, and perhaps there is a lesson to be taken from that fact.

On assertion number one, this issue is top of mind right now because it is a calamity of extraordinary proportions.

An article that was recently published in *The Economist* shows the number of refugees per week who have fled their country during

various crises over the past 30 years. The number of Rohingya people fleeing Myanmar every week is about 120,000. That is since this crisis began, exactly one month and one day ago. By comparison, from Syria we never saw during any point in that crisis more than an average of around 40,000 fleeing per week, roughly one-third the flow. It was a much larger total population that fled, but a much smaller number per week. To make the point here, there are only around 800,000 Rohingya in Myanmar, and we are seeing over 10% of the entire population fleeing the country every single week. That is an extraordinary statistic.

The other crises that have produced large numbers of refugees over the past 30 years—Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo—have all produced smaller flows all at once. This has a number of consequences that are worth mentioning, one of which is trying to provide a place for these people to live where they will have adequate sanitation, water, and food. This is a matter of the greatest urgency; otherwise, one tragedy will be transformed into another, a health care emergency that will result in even more deaths than are being caused directly by the violence.

This driving out of an entire population from its homeland has been characterized by the United Nations human rights chief as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”. That actually misstates things to some degree. What this actually is, and let me quote another individual, is a “textbook example of genocide”, the destruction of an entire people, the wiping out of their ability to live in their homeland, the driving of that population from the land that is their home.

I am quoting now from last Thursday's hearings of the international human rights subcommittee, where one witness stated that the president of France had declared yesterday that what is going on now appears to be genocide.

Seven Nobel Peace Prize-winning lawyers have come out with a joint statement saying that what is going on is a textbook case of genocide.

Yale University has released a report. Fortify Rights has released a report calling what is going on a genocide. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, the President of Nigeria, the President of Turkey, and the Bangladeshi foreign minister have all called what is going on right now a genocide.

I urge the committee to stop using the term “ethnic cleansing”, the term that was put forward by Slobodan Milosevic to cover his crimes in Bosnia. We should be using the word “genocide”, which urges and forces the international community to take direct action.

Genocide does not exist, even if the facts on the ground prove that it is there, until the magic words are spoken at the United Nations by the right kind of resolution. The fact is that the facts on the ground demonstrate a de facto genocide right now, whether or not the United Nations has uttered those magic words.

• (2140)

I would urge our government to do what it can to ensure the United Nations states that what is going on is a genocide so the proper international legal actions can take place.

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I will talk a little about what has gone on in the past, because this is not new.

Back in 2013, I chaired the international human rights subcommittee. We conducted hearings on human rights in Burma, Myanmar. We noted at the time that the treatment of the Rohingya had been abysmal for decades.

In 1977, the Myanmar government began the process of stripping its Rohingya citizens of their citizenship, rendering them stateless. In 1982, a series of human rights abuses led to 200,000 Rohingya fleeing across the Bangladesh border. There were further crackdowns in Rohingya-dominated areas in 1991 and 1992, which resulted in 270,000 Rohingya fleeing into Bangladesh. Sometimes, many of these people returned. They had no way of surviving in Bangladesh. It was not their homeland and it did not recognize them as citizens, although the Myanmar government's position was that these were ancestrally citizens of Bangladesh and therefore the fact that they spent their whole lives in Myanmar counted for nothing. At the time of our writing, 200,000 stateless Rohingya were living in Bangladesh with no legal status.

We heard testimony in 2013 from Professor Schabas who wrote, "human rights violations committed against the Rohingya are sufficiently widespread and systematic to meet the legal threshold of crimes against humanity." This was back in 2013, and his report had been issued in 2010, seven years ago.

We were informed that the Rohingya were subject to a number of serious human rights violations, which at the time included the following eight categories: severe travel restrictions; arbitrary widespread detention, torture, cruel or inhumane punishment; extrajudicial executions; forced labour, including forced labour by children as young as five or six years of age; forcible population transfer, on a smaller-scale version of what is happening now; sexual violence against women and girls; confiscation of land without compensation; and violation of their right to adequate housing.

Additionally, we were informed that families were brought in from central Burma to take over the lands that had been confiscated from the Rohingya, a version of what the Turkish government did when it drove out its Greek and Armenian populations in the period from 1915 to the early 1920s and replaced them with populations from Anatolia to ensure those people could never return to their homeland.

Therefore, this is a long-standing crisis. For a number of years, we have read about the Rohingya boat people trying to escape their plight by fleeing in inadequate craft down the coastline of Southeast Asia, sometimes meeting with disaster in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where we find mass graves of those who died, and sometimes being forced into the sex trade and human trafficking. All of this has been happening, and happening in open view, yet we in Canada and in the world have turned our attention elsewhere.

In 2015, I was often reminded in Canada's debates about a little boy who had died on a beach in Greece, crossing the three-mile stretch of the Aegean Sea. We all remember the photograph. It was a tragedy. I was asked about this and if we should do more for refugees in that area. In response, I said that I took the point, but if the only thing that mattered when we were considering refugees was the

amount of water they crossed and the dangers that were involved, then nothing that was faced by those fleeing from Syria through Turkey could compare to the plight of the Rohingya. However, we were not interested at the time. We are interested now. I hope we will finally take appropriate action and that the world will focus its attention where it ought to be focused: on this terrible tragedy.

● (2145)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member really went through quite a bit of information and that was very helpful.

The Prime Minister has said that the responsibility for resolving this crisis does not just lie with the civilian leadership but also with the military leadership. Does the member agree that the military leadership must also take responsibility to end the violence going on right now in Myanmar?

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, the short answer is yes. I have no special insights into the internal workings of the Myanmar or Burmese regime. Therefore, I am unable to say anything other than all members of that regime ought to act responsibly. It is obvious that we cannot force out a population on a scale like this without the active involvement of the military. That goes without saying, so of course they ought to stop. I have no hope whatsoever that it will act responsibly unless forced from the outside.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon member for touching on what motivates people, particularly those of us who are in comfortable lives in a relatively extraordinarily safe country, to feel compelled to do something. He reminded us of that tragic photo of Alan Kurdi on the beach. His family had been trying to reach Canada, unable to reach safe haven in Greece.

Tonight we have heard unbearable stories of sadistic cruelty and violence toward Rohingya people. Is this enough to move us to act? We are having an emergency debate in the House, but I would hope we can, in a non-partisan fashion, as this debate continues over the next two hours, increasingly focus on those things on which we all agree and which we can urge our government to do so it is not a transitory sense of disgust, horror, and loss of confidence in what we thought was potentially a new age for Myanmar. We find ourselves disillusioned with its leadership and looking at Bangladesh suffering under the burden of people racing to safety in Bangladesh. Surely there is more Canada can do and I ask my hon. colleague what specific recommendations he thinks we can all agree on where Canada can play a constructive role.

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Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, in the very short run, we need to try to ensure that the people who are refugees in Bangladesh are properly housed, have proper sanitation, and have the necessities of life. This is the world's most crowded country. It is one of the world's poorest countries. Infrastructure, especially in its eastern region, in terms of getting supplies to individuals, is very problematic. We have some capacity to do help there. We have used our resources before in the case of natural disasters and it might be appropriate to do so here. That is one thing.

Second, and at an entirely different level, this qualifies as a genocide. However, it is not a genocide on paper until the United Nations says it is a genocide at which time a series of legal mechanisms kick into place that could put an enormous amount of pressure on the Myanmar government. Therefore, we should do what we can to call it what it clearly is. We would not be leaders in doing this. I mentioned a number of heads of state who have already called it a genocide. We would merely be joining in, but our voice means something. We have a certainty of moral weight and we ought to use it to that effect.

• (2150)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank all participants in this emergency debate tonight. I would like to thank my colleague from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston for his submissions. In particular, I would like to thank my friend and deputy critic, the member of parliament for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, for bringing this emergency debate to the floor of the House of Commons.

In the last few weeks and months, a lot of Canadians have probably learned a lot about Myanmar and the plight of the Rohingya people. That is part of what our mandate as parliamentarians should be. Our comfort in Canada, our remarkable freedoms, are often displaced from those suffering. Parliament can be used to bring the plight of some of these people to light.

I would like to comment on what the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan did. He did not just bring the debate here this week, after several weeks of front page coverage in *The Globe and Mail* and other sources. The first time he advocated in the House for the Rohingya was March 2016. That is an important note to raise. I know some of my other colleagues in the House, particularly those on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, have been raising the plight of these people for some time. A tragic situation has gone from dislocation and profound discrimination to death, dislocation and, as we have heard in this debate tonight, to ethnic cleansing and extreme violence.

I will use my portion of time to in the debate, in part as the shadow cabinet member for the opposition for foreign affairs, to talk about why we should be helping the Rohingya of Myanmar. They are a religious minority in that country. They make up approximately 1.1 million in a country of 53 million. They are a Muslim minority population confined largely to the Rakhine province of the country that borders southeastern Bangladesh. That is why we have heard so much about refugee and dislocation into that country. People have been fleeing persecution and violence, trying to escape what appears to be a sustained effort by the government to suppress a people, a religious minority.

Going back several years to date, approximately half a million people have been displaced either on a semi-permanent or permanent basis, including tens of thousands in camps run by the government, and almost entirely made up a minority Muslim population. It is not confined to poverty or areas within the province. It is clearly defined to an identifiable minority group. That is what leads to the concern.

It is hard to get verified reports. I know my colleagues have been working on this. Thousands have been killed or are missing. We have seen reports of 3,000 to 10,000, but it is easy to say that thousands have been killed, displaced, or are missing. Then of course the terrible crimes against humanity, including rape as a weapon, have been engaged as well.

