



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# House of Commons Debates

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Tuesday, February 18, 2020

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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 18, 2020

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayer*

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• (1000)

[*English*]

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

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

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, today, Statements by Ministers, pursuant to Standing Order 33, shall be taken up at 11 a.m.; that the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands be permitted to reply to the statement; and that the time taken for these statements shall be added to the time provided for Government Orders.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 43rd General Election held on October 21, 2019.

[*Translation*]

This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[*English*]

### PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to section 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “Economic and Fiscal Monitor—February 2020”.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “Considerations Regarding the 2020 Tax and Spending Review”.

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[*English*]

### AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

**The Speaker:** I have the honour to lay upon the table the fall 2019 reports of the interim Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), these documents are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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### SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2019-20

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the year ending March 31, 2020, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am tabling a copy of the supplementary estimates (B), 2019-20.

\* \* \*

• (1005)

### CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

**Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the 2018-19 report of the Correctional Investigator as required under section 192 of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

I am also tabling the response to the 16 recommendations addressed to the Correctional Service of Canada.

*Routine Proceedings*

[English]

**CITIZENSHIP ACT**

**Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-6, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 94).

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

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**INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

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

The first concerns the Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance Conference, held in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, from May 6 to May 7, 2019. The second concerns the Western Governors' Association Annual Meeting, held in Vail, Colorado, U.S.A., from June 10 to June 12, 2019.

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**HEALTH OF ANIMALS ACT**

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-205, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to stand today and introduce this bill, which is seconded by my colleague, the member for Beauce.

This bill addresses a critical issue, which is the securing of the biosecurity of our food supply, especially when there are trespassers on farm property and facilities. As the House may be aware, there are numerous protests on farm property and process plants across this country, and it is certainly not relegated to one segment of agriculture or one area of Canada. We have seen people enter hog farms in Abbotsford, B.C. and Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, a pork breeding facility in Ontario, and activists have even tried to remove animals from dairy farms.

In my own riding of Foothills, a farmer was startled to come to his farm in the morning and see that dozens of protesters had broken into the property and into a barn and were trying to take turkeys. There are numerous examples, and I fear the situation will get worse if producers do not see something is done. I do not think activists understand the full consequences of their actions. We want them to understand that they are endangering the safety of livestock, families, farmers and workers. We understand that they care deeply about the soil, food safety, animal health and the environment, but I think my colleagues in this room would also understand and agree with me that mental health and anxiety within agriculture are at a crisis.

These are important issues that we hope to address, but I have decided to focus my amendment to the Health of Animals Act to create a new offence. The act provides for the control of diseases and toxic substances that may affect animals or could be transmitted by animals to persons. The risks from viruses like the African

swine fever are very real and potentially devastating to Canadian agriculture.

Currently, there is nothing that addresses trespassers, which is what this bill aims to change. I look forward to engaging with my colleagues as we work together to address this important issue and the safety of Canada's food supply.

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

\* \* \*

● (1010)

**GREENHOUSE GAS POLLUTION PRICING ACT**

**Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-206, An Act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act (qualifying farming fuel).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my great privilege today to introduce an act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.

Agriculture is a pillar of our economy and it is part of the fabric of our society. Agriculture, though, has been having a particularly difficult time. Our farmers are struggling out there. They are now facing multiple blockades in addition to pricing instability and trade disruptions. The pressures on our farmers today are innumerable. Therefore, it is with great satisfaction that I am introducing a private member's bill that would provide some relief to our farmers.

One of the things I heard when I was travelling my riding, from farmers and non-farmers, is that the carbon tax is impacting the way they operate their businesses. In fact, the carbon tax is taking away up to 12% of their net income, so this is having a significant impact. There is currently an exemption for farmers, but only for gasoline and diesel. For whatever reason, both propane and natural gas were left out. That left many grain growers and farmers out in the cold, as they were drying their grain and paying thousands of dollars in carbon tax.

