



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 397 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

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

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, April is Sikh Heritage Month, when Canadians across the country highlight and honour the many contributions Sikh Canadians have made in Canada.

It was in April 1699 that Guru Gobind Singh Ji created the Khalsa Panth. Around the world, Sikhs believe in meditation, community service, hard work and helping out the less fortunate. These are not just Sikh values; they are Canadian values. Sikh Heritage Month is not just an opportunity to celebrate the contributions of Sikh Canadians, but more importantly, an opportunity to educate not just Canadians but people all around the world about Sikh history.

Happy Sikh Heritage Month to all those celebrating across the country.

* * *

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were all shocked by the terrorist massacre of 50 innocent Muslims in New Zealand. It was a stark reminder of our own homegrown terrorism here in Canada, which was manifested in the Quebec mosque murder of six men in 2017. However, in times of horror, we also find examples of hope.

First was a circle of peace in my riding that formed around the Hamza Mosque. During Friday prayers, 50 people, including Jews,

Christians, Buddhists and secular folks sent a message of solidarity to Muslims in Parkdale that they are welcome and that they are safe.

Second is the example set by Windermere United Church. On the rented sign outside the church, the church regularly posts messages of solidarity. When the sign owner refused to post messages celebrating Ramadan and Pride, Reverend Alexa Gilmour ended her rental agreement and filed a human rights complaint. The church is now fundraising for a new sign, with the help of neighbours like Kate Manson and Maggie Knaus, who are not even congregants but felt compelled to stand up for inclusion and to stand against Islamophobia and homophobia.

Out of the darkness, we can indeed find light.

* * *

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we parliamentarians have the privilege of being invited to special events that reflect a rich variety of cultures and faiths in Canada. One such experience for me was to attend a celebration ending the Muslim fast of Ramadan at Ottawa City Hall. I was warmly welcomed and enjoyed it very much.

Weekly, a group of parliamentarians meet for breakfast, Christian prayer and Biblical devotion, leaving our partisanship at the door and choosing to support and encourage each other as we seek to serve God in this place.

Today I invite all parliamentarians to the longest-running annual event on the Hill, historically hosted by the Speakers of both places since 1964: the National Prayer Breakfast, on May 2. Six hundred and fifty individuals from across Canada and around the world will come together to pray for our nation and the world, including 100 Canadian youth attending the National Christian Youth Summit.

It is going to be a wonderful event and a great opportunity for my colleagues in this House to experience seeing and hearing the Christian faith celebrated on the Hill.

* * *

BHULLAR WRESTLING CLUB

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Richmond's Bhullar Wrestling Club scored another win recently at the B.C. high school championships because of outstanding performances by five area students who train at the club. Under the mentorship of Arjan and Jag Bhullar, these students came away with medals and the experience of a lifetime.

Statements by Members

These are not the first medals for the club. Both Arjan and Jag have represented Canada on the world stage with distinction, and often as the first Sikh and Punjabi Canadians in their competitions. Arjan and Jag are among the volunteers coaching wrestling for young members practising in a small gym on the family's farm. They also work with the esteem team program, helping to inspire and activate young people.

I would like to thank members of the Bhullar family for their contributions to youth and sport in Richmond and wish them continuing success.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week I visited Lac Brochet, a first nation in northern Manitoba. I am thankful for the warm welcome I received, but the discussion was serious. Lac Brochet is on the forefront of climate change. There are numerous signs, including the early melt of the ice road, but nowhere is it more evident than with respect to the caribou. They are moving further and further away from their traditional territory.

The people of the Denesuline, like their neighbours the Sayisi Dene, depend on the caribou hunt for subsistence, for healthy food, for tradition, for life. The caribou are moving too far for a community hunt, and the community is asking for the resources to send its hunters to be able to provide for elders and others.

Climate change has already begun its destruction. Instead of supporting American billionaires by buying out a pipeline, it is first nations like Lac Brochet and others that need support for the caribou hunt, for their roads and for their housing.

We all need bold leadership, leadership like the green new deal. The people of Lac Brochet, our north and our country are depending on it.

* * *

● (1410)

KITCHENER RANGERS

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Kitchener Rangers hockey club has been a source of pride for my community since 1963. It has seen over 200 alumni go on to play in the NHL or the World Hockey Association. Players like Jonathan Yantsis, who finished this season with a league-leading 24 power play goals, give their all on and off the ice throughout the year.

Along with maintaining a gruelling training schedule, Rangers players also attend great educational institutions in my community, such as Grand River Collegiate Institute and the University of Waterloo. The Rangers maintain strong partnerships with numerous not-for-profits throughout the Waterloo region.

While my team won 34 of 69 games this year, it lost its spot in the OHL semi-finals to the Guelph Storm. Due to a wager I made with my hon. colleague from that city, I must temporarily don a Guelph Storm jersey. However, I look forward to standing in this House next year as I watch that same colleague don a Rangers jersey.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the Prime Minister's carbon tax took effect, immediately raising the price of everything from gas to home heating to groceries. We know that this is nothing more than a tax grab to help the Prime Minister pay for his reckless spending, because he is exempting Canada's biggest producers of emissions and charging small business owners, commuters and hockey moms and dads while suggesting that they take public transit. That is not possible for many rural Canadians, like those in Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Farmers in my riding are on the cutting edge of sustainability and innovation, but the Prime Minister's carbon tax is raising the price to get crops to market, to buy fertilizer and for grain drying, causing margins to shrink. They cannot afford to make new investments in sustainability while they are now worried about their bottom line and keeping the lights on.

Make no mistake about it. The Prime Minister's carbon tax is not an environmental plan; it is a tax plan.

* * *

SIKH MOTORCYCLE CLUB CANADA

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in Canada we feel and experience diversity in many ways. In Surrey, we see it on motorcycles, thanks to the Sikh Motorcycle Club Canada. This past weekend, I joined Giani Narinder Singh and the Gurdwara Dukh Nivaran Sahib to lend my support to Sikh Motorcycle Club members Jatinder Singh Chohan, Jantta Singh Dhaliwal, Sukhvir Singh Mlait, Azadinder Singh Sidhu, Jasmeetpal Singh and Parvjit Singh Takhar, who are taking part in the World Tour 2019 ride from the United Kingdom to the Golden Temple in celebration of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and to support humanitarian work by raising funds for Khalsa Aid.

Please join me in congratulating the Sikh Motorcycle Club members for all they do to give back and to live up to the values we hold dear as Canadians.

*Statements by Members***WOMEN'S HEALTH**

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government knows the importance of bringing a gender lens to policy-making, and we know that many health conditions disproportionately affect women. Heart disease and stroke is the number one cause of premature death in women in Canada. In addition, women are disproportionately impacted in their access to medication, and women are more likely to be unable to access medications for financial reasons, which is why initiatives like national pharmacare are so important.

Women's health is an area of gender equality we can tackle together. Today we are joined by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and its CEO, Mr. Yves Savoie, who are here advocating for women's heart and brain health. This evening they are hosting a reception on Parliament Hill. Women with lived experience related to heart disease and stroke will be in attendance to share their expertise.

I am proud to be co-sponsoring this event, along with my colleague Senator McPhedran, and I encourage all members to attend.

* * *

CANOLA

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canada-China canola crisis is a national economic emergency that must be dealt with now. Canadian farmers produce the highest-quality canola in the world. The quality of the product is not the issue; the failed leadership of the Prime Minister is the issue. He is hurting our farmers. The Prime Minister's bungling of the relationship with China is now at an ugly crossroads with the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

His lecturing of Chinese officials on the independence of Canada's judicial system while, at the same time, bullying the former attorney general has shown global leaders that he will dismiss the rule of law for political gain. Our international trading partners know this, and now our farmers are paying the price. The price of canola continues to drop. Farmers are now stuck with product they cannot sell.

Farmers are now making decisions about what to seed this spring. They are worried that they will not have the cash to pay this year's bills. Farmers need to know that the government is going to repair its relationship with China. Right now they have no confidence that the government has a plan, and they are tired of being the ones to pay for the Prime Minister's failures.

* * *

● (1415)

*[Translation]***AUTISM AND PDD SOCIETY OF LAVAL**

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, April is Autism Month. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the commendable efforts of the Société de l'autisme et des TED de Laval. Founded in 1995, this non-profit organization works to improve the quality of life of Laval families. Its talented team carries out innovative, inclusive projects for the organization's clients and promotes the rights and interests of people with autism spectrum disorder and fragile X syndrome.

I am honoured to announce that I have been named ambassador for the Société de l'autisme et des TED de Laval. I will be proudly participating in awareness activities all month long.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, I travelled to New York City in March for the 63rd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, together with my colleagues on the Canadian delegation led by the Minister of International Development and Minister for Women and Gender Equality. We underscored Canada's commitment to achieving gender quality through the empowerment of women and girls across Canada.

[English]

As an official delegate for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, along with my global counterparts, we shared best practices for increasing women's political participation around the world. As parliamentarians, women, peace and security should be in our DNA, and we need to be more vigilant to ensure that women are always at the peace negotiations table.

I am very proud of Canada's leadership at the CSW. Together, let us continue to share Canada's experience and work toward a better future for women everywhere.

Finally, I want to wish all Daughters of the Vote a warm welcome to the Hill.

* * *

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Autism Awareness Day and the anniversary of my son Jaden's diagnosis at age two.

Autism comes with no end of labels, and in Jaden's case, one of those labels is non-verbal. Ironically, I think Jaden's most important label is his name.

I say ironically because unbeknownst to us when we named him, Jaden's name means "God has heard." There are few things I know for sure, but I know this. My 23-year-old non-verbal son has something to say. He says it in the simple words he types or writes. He says it with a sideways smile, a mysterious giggle, a whimsical look and sometimes with heartfelt tears.

If people have the patience to just wait on him, quietly be present with him, joining him in the moment, in his moment, he will touch their hearts in the most magical of ways. They will hear his voice and they will never forget what he has to say.

*Oral Questions***CAMP DAY**

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I invite you, and all Canadians, to picture yourself as a kid at summer camp in your youth, surrounded by friends, at a campfire, learning how to swim and paddle a canoe, gazing at the stars and dreaming big. That is what camp is all about, growing up, having fun, making friends and building that Canadian character.

I am pleased today to stand in the House to celebrate Camp Day on the Hill, and to recognize the work of the Tim Horton Children's Foundation, which helps youth from economically disadvantaged families change their life story through that camp experience.

Today, I welcome to Parliament Hill two special ambassadors for Camp Day on the Hill, Hrithik Sharma and Biticho Muma.

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

I am proud to be able to say that one of the foundation's six summer camps and its only francophone camp in Canada, Camp des voyageurs, is located in Quyon, in my riding of Pontiac.

We want to see all children in Canada grow and thrive, and so I thank the Tim Horton Children's Foundation for everything it does for young people in Pontiac and across Canada.

* * *

DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, all members of the House acknowledge the 338 participants of the Daughters of the Vote program, which was created by the organization Equal Voice.

I had the opportunity to speak to some of them yesterday, and their passion was written all over their faces. It is reassuring to see a new generation of committed young women.

In the future, they may be awarded a Nobel Prize like Malala Yousafzai or recognized by their peers like Thérèse Casgrain, an advocate for women's rights, the founding member of the Ligue des droits et libertés and the first female leader of a political party in Canada.

Unfortunately, female role models are under-represented in public life because of sexism or our paternalistic culture. A total of 842 men have been awarded a Nobel Prize compared to just 51 women.

In the House, women make up only 27% of MPs, and I admire those who have the courage to stand up for their principles.

My message to women is simple. They should not allow any glass ceiling or any restriction to stop them from achieving their goals. They need to have confidence in themselves, hold their heads high and continue to be themselves.

* * *

[*English*]

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we come to this House for the opportunity to shape the future direction of the nation. We must act in the best

interest of Canada with honour and integrity. However, that is not how the Prime Minister sees it.

Yesterday he showed us what happens to those who choose to honour the responsibility of their office ahead of the wishes of the Prime Minister. His message to Canadians is clear: If people tell the truth and stand on principle, there is no place for them in the Liberal Party.

This message is not new. I felt it as well. I swore an oath to put the needs of my country first. Therefore, I did not leave the Liberal Party; the Liberal Party left me.

We must hold our elected officials to a higher standard as a reflection of the office they hold and the example they set for all Canadians. However, the Prime Minister is willing to sacrifice our democracy, discard the rule of law and politically interfere in a criminal prosecution. That is how far the Liberal Prime Minister will go to retain power and cover up the truth at the expense of Canada.

* * *

DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we were part of history when 338 young women from across Canada took their seats in this place and raised their voices.

[*Translation*]

Canada needs more women in politics, in business and in positions of power if we want our communities to prosper.

[*English*]

The work of Equal Voice and the Daughters of the Vote not only empower young women to seek public office, it gives them the tools they need to lead in their communities.

[*Translation*]

Having more young women in our democratic institutions will help us achieve gender equality.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so far everything to date that the former attorney general has said about this corruption scandal has been proven to be true. Everything the Prime Minister has said, from claiming that he never put pressure on her to she never came forward with her concerns, has been proven to be false.

Why does telling the truth get a member kicked out of the Liberal Party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone in this place knows that being a member of a caucus comes with both rights and responsibilities and part of that responsibility is around trust.

Oral Questions

I had extensive conversations with members of our caucus, who informed me that they felt trust was broken. I reflected on it. We worked with the two individuals in question and made the determination that maintaining trust so we could continue to work on the big things that matter to Canadians, whether it is reconciliation, protecting our environment or growing the economy for the middle class, meant that we would move forward together.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, so far, everything the former attorney general has said about the Prime Minister's corruption scandal has been proven to be true, and everything the Prime Minister has said has been proven to be false.

Why is the Prime Minister still saying things he knows to be false?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as all members of Parliament know, being a member of a caucus comes with both rights and responsibilities. That is why I listened to what members of our caucus had to say.

Maintaining trust within a caucus is essential if we are to keep fighting for important things such as achieving reconciliation, tackling climate change and growing the economy for everyone. That is why we made that difficult decision.

We remain united as we work on the things that matter.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only trust that has been broken is between the Prime Minister and Canadians, who have seen his abuse of power.

He is trying to chalk this all up as some kind of internal Liberal civil war, like in the Martin-Chrétien days. However, this is different. This is not about factions within a caucus. This is about two strong individuals who saw something that was wrong and decided to stand up to it.

Why does speaking truth to power disqualify members from sitting as a Liberal?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take no lessons from the Conservatives on the matter of strong leadership. We have 18 strong women members of cabinet who lead every day on the big issues that matter to Canadians, from our place in the world to investing in resources for women's organizations to bringing extraordinary young women to Ottawa on a day like this from every corner of the country.

We will continue to lead the way in a way that matters to Canadians and to this world.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he is continuing to remove everyone who has stood up to his abuse of power and his cover-up of this scandal.

Pressuring an attorney general to interfere in a criminal proceeding is wrong. Kicking out two members of Parliament who stood up to his abuse of power is unconscionable.

Again, why does telling the truth get members kicked out of the Liberal Party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what has been obvious for a number of weeks now is that the Conservatives will go to any ends to avoid talking about the budget, to avoid talking about climate change, to avoid talking about the things that matter deeply to Canadians.

We are proud that in our last budget we invested significantly in women's organizations across the country. We have put a program forward so first-time homebuyers can actually get into their home ownership sooner. We have moved forward on significant measures to fight climate change.

We will continue to focus on the things that matter to Canadians, even if the Conservatives stay focused on us.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, standing up for the independence of our rule of law is important to every single Canadian. The Prime Minister need not worry. We can talk about the falsehoods that he says about his record later.

Today we are talking about the things he has said about this scandal that just are not true. We have all heard the tape. We know now that the Prime Minister sent in his top officials to pressure the former attorney general, and we have seen him kick out those individuals who stood up to him.

Again, why is the Liberal Party safe for those who spread falsehoods, but not safe for truth-tellers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be careful about throwing stones about falsehoods when I am sitting in the official opposition's chair.

The fact of the matter is that we are going to continue to focus on the things that matter to Canadians. Yes, the integrity of our institutions and the rule of law matter deeply to Canadians, like they matter to us. That is why we will continue to respect our institutions and the rule of law, even as we fight for jobs and we stand up for workers across this country. We continue to do the things Canadians expect us to do after 10 years of failure by the Conservatives.

Oral Questions

●(1430)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the member for Timmins—James Bay and I visited Grassy Narrows, we were devastated by the impacts of mercury poisoning on young people and the community. Reconciliation is not just in words. It is in actions. When indigenous activists raised concerns about the mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows, the Prime Minister responded by making a joke at their expense. That is not leadership.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to going to Grassy Narrows, meeting with a community that is suffering with mercury poisoning, meeting with the leadership and committing to action?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologized and I apologize again for the comments I made. They lacked respect. They were unacceptable.

We know that the situation in Grassy Narrows has been dire for a long time. That is why we have committed to moving forward on building the resources for it. We have continued to work in partnership with the province that holds a significant area of responsibility in this matter to ensure that we are supporting the people of Grassy Narrows. I am happy to say that the Minister of Indigenous Services just had a conversation with Chief Turtle. We will continue to work with the community of Grassy Narrows on concrete solutions.

* * *

CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the question was whether he would go there or not. He does not seem to answer.

[Translation]

Many women are on the Hill today to encourage women to get into politics. The Prime Minister has sent them a clear message: anyone who dares to criticize him, who dares to stand up for principles like judicial independence, will be shown the door.

How does the Prime Minister plan to encourage women with a message like that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, my message to the young women here today and across the country is that they should get into politics. We need their perspectives. We need the wide range of opinions and perspectives they will bring and add to the House of Commons. We must listen to them. Everyone will not always agree on everything. This chamber exists so that members can engage in debate with people who have different perspectives. This happens by listening to one another, understanding one another and working together based on our values. That is what we will always do and that is what we have done.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is sending that same message to countless young people who were hoping that politics would be done differently. The Prime Minister has no time for those who have the courage to put Canadians' interests ahead of their party's interests.

Why attack women who stand up for principles that are greater than any political party?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more that the interests of Canadians outweigh the interests of political parties. That is why we are focusing on reconciliation, economic growth, gender equality, strong investments in communities across the country, a plan for pharmacare, and a plan for investing in municipal infrastructure. We are working for Canadians instead of playing politics.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today hundreds of determined young women are in the House from Daughters of the Vote. I spoke with them about the importance of getting involved and running for office, but what have they seen this week? They have seen women speak truth to power and then get shown the door.

What message is the Prime Minister sending to Canadians, particularly to young women, when he kicks out former cabinet ministers just for doing the right thing?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the member for Burnaby South did not mean to even inadvertently disparage the extraordinary women who remain in our government who continue to lead every day on issues that matter deeply to Canadians, whether it is foreign affairs, official languages, employment, status of women, or whether it is the very first Minister of Agriculture to happen to be a woman or the first woman government House leader. There is an extraordinary range of strong women in all seats in this House who are making a difference with what they deeply believe in. I know he did not mean to disparage any one of them.

* * *

●(1435)

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his February 15 press conference, the Prime Minister said that it was the Attorney General's responsibility to come forward. We know that she did. She told the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Clerk of the Privy Council and several other people in his office to stop.

How can he claim that she did not come forward?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been hours and hours of testimony by all the people involved, including the former attorney general, who spoke for four hours. We issued an unprecedented order in council waiving solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence, allowing her to speak fully on the matter. We know that it is important for all perspectives to be heard, and they have indeed been heard.

Oral Questions

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are two viewpoints. There is the Prime Minister's viewpoint and there is the truth. After all of that, there are still massive inconsistencies between what the Prime Minister has said and what testimony has shown.

I have a very simple question for the Prime Minister. When was the first time the Prime Minister spoke to the Clerk of the Privy Council after the December 19 phone call with the former attorney general?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, both my office and the clerk himself have confirmed that I did not get a debrief on that particular conversation.

What we see once again are members opposite trying to talk about anything other than the economy, the budget, the canola challenge that our western farmers are facing right now. These are the kinds of things that matter to Canadians. It has been 339 days since the member opposite promised Canadians he would soon release his climate change plan, and we are still waiting. No wonder he does not want to talk about it.