This week in the House we heard the minister raise the term “ethnic cleansing”. We have heard the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees use the same language. My friend from Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston suggested that “genocide” was the better term. Regardless of the term, Canadians should be shocked and deeply concerned by what is happening to a religious minority people, particularly in a country that has as its State Counsellor one of five recipients of honorary Canadian citizenship.

I hope with this debate that Aung San Suu Kyi can see Canadians and Canada united are calling for intervention and a succession to this displacement and ethnic cleansing that appears to be going on with respect to an identifiable minority religion in that country.

• (2155)

It troubled me that this figure of the world, Nobel laureate, and honorary citizen did not appear at the UN General Assembly last week. Rather, she sent a note. I will quote from the diplomatic letter, which states:

There has been much concern around the world with regard to the situation in Rakhine. It is not the intention of the Myanmar government to apportion blame or to abnegate responsibility. We condemn all human rights violations and unlawful violence. We are committed to the restoration of peace, stability and rule of law throughout the state.

That is not happening. Those are empty words if a State Counsellor cannot control the military and the machinery of a government that has clearly been involved in targeting a minority population, and not just in the last few weeks, when a lot of Canadians have been attuned to the issue.

I will point to a report, on an office the government cancelled, on the great work done by ambassador Andrew Bennett, the former ambassador for religious freedom. The headline from CTV online, in May 2015, is entitled, “Canada's religious freedom envoy denounces treatment of Rohingya Muslims”. That was the first time I became aware of this profound state of long-standing discrimination, where over a million people in that country are not granted the same rights that others in Myanmar are granted. Mr. Bennett began advocating for that religious minority population back in the final months of his mandate.

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What is great about Mr. Bennett is that last month he was still writing editorial opinions challenging Canadians, and challenging the world, to take the plight of the Rohingya seriously. All Canadians, including the Liberals in this House, should be concerned that the office was cancelled by the government, an office that was meant to defend the defenceless, an office that was beginning to raise the plight of the Rohingya before the former minister Stéphane Dion turned the lights out.

I am glad that we are asking some questions, because I have been looking for this new Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion. Remember that the government said that it was not just closing the office of religious freedom but was expanding it. However, there has been absolute silence from this quasi-office of Global Affairs Canada.

Who else was silent? Canada's Prime Minister was last week at the UN General Assembly, where the plight of the Rohingya was not mentioned.

As my friends in this place know, I think there are times when we can work together, such as in this debate. However, I dislike the fact that this non-partisan, specialized, ambassador-level office, which was meant to fight for religious minorities, was cancelled out of petty politics. It is refreshing that an ambassador who was politically let go is still advocating for the Rohingya. I hear more from Andrew Bennett the citizen than I do from this Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion. That has to change.

I think the Prime Minister had an opportunity at the UN General Assembly, with his second appearance as the Prime Minister in the mid-part of his term, to use some of his goodwill, which the Liberals love to talk about, as leverage to show Canada's role as a traditional leader of middle powers.

I am refreshed by the fact that Rohingya who have come to Canada for the safety and security we offer have been emailing me, and I want to thank them. Before coming here, I read the latest letter from Syed Hussaini, who has challenged the government and all parliamentarians to work together to have matching funds, to accelerate refugees, and to provide technical assistance, and a number of other smart recommendations, but also to call for change.

Canada should leverage the aid Global Affairs Canada provides. We should leverage and push our honorary citizen to not just send diplomatic notes to the UN General Assembly but to make assurances that ethnic cleansing or the targeting of a religious minority population in Myanmar comes to an end. That is what the Parliament of Canada can do. It can educate our fellow citizens on the plight of the oppressed and then serve as the leader of a middle power to try to help those in need.

• (2200)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is important to clear the record and state unequivocally that the matter of how Canada can continue to intervene and play a leadership role on the situation in Myanmar, on the crisis that is facing Rakhine State, and on the situation facing the Rohingya was raised by our Prime Minister in his meetings with his counterparts at the UN General Assembly last week, in addition to the leadership provided by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in her bilateral meetings with a number of allies.

Canada has been present, providing humanitarian assistance of \$9 million in 2017 alone, including the recent announcement of \$2.55 million on September 15, for the situation in Rakhine State. Also, there was the letter sent to Aung San Suu Kyi by the Prime Minister clearly laying the responsibility to fix the situation on her shoulders, as well as on that of the military leadership in Myanmar. Canada has been present and will continue to be present.

It is great that this is being debated in the House of Commons this evening so that Canadians can understand where the Government of Canada stands on this issue, and how we can work together to ensure that Canada continues to play a re-engaged role on the world scene.

I would ask my hon. colleague to acknowledge that the Government of Canada wants to be seen as an important leader in helping resolve the situation.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, I applaud the government on its pronouncement of aid. I applaud the minister for speaking so clearly on the plight of the Rohingya. I compliment the Prime Minister on his letter to Aung San Suu Kyi.

The challenge is this. I do expect the Prime Minister of Canada not to just have meetings in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly. Rather, I expect him to use the privileged platform of that general assembly to raise a few areas of the world where Canada and Canadians have concerns. Myanmar is one of those. As the critic for foreign affairs, my concern is that the Prime Minister's desire to have a temporary seat on the Security Council may mean that Canada has been more silent on these issues than normal. I hope that is not the case. However, the fact that the Prime Minister did not mention a single foreign affairs issue of concern at the UN General Assembly has me concerned that the pursuit of that seat could mean that Canada is a bit more silent on issues when it comes to the persecution of peoples around the world. If we add to that the fact that the Prime Minister cancelled the Office of Religious Freedom, which was just starting to take up the case of the Rohingya, it means he will have to prove to us that his intentions go beyond just sending some letters.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thought my colleague made great points about the Office of Religious Freedom. That office was not there to just speak out publicly but to inform the government about issues of faith as they relate to politics and foreign policy, and to ensure our department could understand some of the complex interreligious conflicts so often overlaid with the inter-ethnic issues that can exist and make sure we were fully informed in advance on how to engage in those situations.

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The problem in this case was that the government was slow to see the problem and slow to react. It only became fully engaged in the last few weeks in response to the current crisis. Does the member think that, if that infrastructure were in place to ensure that informing, perhaps we would have seen a faster response from the government?

• (2205)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Madam Speaker, the simple answer is yes. That office was structured to provide support for the government and to point out the plight of people.

I will end with this. The rally cry of the Prime Minister following his election was that Canada is back. There is an absence of Canada when our leader does not even mention this at the United Nations General Assembly. There is an absence of Canada when we close down and shutter an office that was meant to speak up when people are being oppressed. I hope that a lot of Liberal MPs who I know care about this issue will push the government on it and push this new office to take up the work where Ambassador Bennett left off.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Multiculturalism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time this evening with the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler. I appreciate the opportunity to stand this evening to speak on the urgent crisis facing the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar.

I want to start by thanking the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for seeking this emergency debate. While we disagree on nearly all matters of policy and ideology, I have always respected my colleague's passion for the protection of minorities abroad. When that passion takes the form of a Conservative member on the opposite side standing to defend the rights of a Muslim minority, I take note and I think all members of this House should as well.

The focus of my speech this evening is primarily from my perspective as a former war crimes prosecutor who worked at the Rwanda genocide tribunal on behalf of the United Nations. That tribunal was established in 1997, three years after the Rwanda genocide. That experience taught me that even the best of intentions, if not carried out contemporaneously, will have limited effect.

That is why I was very proud to stand with my colleagues in this chamber about one year ago when we decided collectively as a Parliament to act quickly and decisively to aid Yazidis, not years after the fact but rather while their persecution at the hands of Daesh was ongoing.

Fast forward to now, and we know that the plight of Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State is desperate and that there is a complete absence of leadership on the part of the Myanmar leader to stop ethnic cleansing that is unfolding before our very eyes. A moral failure, as Prime Minister and the Subcommittee on International Human Rights have called it.

However, it is not just parliamentarians who are taking note. Everyday Canadians are as well. In my riding of Parkdale—High Park, I have heard from worshippers who attend at the Jami Mosque and the Hamza Mosque, but I have also heard from many others, Canadians of different faiths, backgrounds, races, and religions, all

united by their horror at what they are witnessing and reading about in the media. They are seeking action.

I want to turn to the action taken thus far. I want to turn to some of the precise words used by the Prime Minister in his very terse letter to Aung Sang Suu Kyi. I appreciate this has been the matter of some of the debate this evening. In his letter dated September 18, the Prime Minister opened with:

It is with profound surprise, disappointment and dismay that your fellow Canadians have witnessed your continuing silence in the face of the brutal oppression of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslim people.

The Prime Minister then goes on to reference the Peace Prize that was bestowed on Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, and to quote her when she said:

...disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspirations of the common people.

Then the Prime Minister continues to say:

The situation in Rakhine State betrays these moral commitments. Since violence erupted on August 25, reports indicate that 415,000 refugees, 70% of whom are women and children, have fled to Bangladesh to date, with additional people internally displaced. Emblematic of longstanding discrimination and gross violations of human rights, reports cite the disproportionate use of force, extrajudicial killings and burning of villages by security forces.

The Prime Minister continues:

Landmines are allegedly being laid with systemic violations of international law, which, if established by a court of law, amount to crimes against humanity.

I concur in that. This is an aside by me as a war crimes prosecutor. I concur in that legal analysis.

The United Nations is denied access to investigate fully and international humanitarian agencies lack safe and unhindered access to help all those in need.

The Prime Minister then goes on to state that:

As...my Minister of Foreign Affairs [has stated], there is no escaping the conclusion reached by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights... that the "situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

As he winds up the letter, he states that:

The responsibility for resolving this crisis falls squarely upon you [Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi] and upon the military leadership of Myanmar, including Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing.