Our friends in the government like to say that the carbon tax is revenue neutral. However, for farmers that simply is not the case. Their rebate may account for less than 10% of the carbon tax. Many are paying thousands and thousands of dollars in carbon tax every year, making their prices higher and making it more difficult to compete.

My private member's bill would allow an increase in the exemption, to include both natural gas and propane, making life just a bit easier and more affordable for our farmers. This would allow farmers to invest in technologies to fight climate change, such as sequestering carbon and other sustainable practices that would make life a bit better for all Canadians.

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

**The Speaker:** I want to remind all members in future that “succinct” is the key word, and to try to make it as brief as possible. I know we love our bills that we put forward and want to talk about them, but I just want to emphasize “succinct”.

\* \* \*

● (1015)

[Translation]

#### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion:

That, at the conclusion of today's debate on the opposition motion in the name of the member for Beloeil—Chambly, all questions necessary to dispose of the motion be deemed put and a recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 19, 2020, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

\* \* \*

[English]

#### PETITIONS

##### CLIMATE CHANGE

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present an online petition gathering steam. The petitioners are calling on this House to reject the proposal for a very large expansion, with over 14,000 hectares of wetlands to be lost. Petitioners note that if the expansion goes ahead, it would produce 260,000 barrels of bitumen a day and substantially increase greenhouse gases, blowing through our Paris targets. The petitioners call on this House assembled to reject Teck's Frontier mine and halt any existing or planned construction.

##### OPIOIDS

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in the House today on behalf of Vancouver Islanders who are petitioning the federal government over the opioid crisis. The petitioners note that the number of preventable deaths, which is well into the thousands now, has surpassed the total number of deaths from all other public health emergencies in the last 20 years including SARS, H1N1 and Ebola. They note that problematic substance use is a health issue, not a

#### Routine Proceedings

criminal issue, and that continuing the criminalization approach to this problem does nothing to solve it.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to declare the current opioid crisis a national public health emergency. They would like to see the current drug policy reformed to decriminalize personal possession and the federal government to lead in establishing a network of safe supply so that those who are addicted to these harmful substances can get the help they need.

##### CLIMATE CHANGE

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition from voters on Vancouver Island who oppose the purchase of the Trans Mountain pipeline and do not want that pipeline to be expanded. The price tag for that pipeline has gone from \$5.6 billion to \$12.6 billion. The environmental destruction involved, and the way it will undermine our climate targets, is not acceptable to the petitioners and they would like to see plans for the pipeline expansion to be halted.

##### PACIFIC HERRING FISHERY

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to table a petition on behalf of Vancouver Islanders from Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Courtenay, Hornby Island and Denman Island. They cite the importance of herring in the Salish Sea for salmon, killer whales, humpback whales, cod, halibut, seabirds and other interdependent species.

They also cite that four out of five herring grounds are closed right now in coastal British Columbia because of DFO's failed management policies and that, in 2019, the fishery was fished at 25% of the biomass, which is 5% more than the department predicted. They note that the department is recommending the fishery be cut from 20% to 10% because it is a high-risk fishery. They want the government to take a precautionary approach until a whole-of-ecosystem-based management approach is put in place.

This is not against the fishers. They are calling on the minister and the department to take swift action to protect our ecosystem. They are hoping that the government will pay attention because this fishery is set to open in less than two weeks.

\* \* \*

● (1020)

#### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

*Privilege***REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY DEBATE**

## RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to propose an emergency debate on the urgent need for the federal government to address the concerns regarding issues of aboriginal title and constitutional rights brought forward by the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation and protests in solidarity with the chiefs that have taken place across Canada. I believe this meets the bar of Standing Order 52(6)(a) that the matter proposed be "a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration".

Inaction by the government has allowed tensions to rise. This has put significant pressure on the economy and threatened jobs across the country. This morning all news networks, without exception, were speaking openly of a crisis in this country, and reports of the RCMP's use of force against land defenders have deepened this crisis.