Some hon. member: Oh, oh!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Order. I ask my hon. friend from Mégantic—L'Érable and others not to interrupt the person speaking.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not the question. I did not ask if he got a debrief. I asked when the first time he spoke to the Clerk of Privy Council was after that phone call. I will try it a slightly different way.

Did the Prime Minister know anything about that phone call between the Clerk of the Privy Council and the former attorney general on December 19, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been hours and hours of testimony at the justice committee by a broad range of actors in this, including by the former attorney general herself, who was given an unprecedented waiver that allowed her to speak fully on matters regarding SNC-Lavalin and her time as Attorney General.

I can understand that the members opposite want to stay on this and do not want to talk about the fact that they have no plan to fight climate change, that they have no plan for the economy, that they have no plan for ensuring the jobs of the future. They continue to need to play politics.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he cannot answer a simple yes or no question. There are only two options: Either he knew about it or he did not know about it.

Once again, did the Prime Minister know anything about that phone call on December 19 between the former attorney general and the Clerk of the Privy Council? There is only one answer. Is it yes or is it no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a justice committee that has been tasked with looking into this matter. We have an Ethics Commissioner who, for those people watching today, has the role to make determinations about what is going on in the House.

In this House, members opposite are free to make all sorts of accusations, allegations and sling mud as they will, but we have an Ethics and Conflict of Interest Commissioner who is tasked with digging to the bottom of things to understand what is political dross and what is reality. That is the work that we support. That is what we will continue—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

• (1440)

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody would have to dig through anything if the Prime Minister did not abuse his power to interfere in a court proceeding. Nobody would have to dig through anything if the Prime Minister could just answer a simple question.

Did he know about that phone call on December 19, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): What we have right now is the Conservative Party desperate to try to stretch out a matter that has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

Particularly today, members should be aware of their responsibility to listen to others and to points that they disagree with. That is vital in our democracy as members all know. I would ask them to show some respect for that concept.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, right now we see a Conservative Party trying to stretch out an issue that has dominated headlines for the past weeks because it wants to keep talking about anything other than the issues that matter to Canadians, whether it be a real plan to fight climate change, or a budget that helps Canadians get the training they need to be able to continue in the workforce, that makes education more affordable or that helps homebuyers buy their first homes.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I note that he just cannot seem to bring himself to answer a very simple question. Is it yes or no? There is a reason this is important. It is because from the beginning he has always claimed that he never put pressure on the former attorney general. In that phone call, the clerk said four times that the Prime Minister was “firm”. He also claims that he had no idea the phone call took place and that she never brought her concerns to his office.

Once again, is the answer yes or no? Did he know anything about the call before or after? It is one of the two options: yes or no.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said repeatedly and as we have heard repeatedly, I was not debriefed on that conversation between the clerk and the minister. I should have spoken directly with the minister. There was not an opportunity to do that.

Oral Questions

I continue to say that we know we need to work better. We need to improve our systems so that the lines of communication are better open. This has been a situation that has led to concrete changes in how we move forward.

Again, we are continuing to move forward on the things that matter to Canadians, which include—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, indigenous people across the country want their inherent rights to be recognized. The case of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows is no laughing matter. Indigenous people want to live with dignity and have a good quality of life. The Prime Minister said his comments lacked respect. What he did not say was that he lacks the will to seriously listen to indigenous people.

Enough empty words from the Prime Minister. Will he commit to visit the people of Grassy Narrows and give them the respect and attention they deserve?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have committed to forging a new relationship with indigenous peoples based on trust, respect and the true spirit of co-operation, not just empty words like the member opposite accuses us of. We have made historic investments since 2015, including advancing reconciliation in concrete ways, securing a better quality of life and improving access to safe, clean drinking water. Investments have increased by 50% and there is still more work to do.

In budget 2019 we eliminated barriers to quality health care and culturally relevant social supports. We are funding post-secondary—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would ask the member for Lakeland to come to order, please.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has shown a profound disrespect toward indigenous peoples. He mocks protestors when they are seeking justice for Grassy Narrows, turns his back on indigenous peoples saying no to his pipeline, and now fires one of the most prominent indigenous women in Canada for speaking truth to power.

Indigenous peoples have had enough of this disrespect. Colonialism is alive and well in this country. Many still live in third world living conditions, so why will this Prime Minister not listen to what they are saying and why does he continuously show such disrespect to indigenous peoples?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the very beginning, the government has been focused on partnership with indigenous peoples. We have been focused on moving forward in ways that respect and uplift indigenous peoples in communities. We have been doing that with hundreds of new school projects, better access to health care, eliminating 82 long-term boil water advisories and being on track to eliminating 100% of them within the five years we committed to.

We know there is tremendous work being done on new relationships, including new fiscal relationships and new governance relationships. We are walking forward on the path to reconciliation, but we admit there is much more—

● (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Milton.

* * *

CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2002, three women appeared on the cover of Time magazine as persons of the year. They were whistle-blowers. They took risks to reveal illegal or unethical practices in their own organizations. These women inspired me when I was a young lawyer in 2002.

Today we have two more women who are probably very inspiring for women across this country. These women also took risks to speak their truth, and they were thrown out the door of the Liberal Party.

Why has the Prime Minister decided that whistle-blowers need to be punished and not appreciated?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the members opposite, we have always embraced a range of viewpoints and perspectives within our party. That actually strengthens the Liberal Party and allows us to do a better job of listening to Canadians from coast to coast to coast and governing in a way that is inclusive rather than divisive.

That is what we will continue to do, but ultimately diversity only works if there is also trust, and when that relationship of trust was broken within our caucus I had to take a difficult decision, and I did.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, trust goes both ways, does it not? I think that is something the Prime Minister needs to remember.

Women are quite often whistle-blowers, and I will explain why. For many years we were not part of boardrooms. We sat on the sidelines of what happens in the corporate boardroom and in legislatures. As a result, we are uniquely placed to see when ethical lapses are happening. We also do have the courage to step up and speak when we need to.

The Prime Minister may believe that he has dealt with this by throwing two people out of the Liberal Party, but many more courageous women are here, and they are here today, and they are watching. What does the Prime Minister have to say to them?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud that for the first time in history we brought in a gender-balanced cabinet, bringing in strong women from across the country to be a full part of this government.

Oral Questions

I would very much like to hear from the member opposite if she can tell us that her party has made the commitment that if they should form government again, they will have a gender-balanced cabinet. That would be a wonderful thing to announce to the women in this room today, who very much want to see gender balance as the way forward in boardrooms, in courtrooms, in the house of Parliament and in government.

The Speaker: Order. The hon. minister of status of women and the member for Milton will come to order.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said that he was proud of having a gender-balanced cabinet. However, when two women had the courage to be transparent and honest and to tell the truth, the first thing he did was remove them from the Liberal caucus and send them to this side of the House.

Meanwhile, the problem is still there. The Prime Minister interfered in the legal system on a case involving criminal charges.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, will he give La Presse access to the document from the former clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, so that we can have all of the information between November 1 and—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite said is untrue. We did not take action immediately. We took several weeks to try to bring together our caucus and work with the individuals in question. We wanted a united team so that we could continue to work on Canadians' top priorities.

We have taken this new approach to leadership, which focuses on bringing people together and listening to different perspectives, very seriously. However, when we realized that there was no longer trust in our team, we had to do something.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question was simple. La Presse has requested access to all of Michael Wernick's documents from November 1 to December 15.

How did the government respond? It said the documents would be available in 240 days, in other words, four weeks after the election. What a coincidence.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, will he stand here today, before this House and before Canadians, and promise to make those documents available, as requested by La Presse?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was our government that strengthened the access to information system. We are currently reviewing that request and will respond appropriately at the earliest opportunity. We believe strongly in the importance of access to information and transparency, and in the extraordinary work done by journalists across the country to protect our democracy and keep Canadians informed.

• (1450)

[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today in this chamber dozens of the Daughters of the Vote turned their backs to the Prime Minister. Why? It is because they support strong, independent women speaking truth to power and because they know that integrity is the cornerstone of a person's character.

By kicking the first indigenous attorney general of Canada out of caucus for upholding the law, the Prime Minister has made it clear that principled women who dare to stand up to him are not welcome in the Liberal Party.

Is this what a self-proclaimed feminist looks like in 2019?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a government we have moved forward in significant and meaningful ways on gender equality. I am proud of our development assistance policy, which is fundamentally feminist. I am proud that we have put forward budgets with a GBA-plus analysis. I am proud that we have moved forward on pay equity, that we have moved forward on funding for women's organizations across this country and that we have moved forward on a gender-balanced cabinet.

I recognize there is much more to do and I am proud that there is now a contest among party leaders to see who can be the better feminist. I think that is a great thing for this country. I think that is a great thing for Parliament.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 15 years I have dealt with all manner of Indian affairs ministers, but the member for Markham—Stouffville was one who got things done. I worked with her on the health and suicide crisis in the north. She committed to the relocation of Kashechewan and we battled to instill Jordan's principle as a legal right.

To see the Liberal caucus publicly trash the member's reputation with words like “traitor” and “repugnant” and “joined at the hip” with her colleague is just not acceptable. She deserves better than this.

Does the Prime Minister not understand that?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree entirely with the member opposite when he points out that we have done really big things as a government on the path to reconciliation. A lot of it is due to the extraordinary leadership of our former indigenous services minister. However, he will also know that an approach on reconciliation requires a whole-of-government approach.

I can highlight that every single cabinet minister in this government has been working very hard on reconciliation and is partially responsible for the tremendous advances we have made upon this path. There is much more to do, and we are going to continue.

*Oral Questions***INFRASTRUCTURE**

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk for a moment about how we can continue to improve the lives of our middle-class Canadians right across the country.

[*Translation*]

We have already invested in incredible infrastructure projects in my riding of Outremont, such as the metro's blue line, the REM, the new University of Montreal campus and others.

Can the Prime Minister tell us about the investments in the budget that will continue to meet our municipalities' needs?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Outremont for her hard work and her question.

Budget 2019 invests \$2.2 billion in our communities and in those who have shown that they are ready to move forward on projects. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities calls this a turning point for cities and communities across Canada.

The Conservatives do not know what it means to work with municipalities, which they neglected for 10 years. We are working to build stronger and sustainable communities in Outremont and across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that the former attorney general was telling the truth. She was being inappropriately pressured by the Prime Minister. The tape proves it, and the Prime Minister should have finally admitted that she was right, but that is not what happened. Instead, he kicked her out of caucus and then he sent out his Liberal MPs to smear and insult her. We even saw the Liberal member for Brossard—Saint-Lambert accuse the former attorney general of treason.

Will the Prime Minister stand up now and have the integrity to denounce these outrageous and insulting comments?

• (1455)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone on this side of the House understands that a range of perspectives and opinions is essential in representing Canadians from coast to coast to coast in their hopes and aspirations, in standing up for our institutions and in standing up for their jobs. We are going to continue to do what matters to Canadians in investing in their jobs and their future, while defending our institutions. We will continue to do that as a strong, united team because that is what Canadians expect.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an absolutely cowardly response from the Prime Minister. By not denouncing those comments, the Prime Minister is endorsing the smear campaign levelled against the former attorney general and the former president of the Treasury Board. These women are being punished for the crime of telling the truth and having the proof to back it up. They stood up to the Prime Minister and they refused to be silent.

Why did the Prime Minister punish these strong women for doing what was right, for telling the truth and for standing up to his good old boys club?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the good old boys club is gone, because we have a gender-balanced cabinet in which strong women stand up every day for their constituents and for people right across the country.

The Conservatives can pick and choose who they want to support and which individuals they want to listen to. We listen to all voices. We respect all voices. They are crassly exploiting a political situation for their own advantage and not thinking about the consequences for Canadians when we do not stand up for jobs, do not invest in opportunities for youth or do not support women's organizations like—

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 to know what the Prime Minister thinks of one of his female ministers, the Minister of International Development, who thumbed her nose at Canadians when she said that if the Liberals did politics the old-fashioned way, those two would have been booted from caucus two months ago. She says that is what it means to do politics differently.

The Prime Minister expelled two women from his caucus because they took a stand and defended their principles.

Since when has doing politics differently meant firing the attorney general for protecting our justice system?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will keep working to make life better for Canadians as we continue to respect our institutions and the rule of law, protect jobs, invest in our communities, work toward reconciliation and act on our concrete plan to fight climate change.

Those are all things the Conservatives cannot talk about and do not want to talk about. They have no plan for the environment, no plan for the economy, no plan for gender equality, and no plan for what matters most to Canadians. Petty politics is all they know how to do.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a plan to let women speak.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister ousted two of his former ministers from his caucus for reasons that are unclear and to try to save his image. When the Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie was asked about the Prime Minister's fragile standing in the wake of that decision, she simply said that people are either loyal or they are not.

Since when is telling the truth considered to be disloyal?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for weeks and weeks, we have worked with the two individuals in question to try to find a way to move forward, because we know that the two former members of our caucus agree with the values of reconciliation, economic growth for the middle class and environmental protection. We are still looking to move forward.

However, when it became clear that the relationship of trust between these individuals and the caucus was broken, we could no longer continue to work together as a team. I think everyone can understand that.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when one gains power, one has to actually respect the institutions, respect the voice for 338 ridings that was sent to Parliament, allow for real debate, and have ministers who are actually ministers of their department and not just spokespeople as approved by the PMO.

Who said those words? It was the current Prime Minister, speaking to Maclean's in 2014. How things have changed.

Yesterday, the Prime Minister ordered the expulsion of two former ministers, two women who dared to stand up to him.

Is that how the Prime Minister sees power, as a means to banish anyone who disobeys his orders?

• (1500)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we on this side of the House listen to and respect all voices. However, the member opposite does not seem to have any respect for the voices in our caucus and cabinet talking about the work the government will keep doing to deliver on its commitments for Canadians and to invest in the middle class and in our communities.

We are going to keep working together as a united team with a strong bond of trust. Unfortunately, in the case of the two former members of our caucus, that trust was broken.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the last election campaign, the Liberal Party promised a lot of things, such as enacting electoral reform, ending subsidies for oil companies, increasing international aid, ensuring respect for first nations and reducing tax evasion. Nothing has been done. We were also told they would do politics differently, that they would reduce the role of the Prime Minister's Office. Today we find out that Liberal ministers and MPs have to do the PMO's bidding.

Does the Prime Minister realize that he has lost all credibility and that no one trusts him any more?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were elected on a promise to invest in the middle class and in our communities, and that is exactly what we did.

We are seeing the creation of more than 900,000 jobs across the country and a drop in the unemployment rate to its lowest levels in 40 years. We are seeing one of the strongest growth rates in the G7. We continue to prove that the way to grow the economy is to invest in the middle class.

We will continue to keep the promises we made to Canadians because that is what Canadians expect.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told Canadians that if anyone thought he had done anything wrong on SNC, then it was their responsibility to come forward, but no one did. However, text messages, journal entries and audio recordings prove the former attorney general did come forward and complain to him and his top staff on September 16, 17 and 19, October 26, November 22, and December 5, 18 and 19.

Does he really claim he knew absolutely nothing about the complaints she brought forward in more than half a dozen meetings?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in my direct encounter in a meeting with the former attorney general in September, I confirmed to her that the decision around a DPA was hers and hers alone. That is what has been clear throughout this entire process.

There have been 13 hours of testimony, including four by the former attorney general, allowed for by the fact that we put forward an unprecedented waiver that suspended solicitor-client privilege in this matter, that suspended cabinet confidentiality so she could speak fully to this matter that was being looked at by the justice committee.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at that September meeting, the former attorney general reports that she looked the Prime Minister in the eye and said, "Are you politically interfering with my role...as the Attorney General? I would strongly advise against it."

Does the Prime Minister remember her saying any such thing?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once she said that, I responded, "No, I am not," and said it was her decision to make. She then committed to revisit and look into the decision once again. All these are elements in the testimony we have heard, which the justice committee examined exhaustively.

Once again, we see that the member opposite is desperate to talk about anything other than our budget, anything other than the economic growth we are putting forward, and anything other than our concrete plan to fight climate change, because the Conservatives have no plan on any of that.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now the Prime Minister has caught himself in a trap of his own making. He came out on February 15 and said that no one had come forward to raise any concerns about his conduct. Now he admits on the floor of the House of Commons that way before, in September, his own attorney general asked him to his face if he was interfering.

Why is the Prime Minister having so much difficulty remembering his story? Is it because it is simply not true?

• (1505)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again the member opposite is twisting himself into rhetorical knots to try to make a point that is simply not there.

Oral Questions

We have been crystal clear throughout this process. We have allowed the testimonies to be heard through the justice committee, because of an unprecedented waiver we put forward suspending both cabinet confidentiality and solicitor-client privilege. We very much continue to stand up for our institutions and the rule of law, while always standing up for Canadians and their jobs, right across the country.

We will continue to do that.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, now the Prime Minister has effectively admitted that when he looked 37 million Canadians in the eye on February 15 and told them that the former attorney general had never spoken a word about her concerns, he was stating a patent falsehood. There is a word for that kind of falsehood that I cannot utter on the floor of the House of Commons.

Will the Prime Minister, having now caught himself in his own trap of contradiction and deception, apologize to the Canadian people for stating that falsehood on February 15?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Carleton continues to try to find inconsistencies where there simply are none.

We are going to continue to work together as a government on the things that matter to Canadians, as a strong, united team that is secure in the trust of this team. As we move forward, we are going to stay focused on the things that matter, while the members opposite try to clutch at straws and create political complications where there are none. We are going to stay focused on Canadians, while those members stay focused on us.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Monday marked the 70th anniversary since my province of Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation.

Since 1949, our province has made an invaluable contribution to the social and cultural fabric of our nation. We have seen some unprecedented economic growth and development.

Can the Prime Minister please update this House on the details of the renewed Atlantic Accord with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and how this will benefit every single person in our province?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we thank the member for Long Range Mountains and the Minister of Indigenous Services for their incredible work on securing a strong future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

We were pleased to conclude the renewal of the Atlantic Accord with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have reached a new resource sharing agreement that will create and protect good middle-class jobs. We are going to develop natural resources in the right way. We will set the stage for sustained economic growth for years to come.

This agreement supports a better, more secure future for generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I want to thank everyone involved for their tremendous work.

JUSTICE

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister sent a very clear message yesterday to all Canadians: Liberal members of Parliament are here to do what the Prime Minister says, or else.

The devastating cost for anyone who stands on principle and tells the truth is to be fired, humiliated and discarded.

The Prime Minister holds the highest office in the land. He must serve Canada and defend our democracy, the rule of law and the truth. When will he start living up to the obligations of his office?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we spent weeks working with the former attorney general and others to try to find a path forward to rebuild the links of trust that must exist within a team at any point for it to function.

We took the time to try to find a path forward, and amid many criticisms that we needed to act sooner, we did not. We wanted to demonstrate a different way and a different approach to politics that looks for common ground, that looks for paths forward. Only when it became very clear that there was a broken bond of trust that was not going to be able to be rebuilt did we take—

● (1510)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are watching. What they saw yesterday was two women ministers being shown the door for speaking truth to power, and now the Prime Minister is not willing to answer any questions about the matter.

The only reason the Prime Minister would continue with these non-answers is that the truth is even worse. Canadians deserve to know the truth before they go to the polls in October.

Will the Prime Minister do what is right and call a public inquiry now?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, apparently unlike the member opposite, we have confidence in the work of our House committees. We respect the work that the justice committee did in hearing hours upon hours of testimony, including testimony that was allowed for by the fact that we emitted an unprecedented waiver of both solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidentiality to allow the former attorney general and others to speak fully to the matter under investigation by the justice committee.

That is the kind of openness and transparency that Canadians expect, and that is what we will always stand for.

The Speaker: I am hearing language that could be considered unparliamentary. I would ask members to be cautious about such things.

The hon. member for Bay of Quinte.

*Oral Questions***HOUSING**

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week I was pleased to see that Hastings County will be receiving more than \$1.4 million to help fight homelessness. This funding is part of Canada's first-ever national housing strategy, in which our government committed to reducing chronic homelessness by at least 50% over the next decade.