I read that text verbatim because it is important to note in this chamber that the leadership and the position of the Government of Canada has been made clear by the Prime Minister. In this chamber just yesterday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs herself was unequivocal when she stated:

...we are absolutely seized by the urgent question of the persecution of the Rohingya. Based on reports from the region, this is ethnic cleansing, and it is important for Canada to condemn it in the strongest possible terms and to act. It is important particularly to call on the military leadership to cease this horror.

Why are we debating this issue tonight? We have a motion that has been moved, but I would be keen to share with the House some important facts about what is happening on the ground in Myanmar.

While this issue was studied at length by the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, I must take a moment to outline the most recent situation.

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• (2210)

Since August 25, we understand that 3,000 Rohingya have been estimated to have been killed. Almost 480,000 Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar to Bangladesh, with 190,000 in makeshift camps, 89,000 arrivals in host communities, and 201,000 arrivals in new spontaneous sites. Reports indicate that tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims remain stranded in northern Rakhine State without access to basic supplies such as food and water.

Amnesty International has also been clear in its assessment. It has reported that Myanmar security forces and vigilante mobs are burning down entire villages and shooting people at random as they try to flee. Amnesty's analysis shows how an "orchestrated campaign of systematic burnings" has targeted Rohingya villages across northern Rakhine State for almost three weeks. Amnesty's crisis response director has stated:

The evidence is irrefutable—the Myanmar security forces are setting northern Rakhine State ablaze in a targeted campaign to push the Rohingya people out of Myanmar. Make no mistake: this is ethnic cleansing.

She is also quoted as saying:

There is a clear and systematic pattern of abuse here. Security forces surround a village, shoot people fleeing in panic and then torch houses to the ground. In legal terms, these are crimes against humanity—systematic attacks and forcible deportation of civilians.

As stated previously, our government has been continuously engaged on this file and continues to be. For example, we have taken the following concrete actions. At the United Nations General Assembly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs engaged in bilateral meetings with the European Union, Indonesia, and Turkey on this very issue. The Minister of Foreign Affairs has also spoken with the foreign ministers of Germany, Bangladesh, Norway, Sweden, and with Mr. Kofi Annan on what actions the international community can take to address this crisis. The parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs has spoken with Bangladesh's high commissioner in Canada and raised this issue.

The Prime Minister, in the letter I started reading to the House, has called on the Myanmar security forces "to end all violence and to hold all perpetrators of human rights violations accountable on the basis of independent and impartial investigation."

The Prime Minister continues:

The Myanmar government must welcome publicly the return of all Rohingya refugees and this must be accompanied by a firm commitment to address their citizenship, equality before the law and the realization of rights for all ethnic minorities. I also call on the government to provide full access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and to facilitate safe and unimpeded international humanitarian access to provide life-saving assistance to all civilian population.

We have also made a request as a government that our ambassador be granted access to visit Rakhine State. Our government continues to support the Rohingya people through aid, providing \$27.47 million in development assistance in 2015-16, through reputable third-party groups such as the Joint Peace Fund. That included \$4.3 million in humanitarian assistance funding to meet the immediate needs of conflict-affected and displaced populations, including the Rohingya.

To date, in 2017, we have announced \$9.18 million in humanitarian assistance to the region to address this crisis. This

funding is for things like therapeutic feeding for pregnant women, clinical care, psychosocial counselling, emergency obstetric and newborn care, and child-friendly spaces.

We have not stopped there. We have taken actions, including sanctions against Myanmar. They include a freeze on assets in Canada of any designated Myanmar nationals and an arms embargo, including prohibitions on importing and exporting arms. While these actions are important, I strongly believe that we can and must do more in terms of additional concrete action.

I will return to what I said at the outset. My experience at the Rwandan war crimes tribunal taught me clearly that contemporaneous action is vital when horrific violations of human rights are unfolding before the very eyes of the international community. By concrete action, I mean taking steps to directly assist the Rohingya Muslim minority itself, the victims of the very ethnic cleansing that is unfolding.

We are working hard to restore Canada to a place of international engagement and international leadership. To my mind, international leadership means several things. It means building on the strong statements we have made and continuing to speak out. International leadership means building a coalition of like-minded nations, allies who believe in the importance of international human rights and the rule of law. International leadership means working creatively. If access to Rakhine State is not forthcoming thus far, it means working with allies like Bangladesh to put international observers in border states.

International leadership also has a domestic manifestation. It means empowering Canadians of all faiths, backgrounds, and races who are determined that the Rohingya not be forgotten, and aiding them in their efforts. International leadership means not shying away from solutions that can help desperate victims now, before it is too late.

To paraphrase our dear departed colleague and friend, international leadership means using our heads, but following our hearts.

• (2215)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my friend from Parkdale—High Park for his experience as a war-crimes prosecutor and his Canadian experience as a Somali Canadian who came to this country for religious freedom and the opportunity we provided when a minority was being attacked. His family and the family of my best friend, Riyaz Lalani, have made Canada a better place.

What is Canada's opportunity or potential here? When the Aga Khan addressed our Parliament, he said that cosmopolitan, civil societies like Canada can be "voices of hope for people living in fear". I agree. Canada's responsibility is to be that voice of hope.

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The member mentioned the terse letter that the Prime Minister wrote to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, but should there not be a voice of hope at the United Nations? Should not Canada be using our privileged platform to do more than just write terse letters? Can the member tell the House that he will push the minister and the Prime Minister to make sure that religious freedom and particularly the plight of the Rohingya people get more attention in the Prime Minister's trips and speeches overseas?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, what I can say is that the voice that Canada needs is the voice that we have started to reclaim since 2015. By that I mean a voice that speaks out on the world stage, that is engaged internationally not only with like-minded nations but also with nations that perhaps need a bit of coaxing along the path toward the protection of rights and protection of minorities. Canada has very clearly pivoted since the last election toward a stance of engagement, toward embracing international institutions like the UN, the UNHCR, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for example. We have been told again and again about the clear statements that the minister and Prime Minister have made. I can assure the member opposite that as a member of this government caucus and of this chamber, I will continue to advocate for the human rights that I have spent my entire lifetime defending, both domestically and abroad.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I was unable to make a comment in response to the member for Durham, but I recall vividly the times that the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, shunned the United Nations. If that stage were so important to stand up on for human rights, where was he?

I do not want the debate to become partisan, and I am afraid that the speech by my friend from Durham was one of the few partisan speeches I have heard. I want to remind him, and ask the hon. member for Parkdale—High Park, how is it that in secret we negotiated an agreement with the People's Republic of China that binds Canada for 31 years so it can bring secret claims against us? How often did Stephen Harper ask China about human rights?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the point has to be made again and again that international engagement is important. Canada was once known internationally as a broker of international relations, as a country that punched far above its weight. With the disengagement that we saw under the previous government, unfortunately that status declined, resulting ultimately in our not standing for a position on the Security Council. We have turned the page on that in our response to the Syrian refugee crisis, in what we are trying to do in boosting international institutions, in the funding and aid that we are delivering internationally, in our leadership, and in the feminization of our international aid and development policies.

In respect of the Rohingya, I am confident in the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and in the passion of Canadians in ensuring that we as parliamentarians of all stripes—and again it should not be partisan—are raising this issue in important debates like this evening's debate in the House.

• (2220)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to discuss the plight of the Rohingya people and condemn the atrocities they continue to be subjected to. My remarks today will echo those of my colleagues as we stand

unanimously in condemning the persecution of the Rohingya in Rakhine State and along the border of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

The Rohingya are often described as the world's most persecuted minority. Despite having inhabited Myanmar for centuries, they are not recognized as one of the country's 135 official ethnic groups. Following the 1963 military coup in Myanmar, all citizens were required to obtain national registration cards according to Al Jazeera. However, the Rohingya were only allowed to obtain foreign identity cards furthering the "othering" of them. This move did not just "other" the Rohingya, but had a significant impact on them by limiting job and educational opportunities they could pursue and obtain.

Since 1982, the Rohingya have also been denied citizenship in Myanmar. I want to stress that this denial of citizenship renders them stateless. As a result of the 1982 citizenship law, the Rohingya continue to be denied other basic human rights. Their rights to study, work, travel, marry, practise their religion, and access health services have been restricted. Furthermore, the Rohingya face significant barriers if they choose to vote and other limitations if they want to pursue fields such as medicine, law, or running for office. These basic rights have long been denied to the Rohingya, whose misery is now compounded by being subjected to the waves of violence and acts of ethnic cleansing that have erupted before and, most recently, since October 9, 2016.

Over the past year, my colleagues and I who sit on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights have worked diligently on the Rohingya file. I would like to acknowledge the hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for the motion she tabled in April 2016 to study the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The subcommittee adopted the motion and conducted a detailed study on the issues. Arising out of this study, the subcommittee submitted a report to the House entitled, "Sentenced to a Slow Demise: The Plight of Myanmar's Rohingya Minority", which made recommendations to the government and to which the government responded in full and very positively.

In addition, in November 2016, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights released a joint statement expressing alarm over the response by security forces to violence in the Maungdaw District, which had begun in October 2016. Recently, in response to another outbreak of violence in early 2017, the subcommittee held an emergency meeting with experts on the issue. It heard evidence from the Burma Task Force and the Rohingya Association of Canada. These witnesses appeared again last week at the subcommittee to provide an update on the human rights situation of the Rohingya.

Despite the measures taken to condemn the violence in Myanmar against the Rohingya and the humanitarian assistance provided to assist the region, Canada continues to be greatly concerned by the situation of the Rohingya.