[*Translation*]

Given the urgency of these issues related to the Wet'suwet'en nation and the protests being held by its allies, I believe it is important to hold an emergency debate in Parliament today.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Liberals support what the member is proposing, but I would highlight that there will be a ministerial statement at 11 o'clock on the issue.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 52, I rise today to request that the House hold an emergency debate on the issues that have motivated some indigenous communities to impose rail blockades and on the economic impact of those blockades.

As parliamentarians, we cannot remain silent and allow this conflict to get any further out of hand, a conflict that, with each passing hour, affects more and more citizens and affects the relationship between the federal government and indigenous peoples across Quebec and Canada.

The social climate has become volatile, and this crisis warrants an urgent response.

I am therefore officially submitting this request for an emergency debate, which I hope you will authorize as soon as possible.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say very briefly that we agree with the requests submitted by the NDP and the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

This is obviously a matter of an emergency situation. We also want to make it very clear that we will always stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en.

[*Translation*]

**SPEAKER'S RULING**

**The Speaker:** I thank the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby and the hon. member for La Prairie for their interventions. I am prepared to grant their request for an emergency debate regarding the relationship with indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

This debate will be held later today at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment.

\* \* \*

**PRIVILEGE**

## RESPONSE BY JUSTICE MINISTER TO ORDER PAPER QUESTION

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know if I have had the opportunity to do so, but I would like to congratulate you on your excellent position as my neighbour and as Speaker of the House.

As we are talking about the relationship between first nation people, I rise on a question of privilege pursuant to Standing Order 48, to state that I believe my parliamentary privilege was violated by the Minister of Justice and his staff.

It is my belief that the minister and his staff misled the House on a fundamental issue, which is the legal cost of fighting indigenous children at the Human Rights Tribunal and in Federal Court. I consequently believe that, because they have provided this misinformation, the minister should be held in contempt of Parliament.

We have had a lot of talk this week about the importance of the rule of law. I find this issue especially pertinent when we are talking about the actions of the justice department and the Attorney General, who apparently believe they are above Parliament when it comes to their obligation to respond to Order Paper questions on fundamental questions of fact, not opinions on facts. If you will indulge me, Mr. Speaker, I will present the facts of this case as succinctly as possible.

On December 9, 2019, I gave notice pursuant to Standing Order 39 of a written question seeking information regarding the legal fees for the hours and the associated costs the government has incurred due to legal proceedings related to Human Rights Tribunal cases against first nation children between 2007 and 2019. The Department of Justice provided a written response to this question in late January 2020 stating, "Based upon the hours recorded, the total amount of legal costs incurred amounts to approximately \$5,261,009.14, as of December 9, 2019."

As a stand-alone figure, the idea that the federal government would have spent \$5.2 million fighting the rights of the most vulnerable children in this country is shocking. However, it has come to my attention that these numbers are extremely misleading. I have brought this forward because evidence contrary to the justice official's came out last week when I was representing Canada in Washington, so this is my first opportunity to address this.

Ms. Cindy Blackstock, who has been involved in this case from the beginning, has tabled documents she has received through multiple ATIPs from the justice department about the costs incurred between 2007 and 2017. The number Ms. Blackstock has provided, through the justice department's own documents, is \$9.4 million spent fighting indigenous children in court.

APTN has analyzed the numbers and has come up with a slightly more conservative figure of \$8.3 million as of 2017, but that is still substantially higher than what the Minister of Justice stated the department has spent up until now. This does not include any of the costs incurred after 2017.

I will remind the Speaker that when the government was found guilty of reckless discrimination against first nation children in 2016, the Prime Minister made a solemn vow that he would respect the rulings of the Human Rights Tribunal. He said he would address this and would not fight this.

However, there have been nine non-compliance orders, as well as a battle in Federal Court attempting to quash the ruling and deny the rights of children who are in the broken child welfare system. It is clear the numbers we have up to 2017 from the Minister of Justice's office are higher than \$8.3 million and higher than the false \$5.2 million he provided through the Order Paper.

How can the House make sense of these contradictory numbers? We are not talking about opinions. The issue goes to the heart of the Prime Minister's promise on reconciliation to create a new relationship based on trust. It must also be based on the trust of parliamentarians, when they use tools like the Order Paper question to get factual responses so they can do their jobs.