Could the Prime Minister tell the House how the national housing strategy and reaching home, the government's redesigned homelessness partnering strategy, are helping Canada's most at-risk people find safe, affordable, accessible places to call home?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Bay of Quinte for his hard work for his constituents.

We recognize that one person living in homelessness is one too many. We announced Canada's first-ever national housing strategy and made record investments in housing.

Reaching home, our homelessness partnering strategy, sets ambitious targets and doubles funding to fight homelessness, reducing it by 50% in the coming years. Reaching home makes more communities eligible to receive funding, helps us meet our ambitious targets, and mostly helps vulnerable people across our country.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians watched with disgust when the Liberals stood and applauded as the Prime Minister kicked two MPs out of the Liberal Party for having the audacity to stand up to him and speak truth to power.

The Liberals may have decided there is no greater principle than covering up corruption, but Canadians know better. Throughout this entire affair, the Prime Minister has refused to tell the truth about his involvement in a concerted campaign to interfere in an ongoing criminal investigation.

Why does he not do the honourable thing for once: apologize and resign?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about six months from now, Canadians will have an opportunity to go to the polls and choose what the future of the country will look like. I suspect, from conversations we have had with Canadians, they are going to be making choices around who has a better plan for the economy, who has a real plan to fight climate change, who has a plan for reconciliation with indigenous peoples and who is going to move forward in a way that responds to their real concerns.

The Conservatives promised a plan to fight climate change 339 days ago and still refuse to talk about anything.

* * *

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, today we had 338 Daughters of the Vote delegates take their seats in

the House of Commons. They represented the strength and integrity that Canadians value.

This morning, as we listened to their statements, I was inspired and acutely understood that they get it. They understand the power of their actions, the power of unity and the power of their voice.

I want to encourage them to continue to speak their truth and to continue to stand up for justice. We stand with them.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Whitby for her strong words and her unflagging compassion and passion for bringing Canada forward.

Bringing more women into the political process and our democratic institutions is fundamental if we are to achieve gender equality. That is why the work of Equal Voice and Daughters of the Vote is so timely and crucial. That is why we were proud to invest \$3.8 million in Daughters of the Vote.

I thank Equal Voice and the Daughters of the Vote program for their important work, and I wish great success to all the daughters who are here in Ottawa this week.

• (1515)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon Marcil: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe you will find unanimous consent of the House to move the following motion: that this House acknowledge the 50th anniversary of the expropriation of land from Mirabel residents and that this House call on the government to formally and officially apologize to the people of Quebec from whom the federal government expropriated land in 1969 to build the Mirabel airport.

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

Some hon. members: No.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In a moment, I will be seeking unanimous consent for a motion. As we all know in the House, our canola producers are going through a lot of hardship right now. I hope, because the House has not yet had a chance to voice its opinion on this matter, that all members in the House will join me in giving support to the following motion: That, in the opinion of the House, the government recognize the importance and value of canola as an agricultural crop and do everything in its power to resolve the current trade dispute with China, including (a) ensuring all agricultural business-risk management programs are reviewed and made adaptable to the needs of producers who are suffering because of loss-of-market access; (b) using all diplomatic channels available with the Government of China to press for a speedy resolution; (c) reviewing Canada's current trade deficit with China to ensure we are safeguarding current and future jobs by using all fiscal, legal and other trade options available at Canada's disposal; and (d) diversifying our canola export market.

Routine Proceedings

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

While I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1555)

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

(Division No. 1278)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baylis	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bittle	Blair
Boissonnault	Bossio
Bratina	Breton
Caesar-Chavannes	Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chen	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhalival	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid

Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Gould
Grewal
Hardie
Hehr
Holland
Hussen
Iacono
Jones
Jowhari
Khera
Lametti
Lauson (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
Ludwig
Maloney
May (Cambridge)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Morneau
Murray
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Paradis
Peterson
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Sajjan
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sheehan
Sikand
Sohi
Spengemann
Tan
Vandal
Vaughan
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Young

Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fry
Gameau
Goldsmith-Jones
Graham
Hajdu
Hébert
Hogg
Housefather
Hutchings
Joly
Jordan
Khalid
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lebouthillier
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCrimmon
McGuinity
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Monsef
Morrissey
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Peschisolido
Petitpas Taylor
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Saini
Samson
Sarai
Schiefke
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Simms
Sorbara
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandenbeld
Virani
Wilkinson
Yip
Zahid — 162

NAYS

Members

Albas
Alleslev
Anderson
Arnold
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Benzen
Berthold
Blaikie
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Boucher
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Caron
Choquette
Clement

Cooper
Davidson
Diotte
Dubé
Dusseault
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast
Fortin
Garrison
Gill
Gourde
Harder
Hughes
Johns
Julian
Kent
Kmiec
Lake
Laverdière
Lobb
MacKenzie
Martel
May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McColeman
Motz
Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Pauzé
Poilievre
Rayes
Richards
Schmale
Sopuck
Stanton
Stetski
Stubbs
Thériault
Trost
Van Kesteren
Viersen
Warkentin
Weir
Yurdiga

Cullen
Deltell
Dreeshen
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Eglinski
Falk (Provencher)
Finley
Gallant
Généreux
Godin
Harcastle
Hoback
Jeneroux
Jolibois
Kelly
Kitchen
Kwan
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Lloyd
MacGregor
Maril
Masse (Windsor West)
McCauley (Edmonton West)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Nantel
Nicholson
Obhrai
Paul-Hus
Plamondon
Quach
Reid
Saroya
Shields
Sorenson
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Sweet
Tilson
Trudel
Vecchio
Wagantall
Waugh
Wong
Zimmer— 120

PAIRED

Members

LeBlanc

Moore— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Before the last vote, during the reading of the projected order of business, we unfortunately did not get to the requests for emergency debates. Emergency means emergency. For three days now, the Liberals have been preventing us from getting to requests for emergency debates.

I seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to this important part of the projected order of business and that we be allowed to debate my motion calling on the House to hold an emergency debate on the canola crisis. There are 43,000 canola farmers counting on their members of Parliament. We must debate this motion.

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

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Since the House has been skipping routine proceedings since the beginning of the week, I have not been able to introduce my bill to create a federal youth commissioner position in Canada. I therefore seek unanimous consent to introduce my bill, which will be

Privilege

extremely important in defending the rights of the most vulnerable youth in this country.

● (1600)

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

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: Is the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby rising on the same point of order as the member for Mégantic—L'Érable?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a broader concern.

Both the member for Mégantic—L'Érable and the member for Salaberry—Suroît have pointed out the fact that the government has basically crushed Routine Proceedings now for the last three days. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have not been able to complete Routine Proceedings since March 19. What that means is that members of Parliament are unable to table petitions, unable to table bills and unable to ask for important emergency debates.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to look at this issue and come back to us, because the question is this: How many days are we going to be permitted as members of Parliament to not have the rights that come with being elected to the House of Commons to be able to intervene on these issues?

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby. He knows that I am subject to the Standing Orders and the rules of the House, which is what I have to follow, as he understands completely, I am sure.

I believe the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills wishes to intervene on a previously raised question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE LIBERAL CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to comment on the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington concerning the Liberals' breach of the Parliament of Canada Act. This point of privilege concerns a real breach of members' rights.

How do we know that members' rights were breached? On November 5, 2015, section 49 of the Parliament of Canada Act required Liberal MPs to vote four times. These four votes were to have been recorded, just like votes are recorded here in the House of Commons. One of the recorded votes that did not occur was for the rule concerning caucus expulsions.

On March 21, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood confirmed in an article in the Toronto Star, written by Tonda MacCharles, that with respect to the four votes required, “Nothing like that ever happens in caucus”.

This point of privilege is timely, because that confirmation that these recorded votes did not happen was reported on March 21 in the Toronto Star, only three parliamentary days ago.

Privilege

When the Prime Minister and his leadership team prevented Liberal MPs from exercising their rights under section 49.8, he and his leadership team violated the rights of members in three ways, the Liberal members in particular. First, the Prime Minister deprived members of their right to vote four times in a recorded manner under section 49.8. Second, in depriving members of their right to vote in a recorded manner for those four different rules, the Prime Minister deprived members of the opportunity to adopt the rule in section 49.2 concerning caucus expulsions. In other words, the Prime Minister deprived members of their right to determine a caucus expulsion on a secret ballot vote. Third, in denying members their right to vote and adopt the expulsion rule in section 49.2, the Prime Minister denied members being considered for expulsion the right to a fair process, one that is not ad hoc and arbitrary.

Section 49.2 lays out a clear process for expulsion, and the bar is set very high. First, at least 20% of caucus, in this case some 36 members of Parliament, would have to have written to the caucus chair requesting an expulsion vote. Second, a majority of the entire caucus, not just a majority of members present, would have to have voted in favour of expulsion on a secret ballot vote. In other words, since the Liberal caucus had 179 members, that means that at least 90 Liberal members would have to have voted for expulsion on a secret ballot vote. If only 120 members showed up, 90 votes were still required.

Now, this question is even more relevant in light of the caucus expulsions yesterday of the hon. members for Markham—Stouffville and Vancouver Granville.

[*Translation*]

Last night, the Prime Minister stated on national television that he had taken the decision to expel the hon. members.

[*English*]

He added that he met with those members “to inform them of my decision.” These words are important for your consideration, Mr. Speaker, to underscore that it should not be the Prime Minister’s decision to make. MPs are not accountable to the leader. The leader is accountable to MPs. It is a vital part of the confidence convention of the House. In fact, it is so important that parts of it were taken from unwritten convention into statute law in the last Parliament. The rights of members to hold party leaders and the Prime Minister accountable are so important that the previous Parliament took some of these unwritten constitutional conventions governing party caucuses and enshrined them in the Parliament of Canada Act.

On December 5, 2015, you were called to the chair as our Speaker through a vote in the House. It also means that you, Mr. Speaker, were an active member of the Liberal caucus when the events in question took place on November 5, 2015. With the greatest respect, there could be, at minimum, an appearance of a conflict of interest for the Speaker. Automatically finding a prima facie case of a breach of privilege and sending this matter to the House as a whole for its consideration is one way for you, as Speaker, to have absolution in any potential conflict of interest.

Secret in-camera meetings, whether they are of committees or of the recognized caucuses of the House of Commons, should be no shield to prevent the upholding of the rule of law and members’

rights. You, Mr. Speaker, are the only person in this land who can defend these rights of members. We have no recourse to the judicial branch of the state. We have no recourse to a place outside the House of Commons. You, sir, are our defender of our rights, and I ask that you find a prima facie case of a breach of privilege.

• (1605)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, although it sounded to me like he was getting close to challenging the authority of the Chair. It is a tricky area. I understand what he is saying. I, of course, will endeavour to examine these questions in total fairness.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, I rise to add to the very same point of privilege.

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills has thoroughly explained how the Parliament of Canada Act applies to expulsion from caucus. The federal NDP leader expelled me from caucus without written notice and without a vote, so that evidence should also be considered in your ruling on this point of privilege.

The context for my expulsion was that another member of the House suggested that I was involved in some unspecified harassing behaviour. No complaints were ever brought forward against me under the House of Commons anti-harassment policy. No complaints were ever brought forward against me through the NDP staff union. Instead, the federal NDP leader invented his own process and appointed his own investigator.

It is very important to consider the Parliament of Canada Act in this case. It sets out a clear procedure for expulsion from caucus. Whether that procedure applies in the given caucus is to be determined by a vote of that caucus at its first meeting after the election. No such votes were held by the NDP caucus at its first meeting after the election. In fact, no such votes were held by the NDP caucus at any of its meetings in 2015. We cannot conclude that the federal NDP leader had the unilateral authority to expel me or anyone else from caucus.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. I want to support fully the point brought forward by the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills. Those of us who were in the 41st Parliament will recall that the initial version of the member’s private member’s bill put forward as the Reform Act would have been far more forceful in reducing the extraordinary powers party leaders have achieved by the accretion of privileges and powers over a couple of decades, which I believe are inconsistent with Westminster parliamentary privileges and our process.

As your role is to protect the rights of individual members of Parliament, this opportunity is before us to strengthen our understanding, as the member for Wellington—Halton Hills said, that members of caucus are not accountable to their leader; the leader is accountable to members of that caucus. The individual right of members of Parliament in this place not to be put upon by party leadership needs to be fortified. This is such an opportunity. It is simply wrong for political parties to say, at the end of an election, “Well, that bill was passed under Conservatives, so we do not like it.”

The Budget

The Parliament of Canada Act is the law of the land. It was passed, and it should be respected. The situation with the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan and the situation for the hon. member for Markham—Stouffville and the hon. member for Vancouver Granville should be about the rights of individual members of Parliament not to have their rights put upon without due process and without following the Parliament of Canada Act, at a minimum. This is hard. I would rather that this was not a partisan issue, but everything in this place is.

• (1610)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to confirm, as dean of the NDP caucus, that we did follow the Parliament of Canada Act, as prescribed by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND PARLIAMENTARY
SECRETARY TO MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in light of a document published last night. It is a new document that is relevant to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby on March 18, concerning question period responses on February 7 and 8.

Last evening, the hon. member for Markham—Stouffville published a statement concerning her shocking and troubling expulsion from the Liberal caucus for the sole offence of speaking truth to power. Our strong principled and hon. colleague wrote:

Rather than acknowledge the obvious — that a range of individuals had inappropriately attempted to pressure the former Attorney General in relation to a prosecutorial decision — and apologize for what occurred, a decision was made to attempt to deny the obvious — to attack [the hon. member for Vancouver Granville's] credibility and attempt to blame her.

I was not able to support the recommended response to deny these allegations.

You will, of course, Mr. Speaker, recall the denial of those allegations in the House. For example, the new Attorney General told the House on February 7, “As the Prime Minister has said, earlier today, these allegations in *The Globe and Mail* are false.”

The following day his parliamentary secretary insisted, “As the Prime Minister said very clearly yesterday to the journalists gathered, the allegations contained in *The Globe and Mail* article are false.”

We now know from the admission of the hon. member for Markham—Stouffville, who was at all material times a senior member of the federal cabinet, that this was just a government position to be taken and defended.

Someone in an even more senior government position than the President of the Treasury Board directed and orchestrated this campaign to deny and mislead the House of Commons. Yesterday, the hon. member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands referred to Speaker Jerome's ruling on December 6, 1978. I refer to that ruling, at page 1856 of the Debates:

The complaint which is the subject matter of the question of privilege is not directly a complaint about the minister. Indeed, it is founded on the fact that it is one of the minister's officials who has calculated to contrive this deliberate deception of the House....I have come to the conclusion that it is not a procedural basis upon which I can intervene. Once again, it is a matter to which the House can address itself in debate, and in amendment if necessary, or in a vote.

At page 1857, the Chair concluded:

I can interpret that testimony in no other way than meaning that a deliberate attempt was made to obstruct the member in the performance of his duties and, consequently, to obstruct the House itself.

Even beyond the precedents and the complex law of privilege, I cannot conceive that there is any one of us who would accept the argument that this House of Commons has no recourse in the face of such an attempt to obstruct by offering admittedly misleading information.

I, therefore, find a prima facie case of contempt against the House of Commons.

The House has also, in the present case, been misled and thereby obstructed. It does not matter whether the Attorney General and his parliamentary secretary knowingly misled the House or were unwittingly parroting the talking points they were ordered to say

The former president of the treasury board has confirmed that there was a “recommended response to deny these allegations.” As to who is responsible for this decision to deny the allegations and therefore lie to Parliament, that is a matter which a committee, if its Liberal majority will allow a proper investigation, can sort out for us.

To quote Mr. Speaker Milliken's ruling on October 15, 2001, at page 6085 of the Debates:

There is a body that is well equipped to commit acts of inquisition, and that is the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which has a fearsome chairman, quite able to extract information from witnesses who appear before the committee, with the aid of the capable members who form that committee of the House.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, that you find a prima facie case in respect of the NDP house leader's question of privilege, so the House can begin to get to the bottom of this campaign, this “recommended response” to mislead the House of Commons.

• (1615)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope for adding his thoughts on this. I will come back to the House in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from April 2 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to address the cover-up budget.

The Prime Minister attempted to cover up his SNC-Lavalin corruption by introducing \$41 billion of new cash spending to paper over the wrongdoing that his former attorney general brought to light in her very courageous whistle-blowing over the last several months.

Privilege

Today I rise to address one specific element of that cover-up, and that is the Prime Minister's repeated false statements to the Canadian people wherein he suggested that former attorney general had never brought any of her concerns to his attention prior to being moved out of the role of attorney general. His implication was that she was making the allegations against him out of sour grapes, that he really had done nothing wrong in interfering with SNC-Lavalin's criminal prosecution, but that the former attorney general had suddenly concocted a story about him after he moved her out of her dream job, and therefore she should not be believed.

Allow me to quote what the Prime Minister said to the Canadian people at a press conference on February 15. He said, "If anyone", including the former attorney general, had issues with anything they might have experienced in the government, or did not feel that the government was living up to the high standards it set for itself, "it was her responsibility to come forward", it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did. Text messages, journal entries and audio recordings now prove the former attorney general did come forward, literally dozens of times, to the Prime Minister and his inner circle.

Let me go through the chronology of her whistle-blowing.

On September 16, 2018, there was a phone conversation between the Prime Minister's staff members, Mathieu Bouchard, Elder Marques, and the former attorney general's chief of staff, Jessica Prince. This is from the testimony of the former attorney general:

My chief of staff had a phone call with Mathieu Bouchard and Elder Marques from the Prime Minister's Office.

They said that they understand that there are limits on what can be done, and that they can't direct, but that they hear that our deputy of justice thinks we can get the PPSC to say "we think we should get some outside advice on this."

In response, my chief of staff stressed to them prosecutorial independence and potential concerns about the interference in the independence of the prosecutorial functions.

In other words, at that moment, in early September, the minister's staff did communicate to the Prime Minister's staff that what they were asking for would constitute "interference in the independence of the prosecutorial function."

That is the first piece of evidence I introduce, disproving the Prime Minister's claim when he said that it was her responsibility to come forward, that it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did.

The next day, on September 17, 2018, the former attorney general came forward in person to the Prime Minister and to the Clerk of the Privy Council. From her testimony, we have:

This same day, September 17, I had my one-on-one meeting with the Prime Minister that I requested a couple of weeks earlier. When I walked in, the Clerk of the Privy Council was in attendance as well. While the meeting was not about the issue of SNC and DPAs, the Prime Minister raised the issue immediately.

● (1620)

She goes on to state:

I further stated that I was very clear on my role as the Attorney General, and that I am not prepared to issue a directive in this case, that it would not be appropriate.... At that point, the Prime Minister jumped in, stressing that there is an election in Quebec and that "and I am an MP in Quebec—the member for Papineau."

She went on:

I was quite taken aback. My response—and I vividly remember this as well—was to ask the Prime Minister a direct question, while looking him in the eye. I asked, "Are you politically interfering with my role/my decision as the Attorney General? I would strongly advise against it."

I have heard members across the way yell out that it is mere hearsay. In fact, today we learned it was not hearsay. In direct questioning of the Prime Minister, I asked him if this exchange occurred, and he confirmed that it did. In other words, he says, now, today, that back on September 17, the former attorney general did raise concerns about him "politically interfering with her role as attorney general" and that she also "strongly advised against it". He admits now that she said that to him in September.

How is it then that he stood before 37 million Canadians in February and said that no one came forward with any concerns whatsoever? That is what he said. It was her responsibility to come forward. It was their responsibility to come forward and no one did.

She did and he now admits it, so it is no longer he-said-she-said. She said it and he now confirmed it. It is impossible to reconcile the Prime Minister's admission today that the former attorney general spoke those words to him in September with his public statement in February that she had never once raised any problem with him. Here we have it clear as day that she did, and he now admits that she did.

On September 19, there were conversations between the former attorney general and the current finance minister. She said in her testimony:

Still on September 19, I spoke to [the finance minister] on this matter when we were in the House [of Commons]...and I told him that engagements from his office—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am sorry to interrupt. The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE LIBERAL CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry for the interruption. I do just need to add briefly to what I said previously on the question of privilege.