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Last week, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights heard from Anwar Arkani, the president of the Rohingya Association of Canada. Mr. Arkani's testimony pointed out that the persecution of the Rohingya is not a crisis that began last year when the media reports of violence began to increase. In fact, the state-sponsored violence spans four decades, during which the Rohingya have been persecuted relentlessly by the Burmese military and government. Mr. Arkani discussed the systemic oppression of the Rohingya since 1978, illustrating that the state has continuously adopted measures to oust the Rohingya from Myanmar.

I also want to repeat what Mr. Arkani said of members of his family, who are caught up in the conflict. They live in a village around the border of Buthidaung and Rathedaung. He has one sister and some nieces and nephews, to whom he speaks every night. The last time he called them, they said, "Uncle, if we do not die, if we do not get killed by the army or their attacks, then we will die here without food."

● (2225)

This is a dire situation. These individuals are not just in danger of losing their lives to brutal military attacks, but are unable to access the food and humanitarian aid they need for their survival. Only last week, a boat carrying supplies from the International Committee of the Red Cross supplies was blocked by a mob who threw petrol bombs at it.

We heard other testimony from Mr. Matthew Smith of a human rights organization called Fortify Rights. Mr. Smith is based out of Southeast Asia and works in Myanmar, including Rakhine State. According to Mr. Smith, hundreds of thousands have been displaced since August 25. Rohingya men and women and aid workers are currently trapped in villages. Few of them are fighting with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, also known as al-Yaqin.

Myanmar army soldiers are reported to have shot and killed men, women, and children of all ages; to have administered fatal knife wounds; and to have burned victims alive. In addition, Myanmar's military forces continue to use anti-personnel land mines along the borders with Bangladesh, as cited in a press release by the international campaign to ban land mines.

These weapons are harming and killing civilians fleeing their homes in Myanmar in an effort to find safety in Bangladesh. Eyewitness testimonies, photographic evidence, and multiple reports show that anti-personnel mines have been laid between Myanmar's two major land crossings with Bangladesh, resulting in casualties among Rohingya refugees fleeing government attacks on their homes. I support the international campaign to ban land mines in condemning the use of anti-personnel land mines by Myanmar's armed forces.

There are several headlines that I wish to share: "Who will help Myanmar's Rohingya?", by the BBC; "Myanmar Rohingya refugees' future unclear as Bangladesh registers flood of arrivals", by ABC News; "UN: Rohingya in Bangladesh need 'massive' assistance", by Al Jazeera; "Rohingya crisis: A month of misery in Myanmar's Rakhine", by Al Jazeera. These headlines are just a glimpse into the atrocities being committed against the Rohingya in Myanmar.

As the Prime Minister said in his open letter to Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the responsibility for resolving the crisis falls squarely upon her and the military leadership of Myanmar, including Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, commander-in-chief of Myanmar's armed forces.

We continue to support the Rohingya people. In 2015-16, Canada provided a total of \$27.47 million in official development assistance to Myanmar through reputable third-party groups such as the Joint Peace Fund. This included \$4.3 million in humanitarian assistance funding to meet the immediate needs of the conflict-affected and displaced populations, including Rohingya. To date in 2017, we have announced \$9.18 million in humanitarian assistance to the region to address this crisis.

Despite these funding efforts, we need to do more to address the horrific campaign of violence, rape, and murder being carried out by the Myanmar government. Echoing the concerns of the international community and my own constituents of Kitchener South—Hespeler, we must call upon the Myanmar security forces to end all violence and hold all perpetrators of human rights violations accountable on the basis of an independent and impartial investigation; call upon the Myanmar government to affirm the right of the Rohingya to return to their homes and to live in peace and security; and encourage and support the Myanmar government to commit to finding meaningful and lasting solutions to the issues in the Rakhine State.

I want to end by reiterating that the civilian and military leadership in Myanmar must stop the horror they are subjecting the Rohingya to. Before the world's eyes, before our eyes, multiple acts of ethnic cleansing are taking place. We cannot stand by and watch the Myanmar security forces violently push the Rohingya out of Myanmar. As Canadians, we pride ourselves on our history of international peacekeeping and support for human rights. The plight of the Rohingya people should not go by unnoticed and unanswered.

● (2230)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to briefly respond to a fairly partisan comment from another member earlier. The previous prime minister spoke at the United Nations more than many prime ministers before him, and he always raised issues of foreign policy, including issues of development assistance and fundamental human rights. We wish the present Prime Minister had taken the opportunity to raise the issue of the Rohingya in his UN speech.

I want to ask the member about the question of capacity within government to respond to these things.

My colleague spoke earlier about the Office of Religious Freedom. A new office was created called the Office of Human Rights, Freedoms and Inclusion. It is not clear to me exactly what its mandate is.

Perhaps the member does not know the detail on this, but if he does, could he tell me if this office has been engaged with this issue? Has it been speaking out about this issue? Has it been working on projects on the ground? If not, what capacity exists within the government to effectively respond to these issues in a way that ensures the government is kept up to date and is aware of all the detail? Is a lack of capacity a possible reason why it has taken too long for there to be a response?

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Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Madam Speaker, as mentioned in my speech, I sit on the Subcommittee for International Human Rights. I applaud my colleague for bringing this study forward in the last session.

Our response to the Myanmar Muslims who are in Rakhine State and now fleeing to Bangladesh is that our Prime Minister has denounced this and has done so in an open letter to Aung San Suu Kyi. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs has denounced this as well. We have committed millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to those in Bangladesh and in Rakhine State. Our response has been rapid. We had a prior response within our subcommittee.

We will continue to advocate for the Rohingya Muslims fleeing to Bangladesh. We will be supporting them.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have received many letters from constituents. They are very concerned about the situation in Myanmar and what we are doing to help the Rohingya people. I want to put for my friend some of the recommendations that have been put forth in correspondence, and perhaps he could tell us what his thoughts are.

For example, one letter suggested matching funds collected by Canadian charities for relief and aid efforts for the Rohingya; accelerating the processing of Rohingya refugees; providing technical assistance and increased aid for relief organizations that were serving the needs of the Rohingya, who have been forced to flee to Bangladesh; and calling on the Myanmar government to affirm the right of the Rohingya to return to their homes and to live in peace and security. There are also a few requests to go to the UN for further investigation and assistance.

Perhaps my colleague could comment as to what he believes we should do with these recommendations and how we could use these as a path forward.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Madam Speaker, the first is to work with multilateral nations as well as the United Nations and like-minded nations to look at instilling peace and security there and to ensure atrocities do not happen anymore.

Second, it is absolutely imperative that we ensure that humanitarian aid gets to the most vulnerable, whether in Bangladesh or in Rakhine State. As I mentioned, vulnerable people will die if humanitarian aid does not reach them. We have pledged \$9 million in humanitarian assistance. That is part of our initiative as well. We will continue to support the humanitarian response.

We strongly urge that the Rohingya receive the rights that many citizens in Myanmar receive and that they are treated equally in that regard.

• (2235)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise with great sadness tonight to reiterate the urgent situation that must compel the Government of Canada to demand unrestricted access for humanitarian agencies and for those doing the investigation work and to provide the humanitarian funding necessary for this crisis.

This is a discussion that has already gone on far too long without action over the years. As vice-chair of the subcommittee on international human rights, I can tell members that it was only last

year that we completed a lengthy study of the situation of the Rohingya in Myanmar, and here we are yet again, the situation having grown even worse since our first report.

The world had great hopes for Myanmar when, in November 2015, historic elections ushered in a new civilian government. The National League for Democracy, or NLD, led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate, democracy activist, and honorary Canadian Aung San Suu Kyi, assumed power through a peaceful, democratic transition in March 2016.

For over 50 years, Myanmar had been governed by repressive military rule, characterized by grave human rights violations, an absence of the rule of law, and low levels of human and economic development. The country's new government is now faced with the legacy of long-standing repression of Myanmar's ethnic minorities by successive military regimes whose attempt to shape Myanmar as an ethnically Burman nation in which the official religion is Buddhism has led to persistent internal armed conflict.

The Rohingya are concentrated in Rakhine State, also known as Arakan State. Rakhine State is located on the west coast of Myanmar and is very ethnically diverse. The majority of the population, about 60%, are ethnic Rakhine, who are Buddhists and recognized by the government as an ethnic minority indigenous to Myanmar. Muslim communities, including the Rohingya, make up 30% of the population. In the northern part of Rakhine State, which shares the border with Bangladesh, Rohingya comprise 90% of the population. The state is one of the poorest in Myanmar, where decades of economic neglect by successive regimes have resulted in poverty and underdevelopment all across communities.

The Rohingya are referred to as Bengalis by Myanmar's government and most of its public. This contributes to the false narrative that they are a community of "illegal immigrants", when in fact the Rohingya have been established in Myanmar for generations. Myanmar's citizenship law, enacted in 1982, provided a list of 135 ethnic minorities recognized by the government. It excluded the Rohingya, resulting in the withdrawal of their citizenship. This judgment was based on the false claim that their ancestors were not present in Myanmar at the start of the British occupation of Rakhine State in 1823.

Further, the word "Rohingya" has become politicized in light of concerns that referring to the minority by their proper name could lead to their being identified as a recognized ethnic group with the full set of citizenship rights that follow. Rakhine Buddhists, themselves an ethnic minority in Myanmar, view the Rohingya Muslims as an existential threat to their current ethnic majority in Rakhine State, their desire for more political autonomy, their reassertion of their ethnic identity, and their economic well-being.

Over the decades, successive military regimes have used a divide-and-conquer ruling approach against or in Rakhine State, pitting Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims against each other for political gain, exacerbating tensions and causing numerous flare-ups between the two communities.