This ongoing legal battle against first nation children has had a corrosive effect on the Prime Minister's brand and it would appear to me that it cannot be explained away as a matter of opinion attempting to downplay the numbers.

Page 111 of *Erskine May: A treatise on the law, privileges, proceedings and the usage of Parliament* explicitly states that misleading the House can be considered an issue of contempt. It states, "The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt."

• (1025)

Similarly, page 82 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* quotes the United Kingdom Joint Committee on Parliamentary Privilege in listing various types of contempt, which includes "deliberately attempting to mislead the House or a committee (by way of statement, evidence or petition)".

We know being wrong is not a matter of privilege, but misleading the House is. That is why various Speakers, your predecessors, have used the test laid out in page 85 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. It states:

...the following elements have to be established when it is alleged that a Member is in contempt for deliberately misleading the House: one, it must be proven that the statement was misleading; two, it must be established that the Member making the statement knew at the time that the statement was incorrect; and three, that in making the statement, the Member intended to mislead the House.

I believe these tests can be met in this case.

### *Privilege*

First, if we review the criteria that I have just read, the statement given to me was misleading because there exists in the public domain, in the documents of the Minister of Justice, conflicting information regarding these documents. The minister only provided me with the costs of the hours recorded, but not with the associated legal fees.

Second, the minister knew that his statement was misleading since the ministry with which he is charged provided different information to Ms. Cindy Blackstock, yet his signature on the document was tabled in the House.

Third, the minister intended to mislead the House since he intentionally avoided answering parts of the question that would provide clarity, a point made clear by the fact that the minister omitted to mention all additional legal fees and only provided the cost of hours.

This is not about being wrong; this is about the fundamental question of the obligation of the government to speak truthfully in this chamber.

I note that previous Speakers have ruled that in the event of contradictory information, the matter can be brought to the House to be dealt with.

For example, the Speaker, on March 3, 2014, stated:

...the fact remains that the House continues to be seized of completely contradictory statements. This is a difficult position in which to leave members, who must be able to depend on the integrity of the information with which they are provided to perform their parliamentary duties.

Accordingly, in keeping with the precedent cited earlier in which Speaker Miliken indicated that the matter merited "...further consideration by an appropriate committee, if only to clear the air".

I believe that the same situation exists today and that the remedy should therefore be the same.

The fact that the Canadian government even spent a cent fighting the most vulnerable of its own citizens in court to deny them their indigenous rights and human rights is callous and shameful. However, the fact the government misled the House and provided incomplete or inaccurate information regarding the amount of money that it has wasted on such reprehensible actions is unacceptable. I asked the government to answer these fundamental questions. We need to know that the government will respond with true and accurate figures to an Order Paper question about how much money was spent at the Human Rights Tribunal.

### *Business of Supply*

That is in accordance with page 63 of Erskine May's *Treatise on the Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament*, which states that "...it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity."

Also, I am demanding that the Minister of Justice explain to this House and the Canadian public why the information that was provided in response to the Order Paper question differs so much from the information that was provided to Ms. Cindy Blackstock through multiple ATIP requests in his own department. The Canadian people have a right to know.

I will wrap up here. In conclusion, this matters because what we are dealing with are the lives of children. It mattered to Kanina Sue Turtle, Tammy Keeash, Tina Fontaine, Amy Owen, Courtney Scott, Devon Freeman, Chantell Fox, Jolynn Winter, Jenera Roundsky, Azraya Ackabee-Kokopenace, and all the other children who have been broken in this system that failed them. Parliament needs to know that these children were loved. We had an obligation to do better.

The Parliament of Canada called on the government and the justice minister on December 11, 2019, just after we learned the horrific details of the death of Devon Freeman, to end his legal battle against the children. He has ignored the rule of Parliament. He has ignored the obligations under the Order Paper question. I ask you to address this.