In response, the member for Windsor West rose to reassure the House that the NDP caucus did follow the Parliament of Canada Act with respect to adopting or rejecting the model rules, including the one for expulsion from caucus.

I want to clearly put on record that what the act says is that each party caucus needs to hold four recorded ballot votes on each of those model rules at its first meeting after the election. The NDP caucus did not hold votes, let alone recorded ballot votes, on those model rules at its first meeting after the election or at any of its meetings in 2015.

Rather than just generally suggesting compliance with the act, it would be necessary for the member for Windsor West, or another member, to suggest that they remember actually holding recorded ballot votes at the first meeting following the election. I note that claim has not been made.

The Budget

● (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): We will take that under consideration.

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Child Care; the hon. member for Vancouver East, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; the hon. member for Sherbrooke, Canada Revenue Agency.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Carleton.

* * *

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had just finished telling the House that the Prime Minister admitted today that in fact the former attorney general did raise concerns about political interference in the SNC-Lavalin affair to his face in September, which contradicted his claim in February that she had never once raised any such concern.

Now I will move on to another instance in which she also rang the alarm bell about the government's political interference in her role as Attorney General in the SNC-Lavalin criminal prosecution. In her testimony, she said, "Still on September 19, I spoke to [the Minister of Finance] on this matter when we were in the House...and I told him that engagements from his office to mine on SNC had to stop, that they were inappropriate."

The Prime Minister and the government might try to deny that this conversation occurred. However, unfortunately for them, the former attorney general has now released text messages from the finance minister's chief of staff in which he confirms that the minister told him about the former attorney general's concerns. He relayed news of that conversation to Jessica Prince, the chief of staff to the former attorney general.

In other words, we know for a fact, based on the admission of the finance minister's chief of staff, that the former attorney general did raise concerns about inappropriate engagements from his office to hers on SNC, and that those engagements "had to stop". That further contradicts the Prime Minister's claim from February, when he said, "It was her responsibility to come forward, it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did".

Then, on October 26, there was a conversation between Jessica Prince, who was the former attorney general's chief of staff, and Mathieu Bouchard, senior adviser to the Prime Minister. The former attorney general noted in her testimony:

However, on October 26, 2018, when my chief of staff spoke to Mathieu Bouchard, [the Prime Minister's senior adviser], and communicated to him that, given that SNC had now filed in Federal Court seeking to review the DPP's decision, surely we had moved past the idea of the Attorney General intervening or getting an opinion on the same question, Mathieu replied that he was still interested in an external legal opinion idea. Could she not get an external legal opinion on whether the DPP had exercised their discretion properly, and then on the application itself, the

Attorney General could intervene and seek to stay the proceedings, given that she was awaiting a legal opinion?

The former attorney general then noted, "My chief of staff said that this would obviously be perceived as interference and her boss questioning the DPP's decision."

This is another incident in which the chief of staff to the former attorney general told senior staff members in the Prime Minister's Office that what they were asking for would constitute, or at least be perceived as, interference. That further contradicts the Prime Minister's claim that "It was her responsibility to come forward, it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did."

Then, of course, we have the meeting on November 22 between the former attorney general and two senior staff members from the Prime Minister's Office, about which the former attorney general testified:

In mid-November, the PMO requested that I meet with Mathieu Bouchard and Elder Marques to discuss the matter, which I did on November 22. This meeting was quite long; I would say about an hour and a half. I was irritated by having to have this meeting, as I had already told the Prime Minister, etc., that a DPA on SNC was not going to happen, that I was not going to issue a directive. Mathieu, in this meeting, did most of the talking. He was trying to tell me that there were options and that I needed to find a solution. I took them through the DPP Act, section 15 and section 10, and talked about the prosecutorial independence as a constitutional principle, and that they were interfering. I talked about the section 13 note, which they said they had never received, but I reminded them that we sent it to them in September.

● (1630)

She went on:

Mathieu and Elder continued to plead their case, talking about if I'm not sure in my decision, that we could hire an eminent person to advise me. They were kicking the tires. I said no. My mind had been made up and they needed to stop. This was enough.

Yet again she had warned the Prime Minister's staff that their involvement in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin needed to stop, that this was enough.

This is another piece of evidence, I believe backed up by journal entries and perhaps even text messages that followed, that demonstrates that the former attorney general did warn the Prime Minister and his team that they were acting inappropriately, in contradiction to the Prime Minister's public statement later on, wherein he stated, "it was her responsibility to come forward, it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did." Of course she did.

Then, on December 5, the former attorney general came forward yet again, in a meeting between herself and Gerald Butts, the Prime Minister's most senior adviser. This is from her testimony. She stated:

On December 5, 2018, I met with Gerry Butts. We had both sought out this meeting. I wanted to speak about a number of things, including bringing up SNC and the barrage of people hounding me and my staff. Towards the end of our meeting, which was in the Château Laurier, I raised how I needed everybody to stop talking to me about SNC, as I had made up my mind and the engagements were inappropriate.

The Budget

Again we have the former attorney general specifically and clearly complaining about inappropriate engagements and that “everybody”, meaning the Prime Minister’s team, needed to “stop talking to me about SNC”. However, knowing this, the Prime Minister went in front of 37 million Canadians at a press conference and claimed the former attorney general had never come forward with any of her complaints about his and his team’s conduct in the SNC-Lavalin corruption prosecution.

Then again on December 18, in a meeting between the former attorney general’s chief of staff and the Prime Minister’s two top assistants, Gerry Butts and Katie Telford, she stated:

On December 18, 2018, my chief of staff was urgently summoned to a meeting with Gerry Butts and Katie Telford to discuss SNC.

She recounts the text messages she received from her chief of staff about that meeting—text messages, I might add, that she has now released to the public and to Parliament. One message said:

Basically, they want a solution. Nothing new. They want external counsel retained to give you an opinion on whether you can review the DPP’s decision here and whether you should in this case.... I told them that would be interference. Gerry said, ‘Jess, there is no solution here that does not involve some interference.’

Once again, a senior staff member in the former attorney general’s office said to the top staff in the Prime Minister’s office that what they were doing would constitute “interference”, yet the Prime Minister—and I know I am repeating myself on this particular quote—despite this fact, went on national television and looked 37 million Canadians in the eye and claimed that if the former attorney general had any complaints or concerns about his involvement in the SNC-Lavalin prosecution, “it was her responsibility to come forward, it was their responsibility to come forward, and non one did.”

Then, on December 19, she did come forward again. She did this in her telephone call with Michael Wernick, the Prime Minister’s top public servant. I am going to read a few excerpts.

She said this of the Prime Minister’s conduct and the conduct of people around him, “It is entirely inappropriate and it is political interference.”

She said as well:

So we are treading on dangerous ground here—and I am going to issue my stern warning, because I cannot act in a manner and the prosecution cannot act in a manner that is not objective, that isn’t independent. I cannot act in a partisan way. I cannot be politically motivated. All of this screams of that.”

●(1635)

She said, “This is going to look like nothing but political interference by the Prime Minister, by you, by everybody else that has been involved in this politically pressuring me to do this.”

She said, “Does [the Prime Minister] understand the gravity of what this potentially could mean? This is not about saving jobs. This is about interfering with one of our fundamental institutions. This is about breaching the constitutional principle of prosecutorial independence.”

This is what she said of having to report back to the Prime Minister: “I hope that you do, because I do not think anybody respects this. This conversation that Gerry and Katie had with my

chief of staff and I have it, like she wrote down what was said. Saying that they do not want to hear any more about the legalities but want to talk about jobs is entirely inappropriate.”

In fact, in that now infamous telephone conversation that has been recorded and made available for all ears to hear, the former attorney general said the term “interference” no less than nine times. The Clerk of the Privy Council responded by saying, “All right. Well, I’m going to have to report back before [the Prime Minister] leaves.”

In other words, the Clerk of the Privy Council said that he was going to report back to the Prime Minister on the contents of his conversation with the former attorney general, a conversation that the Prime Minister has used weasel words to avoid admitting he ever knew about it.

It is funny that after this audio recording came out, the Prime Minister swiftly said that he had not been briefed on the full contents of the conversation until the recording came out. Well, nobody is asking if he was briefed on the full contents of the conversation. People are never briefed on the full contents of any conversation. The question was whether he knew about the call before, during, or after it.

Today the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister precisely that question over and over again, and not once did the Prime Minister answer it.

This is important, because it once again speaks to the credibility of the Prime Minister’s claim in February at that famous press conference, where he denied that the former attorney general had ever raised any concerns about his political interference in the SNC-Lavalin criminal prosecution. We now know that the former attorney general again and again raised these concerns.

We know she did so because text messages, journal entries and audio recordings prove it. They include documents, recordings, text messages from September 16, September 17, September 19, October 26, November 22, December 5, December 18, December 19.

Would the Prime Minister have us believe that he did not know about any of the warnings that she and her staff made to his top personnel and ultimately to him on these more than half a dozen occasions? It is entirely unbelievable that he did know that she had spoken out when he went before the Canadian people and claimed that she had not spoken out.

Let me reiterate what I have just gone through here. It is the number of times the former attorney general did come forward.

I will explain why I am going to give this list. It is because the Prime Minister said that if anyone thought he had done something wrong on SNC, “it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did.”

The Budget

•(1640)

Well, she did on all of these occasions: September 16, 2018, in a phone conversation with the PMO staff in which she raised the problem; September 17, 2018, in a meeting with the Prime Minister and the clerk; September 19, in a phone conversation between the PMO top staff and the former attorney general's top staff; September 19, again, in conversations between the former attorney general and the finance minister; October 26, in conversations between the chief of staff to the former attorney general, Jessica Prince, and the senior adviser to the Prime Minister; November 22, in a meeting between the former attorney general and two top advisers to the Prime Minister; December 5, in meetings between the former attorney general and Gerald Butts at the Chateau Laurier; December 18, in meetings between Jessica Prince, Gerald Butts and the Prime Minister's chief of staff; and, of course, December 19 in that famous and recorded phone call.

In all of those cases, she came forward and spoke up about the Prime Minister's personal and political interference in the SNC-Lavalin corruption trial. Despite all of those times when she sounded the alarm bell, the Prime Minister stood before all Canadians and said she had never once raised a concern about this matter while she was attorney general. It was a patent falsehood. He looked Canadians straight in the eye and told them something he knew or ought to have known was completely false. He did so in an attempt to discredit his former attorney general because she, of course, had demonstrated that he had personally and politically interfered in a manner inappropriate with the criminal prosecution of a Liberal-linked corporation accused of fraud and bribery.

This raises a number of important questions. Can we trust anything the Prime Minister says when he stands before Canadians and says anything at all?

The answer comes from the fact that he contradicts his own words on matters of national importance. These are not minor mistakes. He made the false statements that I have just discredited, at a press conference on a massive national controversy where he knew everybody would be watching him. We have to wonder the degree of mendacity that must consume this man that he would be capable of doing that, and the degree of incompetence that must reside in him given that the former attorney general made clear that she had documentary evidence backing up her claims. The Prime Minister ought to have known at the time he stood forward and made that comment to Canadians that the former attorney general would want to step forward and validate her claims using the text messages and other personal notes that she had kept throughout the four-month campaign when he and his team were pressuring her.

I have just spent 25 minutes thoroughly disproving the Prime Minister's February 15 press conference statement and showing that he made statements that he knew were false in respect of the former attorney general's earlier complaints about his role in the SNC affair. Let me move on to another falsehood that has been exposed.

•(1645)

In February when the Prime Minister was first accused of politically pressuring his former attorney general, in a Globe and Mail article by Bob Fife and Steve Chase, he immediately came out and said the story was false and there was nothing more to it. We

now know through 41 pages of evidence, some of which I have relayed in the House of Commons, that his denial was false. In fact, the pressure existed and it was real. Now members on the front bench of the Liberal government no longer even deny that the former attorney general was pressured. They have now moved the goalposts and just claim that the pressure was not illegal, but that in itself is a very big change in their position.

The PMO issued statements in the 48 hours following the Fife-Chase story, in which it flatly denied pressuring the former attorney general. It denied it altogether. Now Liberals tacitly admit that they did so and do not even contest the former attorney general's validated claims that they contacted her at least 20 times, directly or through her staff, in order to get her to change her position on the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin in its fraud and bribery case. That is a second contradiction.

Let me move now to a third contradiction. In that famous September 17 meeting the Prime Minister had with the former attorney general, he twice told her that she had to immediately act to signal a willingness to negotiate a deferred prosecution agreement with SNC-Lavalin or the company would announce within weeks that its headquarters would leave Montreal. He and the Clerk of the Privy Council, along with others in the top levels of the Prime Minister's inner circle, made it clear that she had mere days to do this or the headquarters move would be announced. They even said that it would be announced before the Quebec election. That election was only days away.

We know a number of things about that claim. One is that the company has not since announced it will move its headquarters absent a deferred prosecution agreement. In fact, the headquarters remains in Montreal and no public announcement to the contrary has been made. Two is that the company cannot move its headquarters out of Montreal because it has a \$1.5-billion loan agreement with the Quebec pension plan requiring that it remain in that city until the year 2024.

Three is that it just signed a 20-year lease on its building in Montreal and announced a multi-million dollar renovation to the headquarters to accommodate its thousands of Montreal-area employees. A company does not do purpose renovations for its employees and then get up and move. It is a waste of money.

Four is that moving the SNC-Lavalin headquarters out of Montreal would not in any way limit the company's criminal liability in the charges of fraud and bribery. Those charges would go ahead no matter whether the headquarters of SNC-Lavalin were located in London; Washington; Sydney, Australia; or Kalamazoo. At the end of the day, the trial would happen no less. It is not like an individual bank-robbing fugitive, who skips the country and vanishes into the Bermuda Triangle, never to be prosecuted. The company is facing prosecution no matter where its headquarters is. Therefore, the Prime Minister's claim that it would move was never sensible at all.

The Budget

•(1650)

Five is that the CEO of SNC-Lavalin has said, in an interview on the Business News Network, that he never threatened that the headquarters of the company would leave if the prosecution proceeded. Finally, we know that any damage to the company's reputation as a result of a conviction would be similarly severe if the company signed on to a deferred prosecution agreement, because signing said agreement would require SNC to admit to egregious criminal acts of fraud and bribery. Doing so through a criminal conviction or doing so through an admission in such an agreement would have an equally large impact on the company's reputation. Therefore, signing an agreement would not in any way, shape or form protect the company's headquarters in Montreal, as the Prime Minister falsely claimed.

It is interesting that when I asked the Prime Minister in the House of Commons whether he had told the former attorney general that the headquarters would move, he denied having said so. The problem with that denial, and here we have yet another falsehood, is that he had repeated the false claim that SNC would move out of Montreal and Canada altogether at his famous February 15 press conference. In other words, he is making this false claim not just to her face but to all Canadians and, therefore, cannot deny having made it at all. That is yet another false statement that the Prime Minister and his office have made in this entire affair.

I just listed three falsehoods that the Prime Minister has uttered in respect of his involvement in trying to halt the charges against SNC-Lavalin for fraud and corruption. That does not even take into consideration the falsehoods his staff members have stated. Gerald Butts came before the justice committee and said that if they were doing anything wrong why were they not having this conversation in September, October, November and December. However, all of the documentary evidence shows they were having exactly that conversation in September, October, November and December. Text messages show that they were having that conversation in September, October, November and December. By his own admission, he had that conversation with the former attorney general at the Château Laurier lounge in December.

The Prime Minister has admitted that he attended meetings with the former attorney general where she raised her objections, in September. We have text messages showing that the conversation was happening in the two middle months of October and November. In other words, Gerald Butts' statement that they were not having that conversation in those four months was just patently false, and proven false now by evidence. It is not hearsay, but evidence such as text messages, journal entries and of course we now have heard the audio of the conversation in December with the Clerk of the Privy Council.

The fact that Gerald Butts felt no compunction about going before a parliamentary committee and stating such a patent falsehood just speaks to how liberally the government and its most senior members are prepared to dispense with the truth in order to defend themselves in this corruption scandal.

•(1655)

If a prime minister and members of his inner sanctum are prepared to contradict themselves and state easily disprovable falsehoods over

and over again, is that really the behaviour of someone who has nothing to hide?

If it is, if they in fact have nothing to hide, then why will they not let us conduct a full investigation? Why do we not take all the names of the people who appear in those text messages, which are now in the possession of the House of Commons, and bring them before a parliamentary committee to question them on their alleged interference in the SNC-Lavalin corruption trial?

If the Prime Minister is so confident that he and his team did nothing wrong or illegal, why would he not let the sunshine in? After all, during the campaign, he said that sunshine was the best disinfectant, or as he called it, plagiarizing Laurier, "Sunny ways, my friends. Sunny ways."

Let us open up the curtains in the ethics committee and let the sunshine and the warm glow pour in, and let us see what we find when all the dark corners are lit up. So far, the Prime Minister has refused to allow the sunshine in. He shut down the justice committee and he shut down the ethics committee, so we have a justice committee with no justice and an ethics committee with no ethics.

That being said, I have some hope that this investigation may well resume, and I base that on the comments of two Liberal MPs who are members of the ethics committee. Two members have stated that the reason they were initially against having an ethics committee investigation into the SNC-Lavalin affair was that it would be premature. We needed to see all the documentary evidence. At that time, it had not been tabled with the House of Commons.

Well, now it has. The documents came to all of us on Friday evening. We have now had an opportunity to read through the plethora of text messages, journal entries and written accounts, and of course we have all listened to the famous audio tape. Now that we have seen all the evidence that is available so far, those two Liberal MPs who claimed that the investigation was premature can put their minds at ease and allow that investigation to go ahead.

What more could we find if we did such an investigation? One, we could find out why the Prime Minister stated falsely that the former attorney general had never raised any concerns about his interference in the SNC-Lavalin affair. Two, we could find out if someone lied to the former attorney general in order to try to get her to shelve the criminal prosecution, itself potentially a crime under section 139 of the Criminal Code. Three, we could find out if the shuffle of the former attorney general out of her position was specifically designed to allow for SNC-Lavalin to get a deferred prosecution agreement. I will pause on this point for a moment.

Let us examine the state of play in SNC-Lavalin's quest to have its corruption charges shelved. Under the former attorney general, its quest had failed. She had considered whether or not it would be appropriate to overturn the top prosecutor and instruct that a deal with SNC-Lavalin go ahead to shelve the trial, and she had decided that it was not appropriate.

The Budget

• (1700)

Her mind was made up, something we see in the conversations that were recorded, the text messages that were sent and the other written evidence that has since been provided. In other words, under the former attorney general, SNC-Lavalin's request to have the charges shelved was denied.

The current Attorney General, the person who replaced the outgoing justice minister, has now said he is open to the idea of granting a deferred prosecution agreement.

The cabinet shuffle caused a material change in the state of play. With respect to SNC's desire to have a deal shelving charges, we have gone from a "no" under the former attorney general to a "maybe" under the current Attorney General.

Whether or not the Prime Minister wants to deny that was his intention, it is the result of the shuffle. There is absolutely no doubt that the status of a possible deferred prosecution agreement for SNC-Lavalin has changed as a result of the cabinet shuffle. The door was slammed shut under the former attorney general. The door is now open under the current Attorney General.

We need to know if the current Attorney General received any instructions on this matter before he got the appointment. Did the Prime Minister, or more likely a member of his staff or inner circle, communicate to the incoming Attorney General or those around him that his role as the top law officer of the Crown would involve extending a settlement to SNC-Lavalin?

If the answer is yes, then we would know that the purpose of the shuffle was precisely to get a special deal for this powerful Liberal-linked corporation. That was the theory that the outgoing attorney general had in her mind. She has since written in her letter to the justice committee that she was planning to resign as veterans affairs minister if the incoming attorney general decided to impose a settlement to shelve the charges against SNC-Lavalin. She believed, as she said numerous times to the Prime Minister's inner circle at the time of the shuffle, that she knew why she was being moved. The reason was that she believed the Prime Minister was determined to see this Liberal-linked company get out of a trial, and she was not prepared to do it.

If she is right, then the corollary of that fact is likely that the incoming Attorney General was willing to grant a settlement to the company. Canadians need to know that.