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• (2240)

While Rakhine hostility against the Rohingya has grown since Myanmar's independence from the United Kingdom in 1948, successive military regimes have also gradually imposed policies of persecution and exclusion against the Rohingya. Even before their loss of citizenship in 1982, the Rohingya experienced the severest forms of legal, economic, educational, and social discrimination, including restrictions on their freedom of movement, which further affected their ability to earn a livelihood, pursue an education, or receive medical care. Their right to assemble to practise their religion was also curtailed.

According to testimony by Rebecca Wolsak of Inter Pares, the country's dictators have a vision "to build one nation, with one race and one religion", one race being Burman and one religion being Buddhism. However, she also states that "Approximately 40% of the population are not Burman. They identify as ethnic nationalities."

In a country with over 135 ethnic groups, implementing this vision led to widespread human rights abuses by successive military regimes, including the violent suppression of ethnic, political, cultural, social, and religious rights, and the economic neglect of ethnic dominated regions. A number of ethnic minorities formed their own guerilla armies to counter government oppression and violence, resulting in numerous protracted armed conflicts across the country. In all of these conflict areas, Myanmar's military has been responsible for human rights abuses against civilians, including forced labour, extra-judicial killings, the recruitment of child soldiers, the use of anti-personnel land mines, and sexual violence against women and girls.

This brings us to where we are tonight with the current crisis. I believe strongly that forums such as this emergency debate should be used for more than a recitation of the atrocities. New Democrats believe that it is our job to bring forward workable propositions, concrete ideas that might serve to improve conditions on the ground. Just last week, we heard powerful testimony at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights from Mr. Anwar Arkani, the president of the Rohingya Association of Canada, and Ahmed Ramadan, the coordinator of Burma Task Force Canada.

According to their very powerful, graphic, and disturbing testimony, some of which was recited here tonight, there is and has been for some time a very serious problem with humanitarian aid. In Myanmar, more than 120,000 Rohingya are presently confined to internment camps by the government. This is similar to the situation that occurred during the pogroms against the Rohingya in 2012.

Accessing humanitarian aid in those camps has been very difficult for several years. Right now, food is not getting into these camps. In northern Rakhine State where the recent violence has been taking place, the government has effectively ousted all of the major humanitarian groups that were on the ground providing life-saving aid. The World Food Programme is not permitted to deliver food to northern Rakhine State. There are tens of thousands of children who are suffering from severe, acute malnutrition. Without humanitarian intervention, they will die. This is an area that the government of Myanmar has completely sealed off to all humanitarian group, with one exception, the International Committee of the Red Cross. Here

the government seems content with allowing local Burmese civilians to prevent the International Committee of the Red Cross from delivering aid.

In Bangladesh the needs are massive. There is an enormous influx of people, upward of half a million people since August 25, and the needs are dramatic. Food and health care are in great need. After fleeing horrific violence and travelling on foot, dodging areas strewn with anti-personnel land mines, with little food for up to two weeks, refugees are arriving exhausted, hungry, dehydrated, and in most cases traumatized by their experiences.

• (2245)

Major concerns exist for the children's survival and well-being, with emergency food, nutrition, and health interventions as well as psycho-social support all critical and time sensitive to prevent further harm. In addition to urgent food and shelter needs, of particular concern is the potential outbreak of contagious diseases, given the low health status of the population, severely crowded conditions in the settlements, and poor water and sanitation. We might as well say no sanitation.

With new arrivals crossing the border daily, aid agencies, local communities, and the Bangladeshi government do not currently have the resources to meet the spiralling scale or scope of the need, which brings me to what we, the New Democrats, hope to see from our own government.

When crimes against humanity are taking place, Canada has a moral and international legal obligation to ensure these crimes come to an end, and that all those responsible are brought to justice. Canada must call on the UN Security Council to take measures, including targeted sanctions and referral to the International Criminal Court, in order to stop the violence and bring those responsible to justice.

The Government of Canada must demand that the Government of Myanmar guarantee unrestricted and meaningful access to humanitarian agencies that provide the crucial life-saving services in Rohingya communities and in camps for the internally displaced Rohingya.

The Burmese government should likewise immediately stop using anti-personnel land mines and join the 1997 mine ban treaty. Several reports from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and others have documented the use of anti-personnel mines, having been laid between Myanmar's two major land crossings with Bangladesh, resulting in casualties among Rohingya refugees who are fleeing government attacks on their homes. The use of land mines must stop, and all must be removed. Our government must also demand that Myanmar guarantee unfettered access to UN and other independent investigators so that all human rights violations are fully documented. Without this full accounting, justice simply is not possible.

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We also believe that Canada should increase humanitarian assistance for conflict-afflicted Rohingya in Bangladesh and Myanmar through trusted humanitarian partners. Given the scale of this crisis, \$6.63 million is a start but not nearly enough. The United Nations has called this the most urgent refugee crisis in the world. We also believe that Canada should plan to accept Rohingya refugees in Canada.

We very much would like to see more leadership from Canada on this and other international issues. So far, our government is great with a selfie and a sound bite, but it comes up seriously wanting when actual global leadership is required. Accordingly, Canada must work actively, indeed lead with like-minded states to find a political solution.

I would now like to quote former foreign affairs minister Lloyd Axworthy and Allan Rock, former ambassador to the UN. Here is what they wrote in a recent column:

And what does that mean for Canada in concrete terms? It means forming a coalition of like-minded states drawn from all the world's regions to demand that Ms. Suu Kyi end the Myanmar military's rampage. It means calling for accountability for those in Myanmar who have committed crimes against humanity. It means mobilizing global public opinion to put pressure on the UN Security Council, where China and Russia are already standing in the way of any sensible discussion, to take measures that will end the violence.

It is good to hear these former statesmen, both Liberals, speak out about this important issue. Now, if only we could see some action from the Liberals who are now in government.

Last, we believe that Canada must call on the Government of Myanmar to repudiate anti-Muslim violence, to end impunity for acts of violence against the Rohingya and other minorities, and to develop a strategy for promoting tolerance between the Rakhine and Rohingya in Rakhine State.

● (2250)

I mentioned Ahmed Ramadan earlier, from Burma Task Force Canada, who spoke last week at the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. Mr. Ramadan requested that Canada work to bring in UN peacekeepers to create a safe zone for the remaining Rohingya, because he believes that nothing short of that will be able to provide the requisite security and safety so that food and medical aid can be brought in. While Canada certainly cannot do something like this on its own, it is something that can be accomplished by the international community working together, and Canada must speak up.

Myanmar is a party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UDHR, which is not a treaty, requires member states to confer, in a non-discriminatory manner, some of the most fundamental rights denied to the Rohingya: the right to life, liberty and security of the person; the right to a nationality; the provision of equal protection before the law; protection from discrimination; freedom of movement; freedom of religion, including communal worship; the right to a livelihood; the right to access public services; and the right to health, including providing special care to mothers and children.

It is not a treaty. Many of the rights guaranteed by the UDHR have been recognized in international case law and have gained the status of customary international law. That is to say, it is widely and uniformly applied by states on the understanding that it is legally

mandatory. This effectively creates a universally binding obligation on all states, including Myanmar.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has condemned this situation as “a textbook example of ethnic cleansing”. We have the opportunity to seize this opportunity, with the global community, to act now.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her great advocacy and passion on this specific issue for the past year and a half in our international human rights subcommittee.

The member spoke about justice and accountability. I would like to ask the member what kind of measures the international community can take to hold Aung San Suu Kyi and her government accountable for what is happening in Myanmar and Rakhine State.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. She is an engaging member of our international subcommittee and really escalates the level of discussion. We are very proud to have consensus on that committee, and the hon. member is a key personality in that consensus-building.

We have international, respected agencies that provide the required documentation to the International Criminal Court. As a matter of fact, we heard from my colleague who posed the question. We heard from another member of her caucus who has done war crimes prosecution, so we know how important it is to document evidence.

We also know that a population that is so traumatized, stressed, and low-resourced does not have the capability to provide the documentation that is required. Developed nations are finding ways to contribute through non-governmental organizations that can work through the United Nations and provide this effectively so that justice comes to fruition.

When we have a situation of impunity, moving forward they are only going to have a situation of dysfunction as they try to rebuild civil society in Myanmar. That is an extremely important example of how we can actually do something significant in terms of making people face justice for the atrocities being suffered right now.

● (2255)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for her detailed and thoughtful remarks tonight and the clarion call near the end of her speech for global leadership. I agree with large portions of that part of her speech.

I have a twofold question for her. First, does she think global leadership means, to quote a parliamentary secretary in the debate tonight, a terse letter being written to the head of government in Myanmar, or would it have been a better opportunity for Canada to have publicly raised concerns about the Rohingya at the UN General Assembly?

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Second, the member had some detailed remarks on UN peacekeeping. The government does have an outstanding commitment to deploy 600 peacekeepers, but it has to indicate where that will be. It will be hosting a global or multi-country summit on peacekeeping. Does the member feel that this situation in Myanmar could be an opportunity for Canada to offer to deploy peacekeepers there? Does she think Myanmar might be the solution and that the government should announce this while hosting the summit?

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's remarks and question indicate the way he thinks we should go, which is very important.

We need to be a strong voice. The upcoming summit is an opportunity for us to lend our voice and for the Government of Canada to demand unfettered access for NGOs that need to go in to do the humanitarian aid. Once we arrive at that as a global community, that yes we are going to do that and will provide the peacekeepers for the safe zone, that is part of the voice that we need to contribute to. It is not something we can do on our own, as I said in my speech, but something we can do as a global community, and we have to take the lead. This is such an overwhelming situation that people do not know where to begin.

I suggested that this is where we should begin. We should demand that unfettered access and bring in the resources so that the humanitarian aid can be delivered safely, including to the internment camps, and collect the evidence that we need so there is no impunity moving forward, which is significant. Yes, we have to have a game plan and really step up and say that we are doing it. Should we do it alone? No, but we should indicate, yes, we are willing to put our resources into this for the rest of the United Nations community that is looking at this with concern. If we do this together, it is not just aspirational anymore but tangible, and there are ways that we can do it.