Here is the real and serious risk to the rule of law going forward. Even if we forget about the abuses that might have happened in the past, it is highly possible and maybe even probable that the Prime Minister plans to use his new and more malleable Attorney General to issue a settlement, shelving the SNC-Lavalin fraud and bribery charges right after the next election.

• (1705)

If the Prime Minister plans once again to interfere politically and have his Attorney General issue a written directive to the top prosecutor, instructing her to shelve the charges and sign a deal with this company, then Canadians should know about it before they go to the polls.

I am prepared to make an announcement, if I can be so bold, about the approach Conservatives would take in this matter. I can state confidently that if the current Conservative leader is made prime minister in October, he will not direct his attorney general, whomever he or she may be, to interfere and shelve the criminal charges that SNC-Lavalin faces. Canadians can know that. He has stated very clearly that he will not politically and personally interfere to extend a deal to SNC-Lavalin.

They do not know that about the current Prime Minister. He and his current Attorney General are leaving open the possibility, amazingly so, that they may still politically interfere in this trial. That is the astonishing thing. Let us just behold that for a moment.

After the two months that the Prime Minister has had, one would think the approach he would take to putting this to rest would be to say definitively to Canadians that he is out of this, that he is not going to get involved ever again in a criminal prosecution. To the contrary, he is saying exactly the opposite. He is saying that his current Attorney General may still interfere in the trial, that he may write a letter to the top prosecutor requiring that the prosecutor extend a settlement to the company. That would be a gross miscarriage of justice. Let us think about that.

If a homeless person is charged with stealing a loaf of bread, that person does not have the ability to knock on the door of the Prime Minister's Office and ask, "Can you make the judge go light on me? Could you ask the Crown prosecutor to drop the charges and sign a deal where I just apologize and give back the stolen bread?" If it does not work that way for a homeless man, why should it work that way for a powerful, multi-billion dollar, Liberal-linked corporation?

If we live in a country where corporations have the ability to buy justice with wads of cash paid to lobbyists, those lobbyists can swarm all over Parliament Hill like flies on honey and influence the Prime Minister to step in and let the corporation off. If that is really the way the Prime Minister wants to administer the justice system in this country, we should know about it before the election, so that Canadians can consider it in their vote.

In other words, this is not just about holding the government accountable for what it has already done. This is about giving Canadians all of the information about what the government might yet do.

If the Prime Minister thinks he can defend the possibility of having his Attorney General get this company off trial, then he should go on the campaign trail and say so. He should go from one end of the country to the other and tell people that. He should go to Montreal and talk to the people who have been robbed by this company and its executives in the bribery affair at the Jacques Cartier Bridge, or at the McGill University Health Centre, another instance of bribery.

The Budget

• (1710)

More than that, the next time he is in Africa, he should go to Libya and go into the streets of the ghettos where the people live in squalor. He should tell the people there that he has no problem granting special deals to the company that is alleged to have stolen \$130 million of their money, because that is the allegation before us here. Some have tried to trivialize it by saying that it was just Gadhafi getting yachts and prostitutes from this Canadian corporation. They say it was just a victimless crime, and therefore it is better to settle the matter and avoid a messy trial. That is the argument we hear from proponents of a so-called deferred prosecution agreement for SNC-Lavalin. However, it was not a victimless crime. It was wretched, parasitical corruption that robbed the people of Libya of \$130 million. These are among the poorest people in the world. They do not have \$130 million to spare. If that kind of wretched corruption is not deserving of prosecution in a criminal court, then I do not know what is.

Furthermore, this is not a case of a few bad apples making a small mistake and the company finding out and reporting that mistake. Rather, the company had to be caught. It was only when Swiss authorities found out about some of the corruption and prosecuted one of SNC's perpetrators that the RCMP got wind of the matter and began its own investigation, which resulted in the charges roughly four years ago.

It was not that the company was so honest and so pure in trying to expel from its midst these bad apples that it came forward and fessed up and tried to make it right. No, it had to be caught, just like it had to be caught in the bribery case of Jacques Cartier Bridge, the bribery case of Montreal, and criminal allegations that have surfaced with respect to the company in Mexico, in Panama, in Switzerland, in Libya, and God knows where else. This is a company with a track record of systemic corruption at the highest levels. The former CEO has pleaded guilty to bribery. We are not just talking about a few small bad apples who played junior roles in faraway lands. It is a problem of systemic corruption, top to bottom, through and through.

This is going to be on the ballot in the next election. Canadians will have to decide whether they think it is appropriate for a prime minister to personally and politically interfere to shelve criminal charges of fraud and bribery against a powerful party-linked company like this one. That is one of the reasons we need the ethics committee to get all the facts now, before Canadians vote. If the Prime Minister's intention is to let the company off after the election, when he no longer needs voters, he should say so now. He should look people in the eye and say that he believes that the Attorney General in his cabinet would be completely justified in writing a directive to the prosecutor saying, "Settle this matter, make it go away, sweep it under the rug, let them pay a fine, say sorry and move on."

I can tell members that this will not be the position of the Conservative Party. The Conservative position will be very simple and very clear: The prosecutor and the prosecutor alone should decide how to proceed with these criminal charges.

• (1715)

So far, the prosecutor, the DPP, has shown that she understands the law, and she has acted in a manner that is correct in this case. We

expect that she should be allowed to continue to do so. A Conservative government will make sure that she or anyone who replaces her, with time, has that independent role.

That is exactly what the Director of Public Prosecutions Act foresaw when it became law in 2006 with the passage of the Federal Accountability Act. It foresaw an independent prosecutor, completely free of politics, someone who had so much leeway that she could not even be fired by the Prime Minister or any member of the government unless all of the House of Commons voted to validate such a firing. The purpose of that was to keep the prosecutorial function of our legal system out of the reach of politicians, yet the Prime Minister extended his reach as far as he could to try to interfere with that in this case.

What is perhaps even more insulting is that the Prime Minister thought he could distract Canadians from the resulting scandal by spraying \$41 billion of cash at them in his recent cover-up budget. He thought Canadians would completely forget that his former attorney general had accused him of interfering in a criminal prosecution if he pulled out a fire hose filled with dollar signs and sprayed it all over the country. Frankly, what has happened is not that the budget has distracted from his scandal; his scandal has distracted from his budget. It does not seem to matter how much money he sprays around. Canadians are determined to protect the independence of our prosecution and our rule of law in this country.

Here is the bad consequence that comes from that kind of pre-election political spending. It comes with a cost. I call it the Liberal three steps: massive scandal before the election, massive deficit spending to distract from it, and then of course, massive tax increases to pay for it all after the election is over.

Money is not free. The government does not actually have any money. All it spends comes from the people who earned it in the first place. It cannot give people anything without first taking it away, and the Prime Minister likes to take it away. He has already raised taxes on the average Canadian family by \$800. He took away tax credits for kids' sports, children's art, students' textbooks and some of their tuition fees. He took away the transit tax credit from passengers on buses. He took away numerous other tax breaks, like income splitting, which helped bring fairness to families where one spouse earns more than another. He brought in new tax penalties for small business, including those who share their work and earnings with family members or who save within their company for retirement, maternity leave or a rainy day. He has increased CPP payroll taxes for both small businesses and workers. That does not even include the carbon tax, which kicked in on Monday, punishing commuters and seniors on fixed incomes who are trying to heat their homes.

The Budget

That is the Prime Minister's record of tax increases so far, but the worst is yet to come. We know that, because he has tried to raise taxes even more. He attempted to tax health and dental benefits provided by companies to their employees. He backed off after those companies and those employees rose up against him. He tried to impose a 73% tax on the passive income of small businesses. He tried to double the tax paid by farmers and small business owners when they pass their companies down to the next generation within their families. He even tried to take away the disability tax credit from diabetics.

• (1720)

Finally, the tax increase that was perhaps the most disgusting, and from which he was forced to back down, was when he tried to tax employee discounts, like when a waitress gets a free chicken salad sandwich at two in the morning when she is on her 15-minute break. The Prime Minister wanted the restaurant owner to add the value of that sandwich to the waitress's T4 slip so that she could pay tax on that at the end of the year. It was just petty. His desire to extract more money from the pockets of the people who earn it so he can spend it for them is insatiable, and it is just getting started. He put all those tax increases on hold, but they will all be back after the next election when he no longer needs voters but still needs their money.

Then there is the truth about the carbon tax. The Prime Minister claims that an Ontario family will pay only about \$600 in higher gas, heat, groceries and other inflation costs. However, we are asked to take his word for it. I filed access to information requests to get all the supporting documents that led to that calculation, and guess what I received? I received a big pile of documents with black ink all over the numbers. In other words, they gave me the costing, they just did not let me see the numbers. Why? If the tax costs what the government claims, would it not want to produce all the numbers so that Canadians could confirm that fact? The government did not, because this tax will cost much more than the government admits.

The cost is hard to calculate, unlike income taxes, which we can calculate at the end of the year when tax returns are filed or by simply looking at the payroll deductions, and unlike sales taxes, which we can add up simply by looking at the receipts for things we buy.

Carbon taxes are insidious. They are embedded in every single good and service we buy. Sometimes they are embedded and compounded multiple times in the same product. For example, when one buys a piece of farm equipment, one will pay for the transportation of the farm equipment to the local John Deere outlet but also pay a tax on the energy used in the manufacturing outlet that assembled it. There is lots of steel in John Deere tractors, so one will pay for the carbon tax that was embedded in the cost of shaping and moulding that steel at the steel mill.

Did I mention that the government is charging HST on the carbon tax? It is a tax on a tax. The Prime Minister's estimate of the cost of the carbon tax does not include the compounding effect of the HST on the carbon tax.

If despite everything I have just told members they still believe that the Prime Minister's carbon tax will only cost what he says, that does not account for his plan to increase the rate after the next election. According to government documents from both environ-

ment and finance, after 2022, just three years from now, the tax will have to increase in "severity". That means the rate will actually go up, but by how much?

According to an Environment Canada document, the rate would have to go up to between \$100 and \$300 a tonne of carbon. Right now, the rate is only \$20. If it did go up to \$300, it would be 15 times higher than it is right now. Based on the government's own numbers, that would equal \$5,000 for a family of 2.5 people in Saskatchewan, or \$3,000 for a similar family in Ontario.

If someone has a big family fortune, an extra \$5,000 in higher gas, heat and grocery costs would not be such a big deal. However, unlike the Prime Minister, most Canadians do not inherit tax-preferred trust funds, and therefore, they cannot absorb the cost of a \$3,000 or \$5,000 carbon tax, as may be the case if he is re-elected.

The Prime Minister has no empathy whatsoever for people who are struggling with the cost of living. In fact, he was in Vancouver and was asked about the \$1.60 a litre people were paying for gas not long ago in that city. He said that is exactly what we want. He wants high gas prices, because he thinks they will make people behave better. I am not exactly sure what behaviour he is referring to. Does the Prime Minister believe that people should stop driving to work or stop heating their homes? Are those bad behaviours, according to the Prime Minister?

• (1725)

We know he has no concern whatsoever about increasing the cost of living by imposing higher taxes. He has done it already. All the evidence, from the carbon tax cover-up to his attempted tax increases elsewhere, suggest that he will do much more after the election, when he no longer needs voters but still needs their money.

That was the Kathleen Wynne-Dalton McGuinty technique for 14 years. Who was the architect of that agenda? It was Gerald Butts, the outgoing PMO puppet master, who recently resigned in disgrace because of the SNC-Lavalin scandal. We know that he is still the Prime Minister's intellectual architect, the man who is calling all the shots and will be running the Liberal campaign. His modus operandi is to rack up massive spending and pay for it by piling taxes on the working class. That is why Ontario had the highest poverty rates and the lowest middle-class income growth of any province in Canada during the McGuinty-Wynne reign. We do not need to see that disaster exacted on Canadians.

Private Members' Business

The next reason we know the current Prime Minister will raise taxes is that he is running out of money. His deficits are growing. They are \$20 billion this year, the year in which he promised a balanced budget. Remember his famous words, "the budget will balance itself"? That sure has not happened in the appointed time schedule he claimed it would during the last election. That debt will always metastasize into higher taxes, because somebody has to pay those rich bondholders. They do not lend us money out of the goodness of their hearts. They expect to get more back from Canadians than they lend, and they will if the Prime Minister keeps adding debt at unsustainable rates.

That is the record so far. There is good news and bad news. The good news is that we are not broke yet. The bad news is that we will be if the current Prime Minister is re-elected.

Families who are running out of money but are not yet broke sit down at the kitchen table and discuss what to do about the situation. The responsible decision is to right the course, get back on track and start to balance the family budget before the repo man comes knocking on the door five or six years down the road. They do not go on a vacation to some fancy island in a faraway place, blow even more money and say they will worry about the repo man when he arrives at their home and they will cross that bridge when they get to it. No, they make responsible decisions in the present and modest adjustments to get on track so that they can be financially sustainable into the future.

That is exactly what Canadian households expect of their politicians. They expect that we, like them, live within our means, spend only what we have and leave more in the pockets of Canadians. They know, because they have had to make household payments, that the basic rules of life are that we cannot borrow our way out of debt, budgets do not balance themselves and we cannot make other people pay for our mistakes.

These are lessons the Prime Minister would do well to learn. I suspect he will not, but that is okay. In October Canadians will have another choice, the son of a working-class family who understands the basic rules of life that we have to live within our means, leave more in people's pockets and let them get ahead.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Carleton will have an opportunity to continue his comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from April 1 consideration of the motion that Bill C-420, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Official Languages Act and the Canada Business Corporations Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion

at second reading stage of Bill C-420 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

● (1810)

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

(*Division No. 1279*)

YEAS

Members

Angus	Ashton
Aubin	Bagnell
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Blaikie
Blaney (North Island—Powell River)	Boudrias
Boutin-Sweet	Caron
Choquette	Cullen
Donnelly	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)	Dusseault
Fortin	Garrison
Gill	Hardcastle
Hughes	Johns
Jolibois	Julian
Kwan	Laverdière
MacGregor	Marcil
Masse (Windsor West)	May (Saanech—Gulf Islands)
Nantel	Paupé
Plamondon	Quach
Rankin	Sansoucy
Ste-Marie	Stetski
Thériault	Weir— 42

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Aldag
Alghabra	Alleslev
Allison	Amos
Anandasangaree	Anderson
Arnold	Arseneault
Arya	Ayoub
Badawey	Bains
Barlow	Barrett
Baylis	Beech
Bendayan	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Bittle
Blair	Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)
Block	Boissonnault
Bossio	Boucher
Brassard	Bratina
Breton	Calkins
Carr	Carrie
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chen	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Cooper	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davidson
DeCoursey	Deltell
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diotte	Dreeshen
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Eglinski
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Fergus
Fillmore	Finley
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)	Fry

Private Members' Business

PAIRED

Members

LeBlanc

Moore— 2

The Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

It being 6:11 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

* * *

● (1815)

[English]

FAIRNESS FOR ALL CANADIAN TAXPAYERS ACT

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC) moved that Bill S-243, An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (reporting on unpaid income tax), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, right now, Canadians are busy collecting tax slips and preparing to file their annual income tax returns. Despite the fact that no Canadian loves to pay income tax or particularly enjoys the act of complying with an increasingly onerous tax system, we can take comfort and pride in knowing that we live in a country where most taxpayers honestly report their income.

Respect for the rule of law is a foundational Canadian value. However, the biggest threat to a culture of compliance is the notion that other people or businesses do not comply, so tax evasion threatens the legitimacy of the entire tax collection system. If Canadians see that some Canadians succeed in evading taxes, other Canadians will resent that they are paying and complying, because they know they will have to pay even more as a result.

This past fall, the Auditor General tabled a report that pointed out the challenges that the Canada Revenue Agency has faced with collecting taxes from those who have offshore transactions. The Auditor General found that people or businesses with offshore transactions were given months or even years to comply with requests for information from the Canada Revenue Agency, and sometimes had their cases dropped with zero taxes collected or assessed. This is while regular Canadians are automatically reassessed and penalized after 90 days if they fail to respond.

The report from the Auditor General confirmed what many Canadians have suspected, and that is that there is a serious problem with offshore tax compliance and that some wealthy people have advantages that normal Canadians do not when it comes to avoiding taxes.

While compliance is the norm in Canada, some will under-report their income and others will not file returns at all. The underground economy of unreported cash transactions and the use of overseas tax havens are assumed to create a multi-billion dollar gap between what the law requires Canadians to pay and the amount that the Canada Revenue Agency actually collects. I say "assumed" because there is no real estimate of this gap. Bill S-243 seeks to measure, report on and hold the CRA accountable for its efforts to eliminate this tax gap.

Fuhr	Gallant
Garneau	Généreux
Gerretsen	Goldsmith-Jones
Gould	Gourde
Graham	Grewal
Hajdu	Harder
Hardie	Hébert
Hehr	Hoback
Hogg	Holland
Housefather	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Jeneroux	Joly
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Kelly
Kent	Khalid
Khera	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kusie
Lake	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamouroux
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengary)	Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier	Leitch
Leslie	Levitt
Liepert	Lightbound
Lloyd	Lobb
Lockhart	Long
Longfield	Ludwig
MacAulay (Cardigan)	MacKenzie
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Maloney
Martel	Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
May (Cambridge)	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Mendicino	Mihychuk
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Monsef
Morneau	Morrissey
Motz	Murray
Nassif	Nater
Nault	Ng
Nicholson	Nuttall
O'Connell	Oliphant
Oliver	O'Regan
O'Toole	Paradis
Paul-Hus	Peschisolido
Peterson	Picard
Poilievre	Poissant
Qualtrough	Ratansi
Rayes	Reid
Richards	Rioux
Robillard	Rogers
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Rusnak	Saini
Sajjan	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Saroya	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schmale
Schulte	Serré
Sgro	Shanahan
Sheehan	Shields
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sikand
Simms	Sohi
Sorbara	Sorenson
Spengemann	Stanton
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Tilson	Trost
Van Kesteren	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Vecchio	Viersen
Virani	Wagantall
Wagh	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wong
Wrzesnewskyj	Yip
Young	Yurdiga
Zahid	Zimmer— 240

Private Members' Business

As the opposition shadow minister for national revenue, I am pleased to join a multi-party effort to address the tax gap by sponsoring Bill S-243 in the House of Commons. The bill was introduced in the other place by Senator Percy Downe of Prince Edward Island, was amended at the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and was passed with all-party support. I hope colleagues from all parties will support and swiftly pass the bill in the House of Commons as well.

In my remarks today, I am going to address what the bill would do, what it would not do and why it would be important for Canadians.

Bill S-243 would do three things. It would require the Canada Revenue Agency to publish distinct lists for convictions for both domestic and overseas tax evasion; to calculate and report on the income tax gap; and to give the Parliamentary Budget Officer information needed to calculate the tax gap for an independent assessment.

The bill starts by instructing the Canada Revenue Agency to publish distinct and detailed lists of convictions for tax evasion within Canada and overseas. As the Panama and paradise papers demonstrated, overseas tax evasion is a significant problem for Canada.

Canadians might be shocked to know that years after the revelations contained in those data leaks, no charges have been laid. They might also be shocked to know that according to the Canada Revenue Agency's own information, there have been less than a dozen successful prosecutions for tax fraud and evasion in the past year, and that is in a country with some 30 million annual tax filings.

Law-abiding taxpayers deserve to know what the government is doing to enforce the law equally and to crack down on Canadians who illegally hide money overseas as well as those who refuse to report their income at home.

Presently, it is difficult to find such information and details are not provided. Publishing two separate lists would help Canadians understand the extent of overseas tax evasion and would spur efforts by the Canada Revenue Agency to bring cases to trial in a timely manner. Canadians should never feel that the wealthy and well-connected can evade income tax without consequences.

● (1820)

Bill S-243 would also require the Minister of National Revenue to calculate and report on the income tax gap every three years. This would allow the CRA three years in which to gather all applicable data, analyze it and release a reasonable estimate of the difference between taxes owing under the Income Tax Act and those that it actually collects.