We cannot fool ourselves in thinking that we can go in with great guns and fix this overnight. This is a long-term, ongoing commitment that the government will have to remain strong in regard to. That is the key.

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, there have been a few back-and-forths on the issue of engagement through the United Nations. I was in New York last week for the UN General Assembly and, yes, I was disappointed that the Prime Minister did not raise the issue of the Rohingya. However, there was also a lot of discussion in the meetings I was in about the question of UN reform, with people noting that we see these atrocities and there does not seem to be the capacity to respond through the Security Council and other bodies of the UN. Different people had different solutions for that problem, but if we look at what has happened in Syria, what is happening in Burma, and what is happening in other places, it becomes clear that the proof is in the pudding and that we need to look for other ways of responding. Here I think that part of the solution is UN reform.

I would be curious about the member's thoughts on what we can do to promote changes in the United Nations that would increase that body's effectiveness when it comes to responding to emerging cases of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

● (2300)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I understand the sentiment for UN reform.

Once we prioritize international human rights, once we prioritize citizens, when we put people before economic decisions, when we ensure that we are not exploiting people, that is the start for a global community.

When we can reform the United Nations, it will be a different mindset. We have to buy into that. The United Nations will only be as strong as member nations allow it to be. If we act with our own personal agendas, different individuals, sovereign personalities around the world, the UN will never be anything more than a figurehead.

We need total buy-in and use the United Nations. That way, it can be powerful and effective. Whatever reforms we aspire to will actually mean something. The important point is that the membership as a whole needs that greater level of commitment to the international community, to international human rights. That is how I see it.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to once again state on the record the important role our government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has taken, being forceful on the commitment Canada has to help see a solution to the ongoing crisis in Rakhine State in Myanmar and with the Rohingya population.

The Prime Minister spoke with a number of his counterparts last week about how the international community could intervene to see a solution to this crisis. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs met in bilateral meetings with a number of counterparts on how Canada could contribute in addition to the humanitarian aid we provide and in addition to the ongoing international multilateral leadership our country has provided.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Madam Speaker, I appreciate that. However, what has been done so far is not enough. I have laid out some very succinct recommendations of the ways we can make very tangible demands. They are very clear cut. We need stronger statements.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in the House today to participate in this emergency debate on a very serious issue, a human rights crisis with the whole world watching as it occurs.

A million Rohingya have been devastated as a result of assaults by the Burmese military, and 214 Rohingya villages in Burma have been torched to ashes, as documented through satellite by Amnesty International. Human Rights Watch estimates that 50% of all Rohingya villages have been destroyed. Eighty per cent of the 400,000-plus refugees arriving in Bangladesh in the last month have been women and children, and among the women, a United Nations survey found that 52% had been raped.

In the House we have heard passionate testimony from many members today. I want to outline some things that the Government of Canada has done with respect to the issue.

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Representatives of the Canadian Embassy have visited Rakhine State on several occasions, including the Canadian ambassador to Myanmar, who visited five times in order to fully understand the situation on the ground. This has allowed Canadian officials to engage directly with state and local government representatives in order to advocate for better life conditions for the Rohingya.

Many other trips have happened. It is important to point out that the Government of Canada provided humanitarian assistance funding of \$5 million in 2016 to experienced humanitarian partners such as the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, with whom Minister Dion, our previous foreign affairs minister, met when he visited Myanmar in April 2016 to respond to the immediate needs of the conflict-affected and displaced populations in Myanmar, including the Rohingya. An important part of our humanitarian partners' work is to address these needs.

Canada has also co-sponsored two resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly's third committee, which focuses on social, humanitarian, and cultural issues, and at the UN Human Rights Council. The UNGA resolution called on Myanmar to ensure equal access to full citizenship and related rights, including civil and political rights, for all stateless persons and expressed continued concern over the 1982 citizenship law. The Human Rights Council resolution adopted a stronger tone and urged the government of Myanmar to grant full citizenship rights to Rohingya, including by reviewing the 1982 citizenship law.

A lot has been done and said, and over the past year my Subcommittee on International Human Rights has been very active with this issue. In April 2016, I was honoured to table a motion at the subcommittee to commence a study of the Rohingya in Myanmar. The motion was passed, and detailed study sessions commenced on May 3, 2016. It was great to see the consensus and all the members of the subcommittee participating and engaging with this issue. The Government of Canada tabled a response to the recommendations that were provided by our human rights subcommittee.

On November 24, 2016, the Subcommittee on International Human Rights released a joint statement expressing alarm over the ruthless and disproportionate response by Myanmar security forces to violence in Maungdaw District in Myanmar, which began in October 2016.

Responding to another outbreak of violence in early 2017, our subcommittee held an emergency meeting with experts on this issue. Experts included the Burma Task Force and the Rohingya Association of Canada. Following the meeting, the subcommittee released a second update and joint statement on the situation.

I, along with other MPs, have been providing support to different organizations working on this issue since the start of our tenures as MPs for this term. I was delighted to see that community-led efforts have led to the creation of an organizational coalition that holds meetings frequently on this issue and I am following the coalition's work very closely and updating the government on its progress accordingly.

● (2305)

Alongside the Minister of Foreign Affairs, we met with the State Counsellor of Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi, in Ottawa in early June 2017. Our Foreign Affairs Minister raised concerns about the human rights situation of the Rohingya minority in Myanmar and they were discussed thoroughly at this meeting.

This past week we held another emergency meeting in our international human rights subcommittee and issued another statement.

A lot of constituents in my riding of Mississauga—Erin Mills have reached out to me, raising concerns, asking what Canada is going to do and how we as Canadians are going to help those who really need the help.

We have seen that the Government of Canada has really taken a leadership role. It is a great honour and privilege to be a Canadian, to be a part of this country that takes ownership and leadership in human rights crises. We cannot be silent, and Canada has not been. I commend our Prime Minister and our leadership on the great efforts they have made.

More than 100 constituents participated in a town hall meeting that I held in my constituency office a couple of weeks ago. These constituents were concerned, and I rise today to facilitate their voice in this Chamber. I rise to advise our government and members in the House what some of their recommendations were as we discussed the situation in Myanmar and the atrocities that the Rohingya are facing not only in their own states but also at borders as they attempt to flee.

I would like to share some of the recommendations put forward by my constituents. Some asked that the government revoke the honorary Canadian citizenship given to Aung San Suu Kyi and unequivocally condemn the atrocities committed by Myanmar's military and Myanmar nationalist groups against the Rohingya.

Constituents have also asked to stop the aid and help and forthwith shut down trade with the Myanmar government until it refrains from killing innocent people.

Other recommendations included to call on the Burmese government to immediately de-escalate the military crackdown and withdraw its armed forces from the Rohingya areas of Rakhine State; to use all and any real action available to end this massacre immediately; to ask Myanmar to issue visas to the UN fact-finding mission and to allow access into Rakhine State; to ask the Canadian ambassador to Myanmar, Karen MacArthur, to visit the afflicted Rohingya villages, where her presence will show the Myanmar government that the international community is watching and she can witness first-hand the unfolding massacre; to send the Bangladeshi high commissioner to visit the border so he too can see what is happening on the ground; to publicly endorse the Kofi Annan commission recommendations on what steps to take to resolve this situation; to allow Canadian relief organizations to provide humanitarian access to the victims; and to facilitate the immediate resumption of aid to all Rohingya communities and IDP camps.

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In collaboration with other members of the UN Human Rights Council, Canada may convene a special session on the Rohingya crisis. The outcome documented by this Human Rights Council session may request the Security Council to discuss the matter in its special session, as it constitutes a threat to international peace and security as well as the humanitarian crisis.

Canada may call on international human rights organizations to redouble their efforts to highlight the plight of the Rohingya and to build pressure on Myanmar to revoke all discriminatory laws against the Rohingya and to resettle refugees.

There have also been calls for Aung San Suu Kyi's Nobel Peace Prize to be revoked and for Aung San Suu Kyi to be held accountable.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak in the House tonight and to present some of the recommendations that the constituents of Mississauga—Erin Mills have provided. I look forward to questions from my peers.

• (2310)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for her work on this issue in the human rights subcommittee. She should be commended for being one of the early voices, along with my colleague and deputy critic, in raising the plight of the Rohingya.

My question is based on her comments that we cannot be silent. She mentioned that the Human Rights Council of the United Nations could be tasked with looking at this issue. She suggested that perhaps the Security Council could as well.

I have two questions.

First, was the member disappointed that in his speech to the General Assembly, the Prime Minister was silent on this specific issue, at a gathering where the very nations of the General Assembly gather to discuss issues of concern?

My second question relates to the Office of Religious Freedom. As I mentioned in my speech, in May 2015, Ambassador Bennett specifically raised the case of the Rohingya. In fact, it was my first real familiarity with how persecuted this minority population had been in Myanmar. That office has since been closed. It has been replaced with something else. Could the member assure the House that the new office is at least tracking and looking at these violations of the basic human rights of the Muslim population in Myanmar?

• (2315)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear. Our Prime Minister has not been silent on this issue. Our Prime Minister has been very vocal. In fact, he was one of the first in the international community to speak out against the atrocities and the recent outbreak of violence.

I commend our Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs, and all of the government, including the members opposite, on their hard work, their passion, in their advocacy for the rights of the Rohingya.

I also want to clarify for the member that the Rohingya is an ethnicity that is not just based on Muslims. It is made up of many other religions as well.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for really laying out for us what has been done so far.