Analyzing and calculating the tax gap is an involved process which will take time. Therefore, a three-year reporting cycle would ensure that measurement and reporting would not consume a disproportionate amount of the CRA's resources. The three-year cycle would also allow time for increased efforts to combat tax evasion to take effect and for a long-term trend line to be plotted.

Finally, the bill would instruct the minister to collect, compile, analyze and abstract statistics on the income tax gap and provide that data to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. As such, he could verify the CRA's work and offer an independent opinion on the tax gap. Combined with CRA's reporting, this should allow a reasonably accurate estimate of the tax gap to be charted.

Bill S-243 would mandate that the minister consider certain factors in calculating the gap, such as the value of reassessments as a result of audits on individual, corporate and trust returns and the rate of incorrect returns that were not detected until being audited. However, it would not limit consideration to only these factors. It explicitly states that the calculation of the tax gap would be based on such factors, but with flexibility to consider other things as well.

The bill does not address tax avoidance schemes that are legal under the Income Tax Act or instruct the CRA to calculate potential revenue from amendments to the Income Tax Act. This bill would not mandate particular tax compliance efforts or targeting of any classes of taxpayer for greater scrutiny. It only aims to gather the evidence on which to base tax collection decisions, and it would leave those decisions to the government of the day.

The bill would not infringe on the privacy of Canadians. Likewise, material that the CRA must share with the Parliamentary Budget Officer would be subject to privacy protections that would prevent identification of individual taxpayers. This bill would not create new taxes, modify existing taxes nor change tax treatment. The bill is an effort to identify the extent of tax evasion to ensure that existing laws are being equally enforced.

I would like to address some of the observations raised by witnesses at the Standing Senate Committee on National Finance and by stakeholders with whom I have consulted.

Witnesses pointed out that Bill S-243 could make Canada a world leader in legislating measurement and reporting on the tax gap. Other countries are experimenting with measurement methodology, but none have written the reporting requirements into law. Canada has an opportunity to be a world leader in understanding the scope of its tax evasion problem and be better equipped to address it.

This is a problem that faces countries throughout the world. It is not unique to Canada, but Canada can and should take a leading role in addressing this problem.

Despite the fact that such reporting is new, I am confident that Canada's public servants are up to the challenge of developing a practical methodology over the next three years.

A further suggestion made at committee involved giving the Parliamentary Budget Officer access to anonymized underlying tax data instead of just the CRA's own analysis of tax data. This would allow the PBO to generate a more precise independent opinion, but it would require amending the Income Tax Act to address privacy protections. While I agree that greater precision from the PBO is desirable, such an amendment is beyond the scope of the bill.

Private Members' Business

Some witnesses thought Bill S-243 did not go far enough. They thought it should be expanded to include measuring tax avoidance in general rather than just tax evasion and that it should address evasion of other taxes like the goods and services tax and excise on liquor and tobacco. The bill targets only the gap between income taxes legally owed under the Income Tax Act as written and income tax revenue collected. Measuring tax avoidance would be more complex than the measures contained in this bill and would have to be left to other legislation in the future.

Witnesses also told the committee that participants in the underground economy often evaded multiple taxes at once. A business that neither collects nor remits GST, for example, almost certainly fails to report the income it receives.

● (1825)

I agree that other forms of evasion involving GST or excise duties such as contraband tobacco should be measured and reported as well for an accurate picture of the overall general tax gap. However, income tax is a reasonable place to start to measure the tax gap. Right now none of this is measured at all, so at least this bill we can begin to measure the tax gap by starting with income tax.

Personal and corporate income taxes account for two-thirds of the total tax revenue, so this is a good place for us to start. There is certainly nothing in the bill stopping a future Parliament or a future government from expanding the measurement and reporting system to include other taxes and duties at a later date.

Some stakeholders raised concerns that moves to measure and report on the tax gap would spur efforts by the agency to target law-abiding taxpayers, particularly small businesses, with sterner enforcement measures. I understand this concern and in general I share it, but I think that it is misplaced in the case of the bill.

The issue of overzealous tax collection measures is a separate issue and it is one that this Parliament could have dealt with by establishing a legislated duty of care between the agency and taxpayers. However, the House chose not to do so when Motion No. 43 was voted on in September 2016.

The bill seeks to improve Canada's ability to measure how effective our revenue collection and law enforcement systems are. It seeks to promote better governance through better information. The issue of the CRA's treatment of law-abiding taxpayers is a separate unrelated issue.

The proposed bill does not mandate any particular enforcement actions. It does not single out any class of taxpayers for further attention. It does not amend income tax policy to close perceived loopholes or to raise anyone's tax burden. It is simply a measure to uphold the rule of law. It aims to gather the information needed to ensure that all Canadians comply with the law, that no one can evade it due to wealth or overseas connections and so increase the burden on those who comply.

By requiring the CRA to post distinct lists of both foreign and domestic tax evasion convictions, it will likely focus greater compliance attention on overseas tax haven use. That is good news for honest Canadian businesses.

Bill S-243 would improve Canadian governance through better information. It would allow Canadians to see how effective tax collection and law enforcement efforts are and to demand better. It would provide successive governments the information they need to address domestic and overseas tax evasion more effectively and to provide the impetus to give offshore tax havens the enforcement attention they need. It would provide the evidence for evidence-based policy making. It would demonstrate Parliament's commitment to the rule of law and to treating Canadians equally and permitting none to cheat, thus increasing Canadians' overall confidence in our institutions. It would increase accountability from the Canada Revenue Agency through independent reviews by the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

This is important for small businesses, which often feel like they are the lowest hanging fruit for tax compliance scrutiny. They have watched as the Auditor General has pointed out how those with overseas transactions are sometimes given months or years to comply and maybe have the case thrown out, while a small business person with only domestic business has only 90 days. It is important for law-abiding taxpayers of more modest means to see that the wealthy and well-connected using tax havens are brought to justice. This is important for large companies and wealthy individuals to know that Canada upholds the rule of law.

No one likes paying taxes, but Canadians like cheaters even less. The bill would show Canadians that parliamentarians of all parties take such cheating seriously. It would show them that Parliament takes steps to understand the scope of the problem to better address it.

Therefore, I encourage colleagues from all parties to support the bill, grant it swift passage through the House and ensure that we maintain our culture of compliance and a culture where people believe in their institutions, have confidence in their institutions and are willing to comply with the tax laws that currently exist.

● (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his initiative and for the speech he gave at the beginning of the debate on this Senate bill, which has three very worthwhile objectives. I am pleased that my Conservative colleague has joined the movement to call for more transparency within the Canada Revenue Agency, to calculate the tax gap and to share information with the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Private Members' Business

However, since my colleague is a Conservative, I would like him to shed some light on what happened between the time when the Conservatives were in power and today. The Parliamentary Budget Officer fought long and hard to get this data and finally managed to get a positive response from the current government. However, he had to threaten to take the government to court to get it, particularly because Mr. Harper's Conservative government absolutely did not want to provide him with that information.

Can my colleague tell me what happened since the time when Mr. Harper's Conservative government was in power? Why are today's Conservatives proposing this initiative?

[English]

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I am not going to comment on what happened in the previous Parliament. I was not a member of the previous Parliament. However, I will say that there remains a reluctance at the agency, even now, to provide information. I am pleased that things seem to be moving in the right direction.

To begin with, I hope that members on the government side will support this bill. I hope that the information will get to the PBO and that the PBO will receive the information necessary to independently verify its accuracy or to provide a separate opinion from the CRA. We will see, first of all, if the bill is indeed supported by the government and the government party members. I just hope we continue to move in the right direction on this and are able to measure accurately the tax gaps so that Canadians can have confidence in our institutions and in the fairness of our institutions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member did not really want to comment on the former administration. What we have seen with this government is a very aggressive approach in terms of looking at ways we can recover taxes. We have literally seen close to a billion dollars. That is hundreds of millions of dollars over two consecutive budgets. We are trying to recover millions and millions that people have been avoiding paying in taxes. The Conservatives actually voted against that. Now we have this bill, which actually originated in the Senate.

When the Conservatives talk about publication, can he give us some specifics? What do they want CRA to actually publish?

Mr. Pat Kelly: Mr. Speaker, I am going to start with his preamble and then answer his question. In his preamble, he congratulated his own party for what he is characterizing as the great work it has done in collection, which the Liberals measure only by the amount of money they spend. That is how they measure action, I guess, on that side.

I wonder if the member actually read the Auditor General's report tabled this fall, wherein the Auditor General said that there is no evidence that any of the additional money spent had any successful or tangible result. The report remarked on how the agency treats those who have offshore transactions differently than domestic taxpayers.

The government is in the fourth year of its mandate. It has its own track record now. The Auditor General has revealed just how poorly the government has done, despite the money it has spent on overseas

tax avoidance and evasion. There have been 11 convictions and sentencing events in the last 12 months, out of 30 million taxes filed.

I want to answer his question, though. He asked what information should be provided. Right now, we do not know who has been convicted. We do not know whether they are foreign or domestic. The current minister has mixed those two in her answers and replies in this House. We want specificity with the reporting of convictions, whether they are domestic or foreign.

• (1835)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the Senate public bill, Bill S-243.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Senator Downe for his work in both highlighting the importance of better understanding Canada's tax gap and the fight against tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. Rest assured, the government shares the senator's concerns and understands the importance of both issues.

Early in her mandate in April 2016, the Minister of National Revenue publicly committed to releasing a series of reports that would provide detailed information about Canada's tax gap for the first time ever. In fact, from an overall tax gap perspective, few countries produce and publish tax gaps for all of their major tax categories. The OECD has stated that, as of 2015, only eight countries measured and published the major components of their tax gaps. Canada was proud to join this group of eight starting in 2016. With this information, the government is able to report on the difference between the taxes that would be paid if all obligations were met and taxes that are actually paid and collected. It is important for Canadians to have an awareness of Canada's tax gap and an appreciation of how evading taxes cheats us all.

Canada is now one of the leaders in the tax gap estimation among OECD countries. For example, the CRA was the first tax administration to use underground economy statistics to estimate the personal income tax gap and the first to publish an estimate of the OECD concept of tax assured. As the minister indicated, this tax gap information serves as an important tool that helps build the confidence of Canadians about the fairness of the tax system.

Having an understanding of the tax gap helps CRA identify areas of higher risk for non-compliance. In turn, the CRA can allocate resources where the risks are highest. Generally speaking, tax gap information can provide tax administrations with insights into the overall health of the tax system and indicate the levels of non-compliance with tax laws.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The agency has adopted a progressive approach to estimating Canada's tax gap. Its approach involves taking the time to develop appropriate, well-founded research methods that work in the Canadian context. The method varies depending on the type of tax. Sometimes, a single tax may require the use of more than one assessment method, as I am sure members understand.

I am pleased to announce that the agency's work has resulted in the release of four reports on tax gaps in Canada. A fifth report on the incorporated business tax gap will be published later this year.

[English]

The CRA released the first report in June 2016. It was a conceptual study that defined the tax gap. The study presented the challenges involved in estimating the tax gap and it provided details about how tax gap estimates can be used in administering taxes. The study also described tax gap estimations in other countries.

A second report, published in June 2016, provided an estimate for the goods and services tax and harmonized sales tax gap. With support from the Department of Finance, this report estimated the tax gap to be \$4.9 billion in 2014, with the federal component accounting for \$2.9 billion.

The third report, published in June 2017, estimated the domestic personal income tax gap to be about \$8.7 billion in 2014. This amount included both the tax gap related to the underground economy, \$6.5 billion, and payment of taxes, \$2.2 billion.

Most recently, the fourth report, which was released in June 2018, focused on the international tax gap and compliance results for the federal personal income tax system. It estimated the international personal income tax gap to be between \$800 million and \$3 billion in 2014.

I will take a moment to highlight in greater detail some of the information that was brought to light as a result of the release of the fourth report on the international personal income tax gap.

In the fourth report, the CRA worked to define how it measures the international tax gap. Essentially, the report sets out to help Canadians understand our international tax obligations. The report explains Canada's reporting obligations and voluntary compliance, as well as reports on audit activities related to international non-compliance. It also estimates the tax gap related to offshore investment income, in addition to describing the end results of the CRA's compliance tools, activities and results.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Defining the issue was crucial to helping Canadians understand the international tax gap. Without a doubt, this is a complex issue, and it can be extremely difficult to measure non-compliance internationally given the sophisticated methods some individuals use to hide their income and assets.

It is also important to note that Canada was recognized as the first of the G7 countries to publish its study of the international tax gap using a new method. The method was developed using a collaborative approach that included offshore financial and banking

data to estimate tax loss due to unreported investments hidden offshore.

[English]

Moreover, the CRA works closely with experts and international partners from the United Kingdom, United States, Denmark and Australia to develop robust methodologies to assess the different components of the tax gap. As I mentioned, international tax schemes are more sophisticated and more complex than ever. I cannot overemphasize the importance of strong international relations and partnerships to tackle tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance on a global scale.

Canada is well regarded for our contributions internationally. We take the opportunity to share expertise and learn from the experience of other countries to understand the global intricacies of tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. In fact, Canada is one of more than 65 nations that send out and receive country-by-country reports. Shared automatically, these reports provide countries with access to information about multinational corporations' activities in every country in which they operate. Once analyzed, this information provides great insight into the operations of large companies.

The common reporting standard is another tool used to gain access to information on Canadians' overseas bank accounts. With this system, Canada and close to 100 other countries exchange financial account information. This information helps identify instances where Canadians hide money in offshore accounts to avoid paying taxes, which is a key concern shared by Senator Downe, the government and indeed all Canadians.

[Translation]

I want Senator Downe and all parliamentarians to know that the government is working hard to study and release information on Canada's tax gap. This is a key part of the CRA's commitment to a fair tax system that meets the needs of all Canadians.

[English]

Information collected to assess Canada's tax gap allows the CRA to skilfully target our compliance activities and ultimately improve the integrity of the tax system.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NPD): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate.

First off, I want to thank the senator who tabled this bill in the other place for getting it to the House of Commons. I commend him for his hard work and his initiative. I really respect everything he has done over the past few years to fight tax evasion. Measuring the tax gap, the issue at the heart of this bill, is also one of his primary concerns.

Private Members' Business

As I mentioned earlier in my question, the bill would require data to be provided to the Parliamentary Budget Officer so that he can independently analyze and calculate the tax gap. The tax gap is a measure of the government's annual tax losses relative to the Canadian economy and the global economy. Tax gap estimation is quite complex. The tax gap provides a gauge of how much money the Government of Canada is losing because of its unfair tax system.

Canada's unfair tax system also makes it possible for some taxpayers, especially rich taxpayers, to avoid paying taxes in Canada. These people can afford to hire tax lawyers who charge \$500 an hour and who know how to work the system so their clients do not have to contribute to public services and infrastructure in our society. Calculating the tax gap is extremely important, because it tells us whether our efforts are paying off. This government is not calculating the tax gap because it does not mind missing out on several billion dollars every year.

We in the NDP understand the immeasurable losses caused by national and international tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. Aggressive tax avoidance also seeks to circumvent our laws, which is another part of the problem. Each transaction in isolation is legal, but when put together, the transactions amount to immoral acts. Tax lawyers are not always the most ethical individuals.

The ultimate goal of calculating the tax gap is to check whether our efforts are paying off. If we were to calculate the tax gap for 2019, for example, and if the government had a plan to address tax evasion, we should be able to see whether any progress has been made in five or ten years.

The biggest problem for the Liberal government is that they do not have any results to show Canadians when it comes to fighting tax evasion. For three years the Minister of National Revenue has been saying over and over again that the Liberal government invested \$1 billion in the Canada Revenue Agency to fight tax evasion and that it hired 1,300 auditors.

When people hear that they say that the government is committing a lot of financial and human resources to fighting tax evasion. They also say that such considerable efforts should lead to results, but that is not the case. The government has nothing to show Canadians.

Just this week the Minister of National Revenue announced that searches were conducted in Vancouver last week. That seemed to be the best thing she could announce to Canadians on the tax evasion file. There were three tax scandals in recent years, the Panama papers, the paradise papers, and the Bahamas leaks, but the minister was very proud to announce those searches. She seemed pleased to see that progress was being made on this file even though we are far from seeing charges and even farther from securing convictions.

The government's four-year mandate is coming to an end, and it is still at the search warrant stage, when we should be seeing results. The government may have invested \$1 billion and hired 1,300 auditors, but it still has nothing to show Canadians.

● (1845)

To make matters worse, the Liberals will try to make people believe that they have obtained results, as the Minister of National Revenue has already done on several occasions. When we asked her what the results were, she talked on various occasions about

78 convictions. The number varied. Sometimes it was higher and sometimes lower.

When we pressed further and asked her about the convictions in question, we realized that they all had to do with domestic tax evasion. However, there is a rather big difference between domestic and international tax evasion.

When my NDP colleagues and I asked questions about international tax evasion, we were told that there had been convictions. Saying that amounts to misleading Canadians. In fact, the minister was forced to acknowledge that. Her officials had to acknowledge that in committee. When we asked them how many convictions there had been for international tax evasion, they had to admit that there had not been any. There have been no convictions for international tax evasion. That is the Liberal government's track record. That is the reality.

The Liberals may say that they are working on it and moving mountains to tighten the net, but the net is still wide open. The basic problem here is that the tax laws are still too lax, too flexible, too elastic. Taxpayers who can afford to hire tax lawyers are able to avoid paying their fair share and to get off scot-free when they are caught. When CRA investigators are faced with that situation, they can only say to themselves that the tax laws are so lax that they can do nothing about it. That is the crux of the problem. The government does not want to acknowledge it. That is the reason for the lack of results.

If they do not address the root of the problem, hiring 1,300 people and investing \$1 billion will not make a difference, because the laws are too lax. They do not want to acknowledge that either. They do not want to deal with tax flexibility, which is the root of the problem.

This is why Bill S-243 is so important. If we can measure the tax gap and monitor any progress, we may finally have some way to see whether the government is making progress on combatting tax evasion. This would also give us a clear picture of international and domestic convictions for tax evasion in a report that would be presented by the agency. The two types could be separated in the agency's public reports. The real problem here is that the minister does not distinguish between the two. That may be because she does not know the difference. We would have to ask her.

The Liberal government is showing a serious lack of transparency, which is why the senator introduced this bill and shepherded it this far. He can see it, as can all of us on this side of the House. Even the Conservatives have woken up, even though they were the ones who fought the former parliamentary budget officer to avoid giving him information. They have woken up and joined us in demanding results and demanding meaningful action on tax evasion.

Private Members' Business

I will be happy to support this initiative. I hope that my colleagues will join me so that we can shed some light on the Canada Revenue Agency and finally see results over time. This will help us understand whether our efforts are working and change course if we find that our efforts are inadequate. So far, the government's efforts have not been working.

I hope that the government will support this initiative, which would be in line with its claims of wanting transparency and openness. It now has an opportunity to demonstrate transparency and openness at the Canada Revenue Agency.

• (1850)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be joining this debate in this late evening on a Wednesday. At the outset, I am going to share a few observations about the debate so far on this Senate proposal as well as some observations about things that were said in the House.

First of all, this is a tax matter. We all remember that it was Motion No. 43, a duty of care motion, that was also put forward by the seconder of the bill in the House, the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge. At the time I spoke to it, the Canada Revenue Agency's customer service and the way it treats Canadians who are filing taxes continued to be deplorable, in my opinion. I thank the member for Calgary Rocky Ridge for having sponsored another move toward getting fair treatment for Canadians. I think this is part of it. Understanding the tax gap between what is expected to be collected and what is actually being collected is a very important matter.

Second, it was Senator Percy Downe, from Prince Edward Island, who moved this proposal in the other place. Let it be said that when Conservatives find honest Liberals, we will work with them. We will support their ideas. In fact, it is a Conservative member of Parliament who has brought this Senate proposal to the floor of this House for, I expect and I hope, swift passage.

It is interesting that it is a Senate Liberal, also someone who was kicked out of the Liberal caucus, who is pushing for greater tax fairness and more tax knowledge for fellow Canadians. Perhaps it is something to do with people who speak the truth and are interested in the truth being kicked out of that caucus.