Knowing that we have seen things escalate, and the member has heard other comments, I would like to hear what she thinks should be done next. We need a commitment to increased resources. We need to demand humanitarian aid and the safe traversing of that aid to internment camps. Countless things need to be done, which I am sure she knows and has described these in her speech.

After all the speaking is done, after all the messaging is out to the public and to the leadership community with the other sovereign states, including Myanmar, what are the tangible things that need to be done next?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her advocacy on this issue.

In our international human rights subcommittee and as time has passed on this issue, we learned that there were two basic components. There are the short-term solutions, which deal directly with providing that humanitarian aid to those who are suffering, providing access to Rakhine State, and getting food, water, and medical supplies to the Rohingya, those who are in desperate need.

The second is a more long-term solution, which is more of a political solution. How can we as Canadians, as the Government of Canada promote democracy and equal rights in a country like Myanmar, which is budding as a democracy itself? Myanmar has a lot to learn from Canada. My understanding is that Canada is happy to help.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to join tonight's emergency debate on the Rohingya.

There can be no uncertainty that ethnic cleansing is being perpetrated against the Rohingya peoples in Myanmar. Over the last weeks, the world has witnessed horrifying images of Rohingya villages on fire, children who have lost their parents, and desperate refugees fleeing that country. This crisis has certainly reached a critical level of urgency.

Earlier this week, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees called the Myanmar crisis "the most urgent refugee emergency in the world". Even more startling were the remarks by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on September 11, in which he warned member states that the widespread and systematic attacks against the Rohingya possibly amount to crimes against humanity, or that "The situation seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing". Such assessments behoove every member of the international community to act.

While Myanmar has been marked by significant inter-communal violence since 2012, the escalating cycle of violence in recent weeks should cause great alarm. Since August 25, more than 400,000 Rohingya have been forced to flee after facing mass arson and looting by Myanmar security forces. As they flee such atrocities, anti-personnel land mines are being placed in their path, women are being raped, and children are being killed by soldiers.

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Along with a number of my Liberal colleagues, I had the great honour last week to meet several members of the Rohingya community residing in Canada. They spoke with great eloquence about the of their relatives, friends, and loved ones in Myanmar. We will not ignore their heartfelt concerns.

Myanmar faces complex and serious challenges. Myanmar is a young democracy and is still very fragile. It only recently emerged onto the world stage after many decades of isolation. Although rich in natural resources, those riches have certainly not been equally distributed in that country. While many parts of Myanmar had been experiencing relatively rapid economic growth, the Rakhine area, populated by the Rohingya, has fallen further behind. While Rakhine is fertile, the state's poverty rate is 78%, almost double the rate of 37.5% for the entire country. Perhaps even more significant, identity and ethnicity remain sensitive issues in Myanmar as the state's refusal to extend citizenship to all its residents poses a major impediment to peace and prosperity in that country. Members of the House should realize that Myanmar harbours the largest community of stateless people in the world, with the Rohingya representing a very high proportion of them.

No crisis as serious as this has easy answers, but our government must take immediate action. Just today, I met with a member of a Canadian-based NGO called the Sentinel Project for Genocide Prevention. He echoed what we have heard from other knowledgeable sources, that we need to embark on a program of targeted economic sanctions against the most egregious human rights abuse perpetrators in Myanmar, while also providing humanitarian assistance to the neighbouring countries receiving thousands of refugees. The government is serious about dealing with this crisis and we must engage all of Myanmar's neighbouring countries to craft a durable and regional solution.

I am proud that Canada is already taking action. Since 2000, Canada has provided over \$180 million. In 2017 alone, Canada has directed \$9.18 million in assistance to humanitarian partners in Myanmar and Bangladesh to help the most vulnerable, in particular women and children.

• (2320)

It is not enough, however, to solely provide short-term solutions. Our government has joined others to address the root causes of conflict in Myanmar, including visiting the issue of citizenship rights, socio-economic development, health, education, inter-communal dialogue, and the engagement of civil society.

Our government has a record we can rightly be proud of. Our current government acted decisively with respect to the Syrian crisis, welcoming refugees and providing them with support to restart their lives. When Daesh committed atrocities against the Yazidis, we welcomed more than a thousand survivors, including vulnerable Yazidi women and children.

The government also created a famine relief fund to respond to the food crises in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. In response to the political violence in Burundi, Canada recently provided more than \$2 million in emergency humanitarian assistance to support neighbouring countries. Just in the last month Canada tabled a draft resolution at the UN Human Rights Council to establish an international commission of inquiry to ensure that the

perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Yemen are held accountable. Of course, just last week, our Prime Minister and our foreign minister raised the issue of the Rohingya with many of their counterparts at the United Nations.

We now need more concrete steps. Canada cannot do it alone, but we can take a meaningful stand and do our part while we work with our allies and international bodies.

On August 24, 2017, the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, chaired by former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, released its final report. Canada strongly supports the recommendations and continues to urge Myanmar to implement all the recommendations.

To find lasting and durable peace, Myanmar must commit to the protection of the human rights of all its people, no matter where they live or what religion they choose to practise.

It is not just Myanmar that needs to act. Far too often the international community has forgotten the lessons of history. In Rwanda, the international community refused to act promptly, and a million people died. In Syria, most of the international community turned away, and atrocities continue to this day.

Let us take action now to ensure that Myanmar does not represent another failure of the international system or another tragedy in history. Canada must step up and do what is just and what is right. Among others, we should lead the way to ensure that member states of the United Nations focus on this crisis. Other actions should be to compel the Myanmar government to grant unfettered access for the provision of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable. In addition, we must implement targeted economic sanctions against individual members of the Myanmar government responsible for perpetrating the most egregious human rights violations. Finally, we need to deploy a special Canadian envoy to conduct diplomatic engagement with all the parties in Myanmar. Of course, it goes without saying that we should continue to provide humanitarian assistance to all agencies on the ground in the region.

• (2325)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, who has been very active in the context of the genocide prevention parliamentary group. These are issues he follows closely.

He mentioned this not becoming a failure of the international system. I would argue, quite frankly, that it is already, to a substantial extent, a failure of the international system. It is not that we cannot act now, but up to this point, it has already been a failure in that so many people have been adversely affected.

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Speaking on the broader question of genocide prevention, this is something that has been a long time coming, the removal of citizenship and the denial of the legitimacy of a people to be in their homeland, a place they are indigenous to. There has been this gradual incremental escalation. We should have seen this coming. This is an issue that has been raised in the House for over a year and a half. Specific actions were asked of the government in the spring that were not taken then. Some of those actions have been taken now, in the fall, in light of this stage of the escalation.

How do we act differently in terms of responding faster to these kinds of problems? I especially note that the Canadian ambassador has been to Rakhine, but I have raised in the past in the House that the public comments after those visits have not at all emphasized the urgency of the problem. They have referred to inter-communal violence leading to displacement, but they have not at all pointed the finger where the finger needs to be pointed. How do we get the Canadian government, other governments around the world, and the international institutions to actually notice those warning signs and act earlier, before these situations have already reached what is effectively a crisis point? It is very difficult to act fast enough if we only start at that crisis point.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Madam Speaker, I will start by thanking my colleague for the incredible work he does on issues pertaining to human rights. I, for one, can say that I have learned much from my colleague, having spoken to him regarding numerous issues that have arisen over the course of the past several years.

As my friend knows full well, the situation in Myanmar is an incredibly complex one. For that reason, as is well understood by members of the House, we have continued to provide humanitarian assistance over the years. As everyone is well aware, since 2000, Canada has been one of the countries and member states of the United Nations that has been quite generous in ensuring that the Government of Myanmar is well aware that we would like to assist. We have also been in close contact with former secretary-general Kofi Annan to provide assistance to him and to prevail on other allies to make sure we all come together to ensure that there is effective action.

• (2330)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member has really showcased his passion and advocacy on this issue.

Could the member describe what steps the Government of Canada has taken thus far in assisting the more than 400,000 refugees who have fled Rakhine State and are on the Bangladeshi border? What has Canada done to assist them?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Madam Speaker, as the member is fully aware, given her passion for this issue, we have consistently conveyed to the Government of Myanmar that it needs to look at the root causes of communal violence in that country. In addition to that, as the number of refugees fleeing Myanmar increased over the course of the past several weeks, we immediately decided that it was high time to provide more assistance to humanitarian agencies and to Bangladesh, which is hosting a large number of the Rohingya. Lastly, we think it is not only Canada that should act. We are also trying to prevail on other members of the international community to

ensure that they also do their part to make sure we are responsive to this crisis.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise tonight to join what has been primarily, and I think most appropriately, a non-partisan discussion with vast areas of agreement. In that context, I want to start by thanking the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for making it possible for us to have an emergency debate tonight, and the Speaker for accepting the request for an emergency debate.

There have been so many very fine speeches this evening, and I hesitate to mention some of them for missing others, but the members for Kitchener South—Hespeler and Don Valley West, the Minister of International Development herself, the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the member for Mississauga—Erin Mills, and a number of other parliamentary secretaries, including the parliamentary secretary for Global Affairs, have contributed to our knowledge, to our deep sense of outrage, and to the awareness of the possibilities that exist for Canada to do more, accepting, as I do, that our government has responded, as the Minister of International Development has outlined. However, I do believe that we need to do more.

In digging through the background of this issue, it was a bit of a shock to realize how clearly this attempt at ethnic cleansing/genocide—and I think genocide is an appropriate term—has been in the works for some time. I came across the extremely prescient view of professor Penny Green, a professor at the International State Crime Initiative of Queen Mary University of London. She set out five stages of genocide as it relates to the Rohingya in Myanmar. One is stigmatization, meaning their being denied citizenship and not being acknowledged as one of Myanmar's official ethnic groups, but being labelled Bengalis. This has been referenced before, but I found it extremely prescient. Two is harassment, including job discrimination, religious persecution, and attacks by the state security forces. Three is isolation, including being herded into camps in 2012 and villages being cut-off. Fourth is systematic weakening, with identity cards being removed so that they cannot vote, and their being barred from travelling, leading to loss of livelihood. Fifth is mass annihilation. Professor Green writes that it has not yet occurred, albeit no one has been prosecuted yet for the killing spree against Rohingya in 2012.