Bill S-243 is about reporting on unpaid income taxes. The bill is quite short, but it provides an opportunity to define the tax gap. I note that at least on one other occasion, members were wondering what we are asking the CRA to do. We are asking it to disclose more information about taxes that remain unpaid. Every single year there is a discrepancy between what the government expects to collect and is able to collect and taxes that remain outstanding. That discrepancy between the two accumulates over time. I know that many Canadians are interested in knowing more about why it is accumulating and who these people are who are not paying these taxes.

I especially like the definition of the tax gap being put forward in proposed subsection 88.1(1), which is an amendment to the Canada Revenue Agency Act, because it is a simple amendment. It is very clear what type of information will be provided to the Parliamentary Budget Officer.

I have been a big believer in legislating more rules for civil servants, the bureaucracy, on how they do their work and report their work, both to Parliament and to the public. We spend far too much time in this House legislating what Canadians can do on an everyday basis, whether it is their hobbies or air travel. In general, we create a lot of rules that businesses, corporations and everyday people have to live up to. There is an expectation that they need to know what the rules are. We spend too little time legislating what the civil service does and the type of work it does on behalf of Canadians.

There is a Yiddish proverb that says, "Prayers go up and blessings come down". It has been a prayer and a hope of mine that we will see more such private members' bills and more government bills, in fact, that would look after legislating what the civil service does and how it does its work, both in the collection of information and in the disclosure of information.

We see in this particular proposal the following:

The Minister shall provide the Parliamentary Budget Officer with the data on the tax gap collected and compiled under subsection (2) and any additional data that the Parliamentary Budget Officer considers relevant to conducting a further analysis of the tax gap.

That has been an issue in the past for the PBO. Finance Canada and other departments have been unwilling to disclose information to the PBO. I am going to allow the work they do, because often I will send emails to them, sometimes late at night, asking specific questions about budget line items. We saw that when the member for Edmonton West added up different sections of the budget tables, they did not, in fact, add up.

It is thanks to the PBO that parliamentarians such as us are able to do that work. If we have a question and we want to double-check whether our math is correct or whether we understand a concept being advocated by or pushed forward by the government, we can check with the PBO whether it is true. If it is not true, they can then double-check with the departmental officials they have connections with.

• (1855)

When department officials refuse to disclose information being requested from the PBO, it is a great matter of concern to parliamentarians. We rely on the PBO in a lot of ways to provide us technical information and to ensure our calculations are in fact correct. Perhaps if Finance Canada had taken advantage of the PBO's expertise, it would not have had to table a new set of fiscal tables, updating a great deal of them in the past budget document.

However, this is about the tax gap. This would provide Canadians with an ability to understand what it is over time. It is of great interest. The member for Sherbrooke mentioned in his speech that three times there had been major scandals and there had been great interest from everyday Canadians and members of the public. Different transparency and anti-corruption organizations have mentioned that such information would be of value for the public to have.

Private Members' Business

There is already a lot of information that the government makes public. This particular one, though, is something I have not seen made available on an easy-to-understand basis. The way it is being laid out in the definition of the tax gap, proposed subsection 88.1(1), offers that opportunity for Canadians both to understand what is being calculated and how it is being calculated. From then on, it would be up to parliamentarians to decide what to do with that information. More information from the civil service is always a good thing. At the end of the day, we are all hoping for greater transparency from the CRA, both on what it expects to collect and what it is actually able to collect.

That brings me back to the finance committee, the committee of the House on which I sit. It is looking at Bill S-6, a Madagascar tax treaty. I asked a question of the officials there whether they had any ability in calculating and telling us which corporations in Canada would be affected by that tax treaty and whether an analysis had been done. It was not clear to me from the answers at the time whether it was done.

Prior to Bill S-6 being proposed, a tax gap would have existed, at least in my mind it would have existed, between potential tax planning by certain corporations and individuals who would do business in Madagascar and what would happen after the ratification of Bill S-6. I was told that this information may be collected at some point by the CRA or it may not. That, again, is the tax gap between what may happen if a tax treaty is introduced or not. Aggressive tax planning does happen. It is illegal to do so in jurisdictions that do business with Canada.

Canadians will benefit greatly from the tax gap. It is perfectly reasonable to ask the Canada Revenue Agency to make the calculation. Part of the benefit will be that if it gets into the practice of collecting information and providing it to both parliamentarians and members of the public, it will also force it to start actually collecting that information after the fact. That is of great interest and great benefit. It would allow Canadians and parliamentarians to make access to information requests, to better understand the methods it is using to calculate it and to see the email transmissions among different government officials on the tax gap. It would also help us understand the conviction rate, who is being chased, whether a systemic abuse of the system is going on and whether particular tax treaties with Canada are being abused, which we should perhaps look at again.

All of this publicly available information that we do not have right now should be available right now. I am a parliamentarian who makes a lot of access to information requests and has a lot of Order Paper questions. Therefore, the disclosure of information is important, the calculation in the first place. Too often in this place, the government comes back with a response saying that it does not collect information in that particular way and therefore it cannot answer the question. This Senate proposal, from a Liberal senator, Senator Percy Downe from Prince Edward Island, will do what I have been, like I said before in the Yiddish proverb, praying for, which is more rules on civil servants and bureaucrats, less rules on everyday Canadians and a greater disclosure of information to Canadians and parliamentarians. It is a blessing that is coming down to earth.

I ask all members to heartily support the bill. It is a great proposal and it would provide greater transparency of tax information.

• (1900)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise to speak to private members' business, especially when it comes to taxation.

Virtually from day one, this government has taken the taxation issue very seriously. I found the Conservative Party's approach to taxes interesting, and I would like to provide some thoughts on that.

I would like to first acknowledge Senator Percy Downe in the other place who brought this legislation forward. I had the opportunity many years ago to meet Senator Downe at a parliamentary conference. I have deep respect for him and I appreciate many of the fine things he has done over the years.

Let there be no doubt that Canadians are concerned about tax avoidance and tax evasion. Who could blame them? After all, we expect tax fairness, which is why the Prime Minister and our government have made it a high priority.

I would like members to think of what we have been able to accomplish in just over three years. Our very first bill dealt with taxation. The member for Waterloo often talks about Canada's middle class and the importance of the legislation that cut taxes for Canada's middle class.

We talked about a sense of fairness, and that is what the sponsor of the bill brought forward in his comments. At the same time we recognized that the wealthiest 1% of Canadians should pay a bit more. We argued that paying a bit more was their fair share. Our government has put that into place as standard policy, while we look at ways to change our tax laws to ensure a higher sense of tax fairness.

The government's first action was to increase the tax on Canada's wealthiest 1% and at the same time provide a tax decrease for Canada's middle class. This literally put hundreds of millions of dollars into the pocket of Canada's middle class. It affected millions of Canadians in every region of our country.

I will fast forward to budgets. We introduced a budget last week. It shows that our government is continuing its commitment to fight those individuals who are not prepared to pay their fair share.

A couple of years ago, the minister responsible for CRA introduced, through a budget measure, about \$450 million. That is a guesstimate. Last budget year, we again brought in well over \$400 million. If we combine those two budget allotments, we are getting close to \$1 billion, which is a great deal of money. The purpose of that was to ensure that CRA would have additional resources to go after individuals who were trying to avoid paying taxes.

Our government recognizes the importance of tax fairness and has taken specific action to address the issue.

I am pleased to say that it does not stop there. We hear about international taxes and about addressing that issue. In the last three years our government has taken an aggressive approach toward tax treaties.

●(1905)

By having tax treaties, whether it is with Madagascar or other countries, we are better able to address the types of issues that we are talking about tonight.

To me, that signals a very strong message to individuals, whether here in Canada or outside Canada, that there is an expectation that people will pay their fair share of taxes. I would like to think that people following this debate would recognize or at least be aware that this government is committed to ensuring that they will do that.

When we were talking about Bill S-243 and I had the opportunity to ask a question of the member, I made reference to a number of issues and put them on the table. The Conservative Party has voted against many of them. That is somewhat interesting. Conservatives are bringing forward legislation to say that Canadians need to pay their fair share, but when it came time to actually vote on initiatives affecting Canadians today, they voted no. I think that speaks volumes.

A question was posed when we were talking about this specific piece of legislation. It was not I who posed the question, but one of my colleagues from the New Democratic Party, and the question was related to Stephen Harper's tenure as Prime Minister for 10 years. It asked why he did not bring in the type of legislation the Conservative member is bringing in through the Senate today. Ultimately, the member indicated that the fault was not necessarily in him, but in a previous administration.

It is important to take a look at the Conservative Party's record. Canadians will see that the Conservative Party has been consistent. It has been consistent in not dealing with the whole issue of tax fairness. I saw that when I sat in opposition. I saw many initiatives coming from the Stephen Harper regime, but I did not get any sense that they were looking at ways to ensure more tax equity in government policy, nor did I ever see a government back then that was prepared to go after those who try to avoid paying their fair share.

When I posed the question, the Conservatives stood up and said that we have not had many prosecutions. We have had more prosecutions under the Liberal government than under the Conservatives, and it has only been the last couple of years that the government has invested the resources that are necessary. I would suggest that by doing that, the Liberal government is getting more and more people to pay their fair share, which could actually be a good thing. If a prosecution can be avoided when there is an agreement for monies to be paid and there is a fairer sense of taxation, that is ultimately a good thing.

Having said all of that, I think there is some merit for the legislation. I look forward to hearing more debate on this very important issue. I believe it is very important.

One of the things the Prime Minister often talks about is that he wants members of Parliament to listen to what their constituents are saying in their ridings, back home in their communities, and to bring

Routine Proceedings

those ideas and thoughts back to the chamber and to the respective caucuses.

●(1910)

This is an important issue to Canadians and, therefore, it is an important issue for this government. Maybe I will get an opportunity at a later time to be able to speak to this very important issue of tax evasion.

●(1915)

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The House resumed from March 18 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up the question, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader was just about to start his 10-minute period for questions and comments, so we will start there.

Are there questions and comments directed to the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader?

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so glad I was able to catch your eye this late in the evening to rise to speak about this concurrence report.

What I wanted to do in my initial comments was to mention that I co-seconded the amendment. I know members are probably tired from this later-evening sitting so I will not add too much to the debate. I know a lot has been said on our side already about the wisdom of returning this to committee in order to confirm the independence and autonomy of the director of public prosecutions, as well the appointment to that position of Kathleen Roussel, who made the right decision in the case of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, which was confirmed at the time by the former attorney general.

I will mention as well that the law that created the position goes all the way back to 2006, which was Bill C-2. It was created by the Federal Accountability Act. There is a reason we know who lobbies who in this place. It is because the Lobbying Commissioner and the registry were created by that very act as well. The Ethics Commissioner was also created by that act.

Routine Proceedings

Actually, a lot of the accountability mechanisms that now exist in this place, which parliamentarians take advantage of to better understand their responsibilities toward Parliament and the people of Canada, were created in Bill C-2, the Federal Accountability Act, which was passed at the time by a Conservative minority government. It was able to work across the way with the other side for the betterment of the people of Canada, who, after the sponsorship scandal, were demanding greater ethics and accountability from parliamentarians and elected officials.

At the time, that scandal led to the creation of an independent director of public prosecutions whose decisions were to be confirmed by the Attorney General. The Attorney General would not be able to overturn a criminal prosecution and take over a case without gazetting it. I remember being a staff member working for a backbench Conservative member of Parliament at the time. The thinking at the time was that nobody would go through the trouble of trying to overturn a decision by a prosecutor who had decided not to offer a certain deal to the defence and that this would now end all political and criminal interference in public prosecutions.

Little did we know that 12 years later it would in fact happen. It would cost the political futures of two now former cabinet ministers, now former members of the Liberal caucus, and other members who have since then quit sitting on that side. Who can really blame them with everything that has been going on?

I love Yiddish proverbs so I want to share one that applies here: "Before you utter a word you are the master; afterwards you are a fool."

From statements that have been made publicly from September, October and November to then January and February, we can see the inconsistency of the story on the side of the Liberal government. At first, the Prime Minister said that he knew nothing. In a press conference, he said that what was being reported by *The Globe and Mail* was absolutely untrue. This was not any digging around that the Conservatives were doing. It was in fact journalists who heard the story, corroborated it and then reported it. At the time, the Prime Minister said that it was absolutely false and there was no truth to it. We know now that statement is completely inaccurate. There is absolutely no basis to have said any of it. We know this now because the independent caucus continues to grow quickly, with former Liberal caucus members now being punted to this side of the House because they are standing up for truth.

There is a deep betrayal of justice on that side of the House in basically shooting the messenger. They have broken trust with Canadians and this is what the amendment to the concurrence report is trying to re-establish by reconfirming the independence and autonomy of the director of public prosecutions. We, on this side of the House, have faith in her work. We know that she can do the job. She made the decision, which was then confirmed by the former attorney general 12 days later. A decision was confirmed and she stuck to her guns. She decided it was the right thing to do.

I hear so much chirping from the other side of the House because they are all looking at the same polls that we are. They are looking at the opinions of Canadians, who are telling pollsters and telling us on Twitter, Instagram and social media that they are tired of this.

● (1920)

Canadians were sold a bill of goods back in 2015. They were told there was going to be real change, a new way of governing the country. In fact, that is completely untrue. It has gone back to the good old days of 2002-2003 and the sponsorship scandal of the 1990s that led to one of the deepest crises in our democracy at that time, which led to the Federal Accountability Act being passed in this place, requiring greater accountability and ethics from our parliamentarians, something that is sorely lacking on that side of the House.

I am pleased to be rising to speak to this matter. I am pleased to be providing my support to this measure by co-seconding the amendment to send this back to committee and to ensure we stand with those parliamentarians who have been punished by their leadership for standing up for the truth and doing the right thing. It is better to put country before party. It is better to stand up for the truth, wherever that leads us.

I just want to remind members again of this Yiddish proverb: "Before you utter a word you are the master; afterwards you're a fool." I hope the government sees the light on this, tells the truth, comes clean with Canadians and sends this report back to committee so it can again confirm the independence and autonomy of the director of public prosecutions.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree we would assume that all members in this House would have great faith in the director of public prosecutions. To quote this member, he said in his speech that his side of the House has faith in the director of public prosecutions.

However, not that long ago we were forced to sit in this House for roughly 30 hours of voting. The opposition members had the opportunity to pick selectively which votes they were in favour of and opposed to. That member and all members on that side of the House voted to defund the director of public prosecutions.

I am curious if the member can comment. Since he has such great faith in the director, why he would vote in favour of defunding that particular agency?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Speaker, on that morning or evening, after 30-plus hours of voting, who can remember?, I remember the government losing a bunch of confidence votes and its members scurried in, trying to make up for the fact they were not in their seats to vote at the time.

Members will know this, because I am stickler for the rules. I like reminding Speakers sitting in the Chair about votes not being counted when members are not sitting and representing their constituents and are not sitting until the very end of the vote to ensure their votes are recorded accurately.

I will take no lessons from that member. Soon he will be sitting on this side of the House, with a far smaller caucus, as part of the opposition, and perhaps he will learn the rules as well.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Deputy Speaker: 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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment 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 nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 66, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 10, 2019, at the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

• (1925)

[*Translation*]

CHILD CARE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals go on and on about how they have lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty thanks to the Canada child benefit, yet there are 1.4 million poor children in this country, which means there are also poor families. These are people who want to join the middle class but cannot. In many cases, that is because they are up against exorbitant child care costs.

It would have been nice if the Liberal poverty reduction strategy had included money for a national child care system, but it did not. This is an issue for families everywhere. Families in my riding and elsewhere spend around \$40 per day per child in private care. That is a huge amount of money. Families that have two kids in care five days a week shell out \$1,600 per month.

Even though Quebec has a subsidized child care program, spaces are in short supply and many families have no choice but to find private child care. Interestingly, only about 10% of Quebecers use private child care compared to Ontario at over 30% and British Columbia and the maritime and prairie provinces at over 40%.

On average, parents in all of these provinces except Quebec are more likely to use private day care than subsidized day care. While the subsidized day care situation is already a real contributor to poverty in Quebec, it seems to be even worse in the rest of Canada. It is time to start working with the provinces.

I want to thank the Minister of Families for coming out Monday for the beginning of the panel organized by the Groupe femmes, politique et démocratie and the magazine L'actualité. At one point,

the MPs on the panel were asked about day care and gender equality in the context of an MP's duties. I want to make it clear that government inaction on child care disproportionately harms women, whether they are single or have a partner. It is time to make sure that families, especially women, can choose to return to work instead of making sacrifices.

Access to affordable day care is a problem for all women, but it is also a problem for all minorities. Indigenous peoples, newcomers, rural residents and the most vulnerable segments of society are all aware of this issue. The federal government should be working in partnership with the provinces to help these people, who make up a large proportion of our population. Forty dollars per day, per child, in a country where 46% of the population is \$200 away from insolvency at the end of each month is not sustainable.

The NDP wants to be an ally to Quebec, as we have always been when it comes to federal programs that involve provincial jurisdictions. If it wanted, Quebec could use the money to create more child care spaces to help Quebec families. The NDP has always been a partner to Quebec and always will be. Together we can expand child care coverage and reduce daily rates, acting in direct compliance with the priorities of the Government of Quebec.

I am therefore calling on the government to give young children the tools and parents the choice. If child care is easier to access, many parents, especially women, will be able to return to the workforce, which will promote job creation and a better quality of life for Canadians. Back home, child care will still be affordable, but more women and minorities will be able to rejoin the workforce, which will have a very positive impact on our economy, on family income, and on the financial independence of women in particular.

My question is simple. When will the Liberals keep the promise they made decades ago and implement affordable child care nationwide?

• (1930)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot for her contribution. She raises the most important issues in this country on a regular basis. The House of Commons is better for discussing those issues, because those are the issues that are confronting Canadians day to day and that actually matter, and that is exactly where our government is focused.

I have heard the member speak on this issue since I was first elected in a by-election in 2014. As I listened to her speak, I thought I may have heard the same speech when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister. In fact, when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister, most of the issues she is talking about were never, ever addressed.

Adjournment Proceedings

In fact, the day care accord, which was defeated by both the NDP and the Conservative government in the House, and then later in the election, was never picked up, developed or really evolved with Stephen Harper. Housing dollars were cut on a year-after-year basis by the former government. In terms of the child benefit, a position the NDP supported, it was taxed and that put, in particular, single moms in very precarious positions, especially as they tried to move from poverty to self-sufficiency through the middle class by getting good, strong jobs.

Our government's record on children stands in stark contrast to the previous government. The investments we have made also stand in stark contrast to the NDP platform from the previous election. When NDP members talk about day care, their day care platform required the provincial governments to fund virtually all of their day care plan. As a result, it would have probably not even caught the attention of any of the provincial ministries, because many of the provinces in this country steadfastly oppose national standards being imposed upon them if federal dollars are not at the table investing.

How do we know that? We signed a \$7.5 billion, 10-year agreement with the provinces and territories and extra agreements for indigenous-led, indigenous-designed and indigenous-delivered day care programs for the first time ever in the history of the country. That \$7.5 billion was not in this year's budget, although the dollars are being spent this year, because it was in the budget two years ago. Those dollars are now being invested right across the country.

We also substantially increased the Canada child benefit, made it tax free and indexed it. As a result of that, close to 800,000 Canadians have been lifted out of poverty, largely as a result of that measure, and almost half of them are children. In the city I represent, female-led households have seen poverty reduced by 52% in the last four years, directly as a result of the work of this government.

We added to that the \$50 billion we have now set aside for housing over the next 10 years, including substantial dollars that were announced just this week to fight homelessness in every single community across the country, but particularly in designated communities. We have added to that the Canada housing benefit, which is coming online next year. We have added to that by taking steps to deal with issues that confront families in a host of other areas, including supporting seniors, making EI more flexible and putting all of these support programs in place.

What we are seeing is not just the rebuilding of a social safety net. We are seeing the construction of a trampoline, a social safety net that actually bounces people back up into security.

Is our work done? No, it is absolutely not done. As we move towards hitting our poverty targets, we know that we have more targets to set and more targets to meet. We will not rest until those programs are strengthened and poverty is reduced, in particular, for children and particularly for children in households led by women. However, that involves our having to sit down with the provinces and convince people that when federal dollars arrive, provincial dollars do not go out the back door.

When we stepped up on infrastructure, in Alberta in particular, on transit, we put investments on the table. In fact, we delivered new infrastructure dollars for transit, which is a very important tool for

fighting poverty. What happened? The provincial government in that province cut provincial contributions, leaving the federal government to pay the freight as it related to public transit in that province.

We need good, strong partners. When we get them, we see results. We are seeing it on housing in British Columbia right now. We are seeing it on a host of other issues.

Child poverty rates are dropping to the lowest levels we have seen in this country in a generation. Our work is not done and we continue of focus on working with provinces, territories and all partners, including municipalities, to solve this terrible problem that confronts Canada.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, we saw this in Quebec with the creation of the day care network. This really served as a launching pad for women, allowing more and more to get into the workforce and go into more interesting careers. Unfortunately, this network can no longer keep up with the demand. To secure a place for nursery school, women often have to apply or get on a waiting list before even becoming pregnant.

I recently hosted a town hall at my constituency office on the topic of debt. Many people came out to talk to us because they are worried about their high debt levels. I would remind members that the average Canadian household debt is 168%. Many people from young families told me that high day care costs are contributing to their debt load. Unfortunately, the high cost of day care is often the reason that one of the parents might decide to stop working, driving them further into debt.

That is why leadership is crucial. It is unfortunate that we keep talking about the past. It is important to look to the future, to take into account the precarious nature of work, and create a day care system for everyone.

● (1935)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, we agree, and that is why we invested \$7.5 billion in early child care and learning, which the province of Quebec is now using to supplement its day care program. That is the kind of federal-provincial partnership that works, but it requires federal dollars, not an argument to the provinces that they need to spend more.

We can take a look at other things. An issue was raised regarding household debt. We are looking at issues regarding affordable home ownership.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let us contrast the two parties' approaches. The NDP promises to send a cheque for \$750 to people who can afford million-dollar mortgages, believing that is going to solve the housing crisis. It is going to spend \$125 million to send cheques for \$750 to people who can afford to buy homes in Vancouver for \$1.6 million and carry a mortgage of \$1.2 million. That does not create equity and that is not social justice. That simply subsidizes people buying a fancy suit or a fancy bicycle to put in the back of their BMWs as they ride around to climate change protests.

The reality is that the Liberal program actually delivers real dollars to help subsidize mortgages and the down payment for mortgages for struggling Canadians, such as lower-income Canadians, so they can actually purchase real estate and get into the housing market. These are real dollars for real people, but they are also targeted toward lower-income Canadians.

If we want to solve these problem, we cannot do it with slogans. We have to do it with real investments. This government is proud to have made the investments to reduce child poverty and poverty in general in the country. About 900,000 Canadians—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver East.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in November 2018, I rose in the House to ask the Minister of Immigration why he continued to leave migrant caregivers and their families in the dark regarding what would replace the current caregivers immigration stream, which is ending this November.

I received no answer from the minister, as usual, in question period. I, along with the caregivers working hard across the country, would not receive an answer until the end of February this year as to what the future would hold.

I had the privilege of speaking to many of the caregivers, the migrant workers rights groups, the community advocates and the policy experts who took part in the government's so-called consultations on the new program. Their message to the government is clear: landed status now.

The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change report, which I noted in the House back in November, echoes the same message. It calls on the government to treat caregivers with the respect and dignity they deserve. That means permanent resident status on arrival.

What did the government do when it finally came around to announce the program and outline the pathways? It outlined two temporary programs, lasting five years each. Did the new pathways finally end the discrimination that caregivers faced, as they were in the only economy immigration stream that was not provided landed status on arrival? No, it did not provide that to these individuals.

On March 18, IRCC officials came before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I asked them questions about the new pilot program to learn some of the details about what the program looked like. Unsurprisingly, the officials could not answer those questions. In fact, they said that they did not have the details, as the government had yet to announce them, and they did not even know what the program would look like other than in broad strokes.

For example, the government said that people would be pre-vetted before they came to Canada. This would mean that after caregivers completed their two-year work requirement, their family members would be able to stay here.

With respect to that issue, I wanted to know whether family members would have to go through another round of medicals or whether the pre-vetting process would include a medical and after that was completed and passed, they would not have to go through another medical process. The officials could not answer that question.

Caregivers are wondering about this, by the way. The government has said that caregiver families can come to Canada and that the adults will be provided with a work permit. Would that work permit last for two years or would people have to continually renew it, as they do now? We do not know the answer to that.

Will the younger children who come here, who might be going to school, or the students getting a post-secondary education have to pay an international fee, for example? We do not know the answer to that.

Let us consider the issue regarding eligibility for medical MSP. Would people be covered for that service here? Of course, we do not know the answer to that.

How is it possible that the minister has waited all this time to come forward with an announcement and is not able to provide answers that caregivers need to know to proceed accordingly? More to the point, why does the government not do what is right? That seems to be such a hard thing for the government to do. It should ensure that caregivers are provided landed status on arrival and it should treat them with respect and dignity. They are calling for that.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the late show to answer my hon. colleague's question.

[*English*]

She is right. When she rose on November 21, 2018, she did not get a response from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. In fact, she got a response from the Prime Minister of Canada, who stood in the House and spoke about this government's strong record on enhancing Canada's immigration programming, including our humanitarian streams, our refugee streams and our economic streams.

This government well knows the importance of caregivers to the economic growth of Canada. This government knows that caregivers have been coming to Canada for decades. They help care for the elderly. They help provide special care for those with special needs and in need of special assistance. They help raise children and support families that are working hard each and every day to help Canada's economy grow.

Adjournment Proceedings

In 2017, our government committed to addressing the backlog that was left to us by the former Harper Conservative government, a backlog of over 9,000 applications in the live-in caregiver program. We have done great work to get rid of that backlog, with over 94% of those applications having been processed. There are now 500 that are still waiting in the queue. Under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, caregivers can rest assured that we will not stop until that entire backlog is removed.

The Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has been maintaining a 12-month processing time for new permanent resident applications from caregivers who were grandfathered into the old live-in caregiver program and has achieved a six-month application processing time in the pilot programs for caring for children and caring for people with high medical needs.

In February, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship addressed the issue of caregivers who were not grandfathered into the live-in caregivers program and who were not going to meet the eligibility criteria of the two pilot programs. He did this by launching a replacement to the live-in caregiver program. He announced an interim pathway for caregivers that opened on March 4, and the window will remain open until June 4. This program offers many caregivers in vulnerable situations an immediate pathway to permanent residency because of reduced education and work experience criteria, compared to the current pilot programs.

As well, given that the caring for children and caring for people with high medical needs pilot programs will expire later this year, our government will launch two new five-year pilot programs for caregivers, one dedicated to home child care providers and another for home support workers.

Similar to what was available under the old live-in caregiver program, these two pilots will provide a more defined transition from temporary to permanent status in Canada. In fact, caregivers will be assessed to ensure that they meet permanent residence criteria before they get a work permit and come to Canada. This means that the only eligibility criteria that in-home caregivers will have to meet when they get to Canada will be the two-year work experience requirement.

I would say that these actions demonstrate how our government is committed to caregivers. We are promising them a defined and assured pathway to permanent residency. Our actions also demonstrate our commitment to the individuals and families in this country who for decades have relied on caregivers coming from afar to help support them and their families so that they can be out in the workforce or re-educating themselves so they can contribute to the economic growth of this country.

We as a government have set out an ambitious three-year levels plan to ensure that we responsibly grow immigration levels across this country. We are doing that in a responsible way, with adequate supports, to make sure that we can take advantage of the economic opportunity that is there.

● (1945)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Speaker, not only did the minister not answer my question: neither did the Prime Minister. If we look at Hansard, it is very clear. They talked about something else and

patted their backs over how great they were doing. What they have forgotten are the hardships that caregivers have to endure.

I have met caregivers here who have been separated from their families for more than a decade, yet the government cannot bring forward a program that will ensure that they are reunited right at the get-go and give them the respect that they deserve, which is to provide them with landed status on arrival.

The parliamentary secretary also did not answer the questions I just put on the record just now, the litany of questions around the working permits, on the issue around international student fees, on the question around additional medical requirements and so on.

I would like to have straightforward answers for caregivers. Would the parliamentary secretary please answer those questions?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Speaker, we have come forward with two five-year pilot initiatives that will be rolled out later this year as the previous two Conservative pilot programs come to a close. We also opened an interim pathway, which opened on March 4 and will be open until June 4, to ensure that those caregivers who did not have a defined pathway to permanent residency through the prior programs will be able to find that pathway to permanent residency.

I know that nothing will ever satisfy the NDP when it comes to immigration, but we will keep the confidence of Canadians, which is an essential part of having a robust, open and fair immigration system that is lauded as the best in the world.

The government members on this side of the House will never apologize for having a strong immigration system and for using it as one of our most important assets to grow the economy of Canada, and we will do it in a way that is fair and that is caring of everyone who seeks to use that system.

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to raise an extremely important issue, as Canadians are preparing their tax returns to pay the taxes owed to government.

The Auditor General's fall 2018 report could not have been clearer. The NDP has known and has been saying for years that Canada has a two-tiered tax system. The Auditor General, who is independent, came to the same conclusion as the NDP that Canada has a two-tiered tax system: one for the rich and one for all other taxpayers.

Canadians are filing their taxes, and they are right to be worried and to feel that this system is unfair. I can understand those who are unhappy to see news reports about information leaks, such as the Bahamas leaks, the paradise papers and the Panama papers. There are more and more leaks, and they show that the wealthy, those with the most money in their pockets, can afford to pay tax lawyers big bucks to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. Canadians are understandably frustrated.

Adjournment Proceedings

After reading about these leaked papers on tax havens, they feel even more frustrated to see that the Auditor General has also come to the conclusion that we have a two-tiered tax system. People who can afford to have trusts, bank accounts in tax havens or numbered companies around the world, mainly in low-tax jurisdictions, can avoid paying their fair share of taxes. People are frustrated that these taxpayers are able to hide their money from the Canadian taxman.

When the CRA realizes that something is afoot, it gives these taxpayers more time to answer the agency's questions. The agency gives them more latitude to respond, even though they use all sorts of tax schemes. However, when the average taxpayer honestly forgets to declare \$1, \$10 or \$100, the CRA comes down on them like a ton of bricks to recover these small amounts.

First, these taxpayers cannot afford to hire tax lawyers to look after their affairs and, most importantly, they do not have the means to defend themselves against the CRA when it knocks on their door to collect what is owing.

Canadians are frustrated to see that the CRA always grants extensions to wealthy taxpayers with fortunes stashed abroad. The CRA agrees to extend their deadlines and sometimes even grants amnesties. We all remember the KPMG scandal. That may jog some taxpayers' memory. What happened was that people were caught participating in a tax scheme involving the Isle of Man, and the CRA offered them amnesty. Even though they had been caught red-handed, their debts were written off, and they got off scot-free. Smaller taxpayers do not get that kind of treatment from the CRA.

What has the government done since the Auditor General tabled his report? What has it done to remedy the situation and finally start moving towards a fairer tax system? At the very least, there needs to be an appearance of justice for taxpayers, who are preparing their tax returns as we speak.

• (1950)

[*English*]

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to have this opportunity to rise in the House, respond to this question and get the facts on the record.

I can assure my colleague that administering a fair and equitable tax system, which meets the needs of Canadians, is central to the work of the CRA and a top priority for our government.

The CRA welcomes the Auditor General's review of its tax compliance work. Its compliance programs affect millions of taxpayers and involve billions of dollars each year. The Auditor General's report provides important information that helps to highlight what is working well in the management of the CRA's compliance activities, as well as to identify the areas that require more attention.

The CRA agrees with the recommendations in the report and has developed action plans to address them. In fact, the CRA had already started to address some of these recommendations as a result of our own internal improvement processes and procedures. We are committed to acting in all areas identified by the Auditor General within 18 months, at no additional cost to the government and without requiring any legislative changes.

In response to the Auditor General's findings and recommendations, the CRA continues to review its internal processes and procedures to ensure that its compliance work is consistent and respects due process.

Our government knows that there is more work to be done to combat tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance. These issues are complex and shift constantly as new schemes and structures are introduced by those looking to avoid their tax obligations. That is exactly why, through the last four budgets, our government has invested over a billion dollars in the CRA to give it the tools it needs to crack down on tax cheats.

In addition, the CRA will review its methodologies and approaches to ensure that its tax compliance reporting is more comprehensive and easier for Canadians to understand. Thanks to recent and unprecedented funding investments, the compliance functions of the CRA have been strengthened and are helping us to find more of those not paying their fair share.

The results of these increased efforts are tangible. Added audit capacity means that the CRA now has audit teams focused exclusively on offshore tax planning. Currently, the CRA is conducting more than 1,100 taxpayer audits that have offshore implications. There are a number of CRA teams in place that focus exclusively on multinational enterprises. We targeted promoters of abusive or illegal tax schemes that led to the assessment of roughly \$48 million in third-party penalties in 2017-18 alone. With updated digital tools, the agency can now risk assess 100% of all large business corporate tax returns on a yearly basis, which greatly improves the ability to identify high-risk transactions. Last week, the CRA executed two search warrants in relation to a significant offshore tax evasion case in order to find further evidence in a \$77 million case.

Many of the areas the Auditor General flagged are common challenges for tax authorities around the world. Our government remains committed to ensuring that all Canadians meet their tax obligations and receive the credits and benefits to which they are entitled. Moreover, we remain committed to the protection and integrity of the tax system in order to ensure greater fairness for everyone.

• (1955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, this answer and the Prime Minister's answer both clearly indicated that offenders would face the consequences of their actions.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, the answer that was just given clearly indicates that offenders have still not faced any consequences. As a result, my supplementary question has to do with the results obtained by the Canada Revenue Agency.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue once again mentioned the investigations, searches and audits being conducted by the Canada Revenue Agency, but the government has no evidence to show Canadians that its fight against tax evasion has been effective.

Once again, while Canadians are filling out their income tax returns, can the parliamentary secretary tell us what tangible results the government has achieved in the fight against tax evasion and can she tell us about the convictions that have been made and the white collar criminals who have been sent to prison through the CRA's efforts?

The government has been in power for nearly four years now and there have been three financial scandals involving information leaks.

When will there be even just one conviction? People can be sent to prison for international tax evasion.

[English]

Mrs. Deborah Schulte: Mr. Speaker, after 10 years of Conservative inaction, in 2015 we made the commitment to

Canadians to crack down on tax evasion and ensure that everyone pays their fair share. We have invested \$1 billion in the CRA to ensure that it has the tools that it needs to carry out this work.

To specifically answer the member's question, the minister tightened the rules relating to the voluntary disclosures program. That voluntary disclosures program was tightened up to prevent individuals named in information leaks from being able to make deals with the CRA and avoid facing prosecution. We made this decision knowing that it could take years to bring tax evaders to justice. We chose thorough investigations and sometimes a long justice process over quick dollar figures. That was a choice that our government made and I am pleased with the progress that the CRA is making on this important issue.

Canadians want justice and that is what we will deliver.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:59 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, April 3, 2019

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Sikh Heritage Month

Mr. Grewal 26615

Religious Freedom

Mr. Virani 26615

National Prayer Breakfast

Mrs. Wagantall 26615

Bhullar Wrestling Club

Mr. Peschisolido 26615

Climate Change

Ms. Ashton 26616

Kitchener Rangers

Mr. Saini 26616

Carbon Pricing

Mr. Barrett 26616

Sikh Motorcycle Club Canada

Mr. Dhaliwal 26616

Women's Health

Ms. Damoff 26617

Canola

Mr. Hoback 26617

Autism and PDD Society of Laval

Mr. El-Khoury 26617

Status of Women

Mrs. Nassif 26617

World Autism Awareness Day

Mr. Lake 26617

Camp Day

Mr. Amos 26618

Daughters of the Vote

Ms. Quach 26618

Elected Officials

Ms. Alleslev 26618

Daughters of the Vote

Mr. Duguid 26618

ORAL QUESTIONS

Caucus Membership

Mr. Scheer 26618

Mr. Trudeau 26618

Mr. Scheer 26619

Mr. Trudeau 26619

Mr. Scheer 26619

Mr. Trudeau 26619

Mr. Scheer 26619

Mr. Trudeau 26619

Mr. Scheer 26619

Mr. Trudeau 26619

Indigenous Affairs

Mr. Singh 26620

Mr. Trudeau 26620

Caucus Membership

Mr. Singh 26620

Mr. Trudeau 26620

Mr. Singh 26620

Mr. Trudeau 26620

Mr. Singh 26620

Mr. Trudeau 26620

Justice

Mr. Scheer 26620

Mr. Trudeau 26620

Mr. Scheer 26621

Mr. Trudeau 26621

Mr. Scheer 26621

Mr. Trudeau 26621

Mr. Scheer 26621

Mr. Trudeau 26621

Mr. Scheer 26621

Mr. Trudeau 26621

Mr. Scheer 26621

Mr. Trudeau 26621

Indigenous Affairs

Ms. Jolibois 26622

Mr. Trudeau 26622

Ms. Ashton 26622

Mr. Trudeau 26622

Caucus Membership

Ms. Raitt 26622

Mr. Trudeau 26622

Ms. Raitt 26622

Mr. Trudeau 26622

Justice

Mr. Rayes 26623

Mr. Trudeau 26623

Mr. Rayes 26623

Mr. Trudeau 26623

Status of Women

Ms. Kwan 26623

Mr. Trudeau 26623

Indigenous Affairs

Mr. Angus 26623

Mr. Trudeau 26623

Infrastructure

Ms. Bendayan 26624

Mr. Trudeau 26624

Justice	
Ms. Bergen	26624
Mr. Trudeau	26624
Ms. Bergen	26624
Mr. Trudeau	26624
Mr. Paul-Hus	26624
Mr. Trudeau	26624
Mrs. Boucher	26624
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Boulerice	26625
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Boulerice	26625
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Poilievre	26625
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Poilievre	26625
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Poilievre	26625
Mr. Trudeau	26625
Mr. Poilievre	26626
Mr. Trudeau	26626
Intergovernmental Relations	
Ms. Hutchings	26626
Mr. Trudeau	26626
Justice	
Ms. Alleslev	26626
Mr. Trudeau	26626
Mr. Singh	26626
Mr. Trudeau	26626
Housing	
Mr. Ellis	26627
Mr. Trudeau	26627
Justice	
Mr. Strahl	26627
Mr. Trudeau	26627
Status of Women	
Mrs. Caesar-Chavannes	26627
Mr. Trudeau	26627

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Government Response to Petitions	
Mr. Lamoureux	26628
Motion	26628
Motion agreed to	26629
Privilege	
Alleged Process Used to Determine Liberal Caucus Membership	
Mr. Chong	26629
Mr. Weir	26630
Ms. May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)	26630

Mr. Masse (Windsor West)	26631
Statements by Minister of Justice and Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice	
Mr. Strahl	26631

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

The Budget	
Financial Statement of the Minister of Finance	
Motion	26631
Mr. Poilievre	26631
Privilege	
Alleged Process Used to Determine Liberal Caucus Membership	
Mr. Weir	26632
The Budget	
Financial Statement of the Minister of Finance	
Motion	26633
Mr. Poilievre	26633

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Canada Labour Code	
Bill C-420, Second reading	26640
Motion negatived	26641
Fairness for All Canadian Taxpayers Act	
Mr. Kelly	26641
Bill S-243, Second reading	26641
Mr. Dusseault	26643
Mr. Lamoureux	26644
Mrs. Shanahan	26644
Mr. Dusseault	26645
Mr. Kmiec	26647
Mr. Lamoureux	26648

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House	
Justice and Human Rights	
Motion for concurrence	26649
Mr. Kmiec	26649
Mr. Gerretsen	26650

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Child Care	
Ms. Sansoucy	26651
Mr. Vaughan	26651
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship	
Ms. Kwan	26653
Mr. DeCoursey	26653
Canada Revenue Agency	
Mr. Dusseault	26654
Mrs. Schulte	26655

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>