In 2012, there was a mass killing and evidence exists that it was orchestrated. It was made to appear as though random mobs had killed 200 Muslims in Sittwe. However, the reality of the reports from witnesses is that the perpetrators were brought in by trucks and assisted by the military to begin what became a campaign of fear. This ethnic cleansing of 2012 was a stage in what is described as a process of genocide. As this escalated without response, without consequences for those who murdered innocent people, it set the stage for what we have seen since August 25, a mass annihilation and process that has shocked the world. The refugee crisis, with more than 400,000 displaced people fleeing to Bangladesh in barely a month, is one that has exceeded even the recent experiences of exoduses from Rwanda or even Syria.

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The United Nations International Organization for Migration has proclaimed this refugee movement as “unprecedented in terms of volume and speed”. Many speeches tonight have already cited the various conclusions that the words “ethnic cleansing” apply or certainly potentially. I believe that it is an attempted genocide, especially when we examine the systematic efforts that led to the effort to try to remove Muslims from Myanmar.

This is shocking at many levels, particularly because of the role of one of my heroes, Nobel Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, whom we looked at as an icon of democracy during her house arrest in Myanmar for all those years.

● (2335)

I was very moved and appreciated the decision of the previous government to grant her honorary Canadian citizenship. No one would have doubted that the Nobel Prize committee was correct in giving her a Nobel Prize. Now, as we heard most recently in the speech from the hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills, constituents in her riding are saying that her Nobel Prize and Canadian citizenship should be taken away.

It certainly is astonishing for anyone who appreciates the religion of Buddhism, one that is committed to non-violence. Look at any number of Buddhist communities, which have exemplified non-violence in such an extent as they do in Tibet, or places where we know that within Buddhist communities rare tigers are safe because of a practice, belief, and faith in non-violence. This adds to the level of shock and disbelief.

As many Canadians must now be wondering, the sense that democracy was arriving and Myanmar was emerging, that we could support that government, and claims that someone like Aung San Suu Kyi would be equally guilty of promoting ethnic cleansing were just hard to digest.

How do we find a solution? It is clear that Aung San Suu Kyi has been willing to promote ethnic cleansing in that country. Some ideas come to mind. Some have been mentioned before. I will go through three ideas in closing.

One that has been mentioned is the importance of looking at the advice from the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, an organization that holds a Nobel Peace prize, one that will never be questioned. That campaign for the Ottawa campaign to have an international treaty on land mines has saved lives already, and it can do more.

It is true, as an hon. member on the Conservative side mentioned earlier tonight, that Myanmar is not a party to the international treaty to ban land mines. However, Bangladesh is. In April 2017, it achieved an agreement with the border military of Myanmar to allow the clearing of land mines. Since the beginning of this campaign of terror, a number of organizations, including information collected by the research arm of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, the land mine monitor, had direct eyewitness accounts of the Myanmar military arriving and unloading trucks full of land mines, placing anti-personnel devices on the very paths the Rohingya Muslims would use to flee to Bangladesh. Those were eyewitness accounts of August 28. Amnesty International has also interviewed many witnesses who have seen the military adding new land mines.

If Canada could offer help to Bangladesh, such as military assistance and our expertise in removing land mines and financial support to remove land mines, it would be one thing we could do on top of everything else we have done.

Second, many members here have already said that we need to do everything possible to clear the way for NGOs, civil society organizations, to get in on the ground and provide assistance, food, and medicine on the Bangladeshi side of the border, a very poor country that now has over 400,000 desperate refugees. We can certainly do more to provide assistance there, but we can also demand of the government of Myanmar that NGOs and relief agencies be allowed in to Myanmar to provide relief.

If I missed anyone saying this earlier today I apologize. The last is that it strikes me as possible that we could use Aug San Suu Kyi's global reputation and status as an honorary Canadian citizen and pressure her far more directly to rescue her completely burnished halo, to stand up for human rights, to stand up for the rights of Muslims within Myanmar, and find any way we can through diplomacy in this horrific situation. If such a threat of hope exists, it is worth trying.

In any case, I thank my colleagues for an extremely important emergency debate. I thank the government for what it has done so far, and I beg it to do more.

● (2340)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a couple of questions for her in relation to an emergency debate.

I think we have been united in our concern for the tragedy taking place in Myanmar. We are debating that. We are educating Canadians who are following this debate. Does the member not agree that if we feel as parliamentarians that the government could do more, that is what a debate is? This is not just to all agree and point out the issues. This is to ask if we can do more.

I think there is goodwill on all sides. In that vein, I would like to ask the member, who often seems reticent to criticize the government, a question. We agree that aid has been good. There have been some very good, passionate pleas from Liberal members here tonight. However, does the member not find it unusual that last week when the Prime Minister spoke at the United Nations General Assembly, he did not mention the plight of the Rohingya?

To me, that is somewhere we could go further to advance this debate when our Prime Minister has the world stage. Could we not also propose, as the member for Windsor—Tecumseh did, a Liberal commitment to a UN mission of some sort? Could we push toward international consensus to perhaps allow a mission like that to let civil society and NGO organizations into the country, which she is advocating?

In an emergency debate like this, is it fair to suggest there are ways we could do more as a Parliament?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, if the hon. member for Durham is unfamiliar with my various criticisms of the Liberal government, I could refresh his memory. I have been very critical of the government's failure to step up, to negotiate, and to participate in the treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons.

I am dismayed that the current legislation, Bill C-47, on which the hon. member for Durham has taken the bizarre tack that it might be a long-gun registry in disguise, in fact needs to close the loophole for the shipment of weapons to the United States and then to other countries without record.

I have many criticisms of the current government. It does not compel me in any way to join in to a piling on in criticizing a speech that has already been given. I do agree with the member for Windsor—Tecumseh that a UN mission is appropriate, and that Canada should use every lever we have through international organizations to do more to pressure the government of Myanmar, to do more to protect the rights of refugees, and to do more to prevent the ongoing genocide.

• (2345)

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope that my colleague opposite will allow me to ask a question in French even though it is late because we have not had a lot of discussion in French this evening.

I appreciate her support for Canada's leadership on the world stage and her suggestions for how we might play an even bigger role. I am also glad to hear what the Conservatives think of the platform at the United Nations and to know that it is important to them. We do not always hear Conservatives talk about the United Nations as a place where Canada can play a leadership role internationally.

Can my colleague suggest any ways in which the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and our delegation to the United States can keep the dialogue going around finding solutions to the crisis in Myanmar?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. He is right, the debate this evening happened almost exclusively in English, unfortunately. I appreciate his effort, which I now make myself. It is clear that the United Nations is truly important for peace in the world. It is also clear that it is time to move forward with UN reform. However, without the United Nations, the world would be even more dangerous.

Canada can do more within the United Nations. As a society we can play a bigger role in the world, as peacekeepers for example. We must do more to keep playing this traditional role for Canada and to speak to the matter. However, the government does not yet seem to be willing to move forward. I do hope that the Liberals will find the words to promote peace in the world.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question I asked an NDP member earlier and get her thoughts. It is the question

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of the ability of the international community in general to respond to the issue of genocide. She spoke about the very clear early-warning signs, signs of things already happening much before this point, yet we see with human rights crises around the world—the situation in Syria and the situation in Burma are two contemporary examples—that it seems that the United Nations has not had the capacity to respond effectively.

I would be curious to hear her thoughts on, first, what kinds of reforms to the United Nations should be proposed to make that body effective in responding to these issues, and second, how we can change the architecture of the response to these kinds of events so that we can say, “Never again,” and actually mean never again and actually action it, not just as a slogan but as a concrete reality.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I am going to have to try to keep a very long explanation very short.

The hope for ending genocide within a country, to stop a government from ethnic cleansing, from killing an entire population within its borders, is in the emerging principle of responsibility to protect at a global level. Unfortunately, Canada, I think inadvertently, but clumsily, assisted in damaging that concept, maybe irrevocably, with allies in the mission in Libya, where the UN Security Council, which means Russia and China, agreed that western forces would go into Libya to protect the Libyan people from Moammar Gadhafi. When we shifted from responsibility to protect to regime change, we damaged the principle so strongly that we were unable to help the people in Syria when they needed our help the most in 2011. We allowed Libya to become a failed state. We allowed Moammar Gadhafi to be killed in the street, and we damaged the process and the hope of an international principle of responsibility to protect.

It is in rebuilding it that the world community, including Security Council members, will ever again authorize a military mission within a sovereign country to protect its own people.

• (2350)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I congratulate all members who have spoken tonight outlining the terrible situation for massive numbers of Rohingya.

Burma had these types of murders, rapes, and extrajudicial killings for years on a bunch of ethnic groups, including the terrorist actions at the beginning of this phase. I hope all members agree that we want to try to eliminate all the improprieties happening in that state. It has been at war for a couple of decades with various ethnic groups, and hopefully the various suggestions made will help eliminate all of that.

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Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, to the member for Yukon, amen. That is exactly what is needed. In responding to the Rohingya crisis, we have to remember all the other ethnic groups that have suffered and remember that if we can find a solution, such as the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan asked me to suggest, we can actually find the solutions internationally to protect marginalized and vulnerable groups everywhere.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate. There being no further members rising for debate, I declare the motion carried.

[Translation]

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:51 p.m.)

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