• (1030)

**The Speaker:** I will take this question of privilege under advisement.

I will hear very briefly from the hon. member for Perth—Wellington, for 30 seconds or less. I do not want this to turn into a debate.

**Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in the interests of time, the opposition would like to reserve its right to return to the House, if needed, to address this question of privilege.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SICKNESS BENEFITS

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ)** moved:

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. NDP member for not taking up our entire opposition day.

We are hearing about some very serious issues in the news, issues that have been commanding our attention and that will now be debating in the House, and rightly so, as we just agreed. I thank the Speaker for that. However, I am asking members today to make room in their thoughts, hearts and minds for an issue that may, on

the surface, appear to be less urgent but that, in its own way, has a serious impact on the lives of tens of thousands and perhaps even hundreds of thousands of Quebeckers and Canadians.

I would like to tell a little story. A few months ago, I met a Quebecker who told me about the situation being faced by his daughter Émilie Sansfaçon. This woman, who worked and paid EI premiums throughout her entire career, suddenly found herself unable to work. That is the very principle behind what we call insurance. It is an amount that you pay yourself or with others in order to be able to cope with a difficult situation that is hopefully temporary.

However, Émilie was being granted only 15 weeks of benefits, when a regular worker employed by a given industry or the government could receive up to 50 weeks of benefits. That is a major problem for someone who has a serious illness, such as cancer, or who had a serious illness and then relapses, which is even worse.

When I met with Louis Sansfaçon, Émilie's father, I was shocked to learn that this discrimination exists. To me, that seemed extremely unfair to people in serious need in our supposedly generous and open society and completely devoid of compassion toward them.

We therefore raised the issue in Parliament and organized several meetings, one of which the Prime Minister did us the honour of attending, along with the minister. It emerged from that meeting that the Liberals would consider not only their own election promise of extending benefits from 15 weeks to 26, but also the possibility of extending them from 15 weeks to 50.

I left the meeting thinking that we had gone from a ceiling of 26 weeks to a floor of 26 weeks, so that what might have been the maximum had become the minimum. The number of weeks would be somewhere between 26 and 50.

Of course, there is no such thing as "semi-discrimination". Either there is discrimination or there is not. If an ordinary worker is entitled to 50 weeks, someone who is unable to work for whatever reason should also get 50 weeks. It would be discriminatory to give that person 32 or 41 weeks.

At least we were seeing some openness and some progress. At the time, we agreed that although we were seeing some progress and discussions—and of course things would move more quickly in the lead-up to the budget—we would exercise discretion in a spirit of collaboration, as we always do.

Sadly, it did not happen. The reports we are hearing suggest that there is no measure, that the 26 weeks will not necessarily be guaranteed in this budget, and that the 50 weeks will not even be considered.

*Business of Supply*

By its own analysis, either the government came to the conclusion that this is not a good measure, and I would be curious to know why, or we got taken for a ride. Apparently they wanted to stretch this out, buy some time and see what they will do with this issue later. Obviously, that is not satisfactory to us.

● (1035)

The government, and particularly the Prime Minister, is quick to see discrimination everywhere, however it defines it and however imagined. In some situations, there truly is discrimination, but not in every case. In Quebec, we certainly feel the repercussions of comments that we believe are not entirely true.

In this case, we have a technical and mathematical issue. People contribute to an independent employment insurance fund and then, one day, find themselves unable to do their job, either because it no longer exists or for a wide range of other reasons. Some of those workers will receive employment insurance benefits for 50 weeks, and others for fewer weeks, which is a clear example of discrimination.

I am appealing to the government's real or purported values to ask it to be fair. Fairness means not being discriminatory. Fairness means applying the same rules to everyone. In this case, there are no linguistic, territorial, religious or other variables. We are talking about the ability to work, a foundation of modern western economies.

Politicians tend to brag about Canada having a generous social safety net. The primary purpose of the social safety net is to protect the purchasing power of individuals, who in turn support economic activity while successfully maintaining a minimum standard of living and quality of life. In a way, parliamentarians have a solemn duty to protect this 20th century benefit.

In this case, we would tend to say that it is good for some and not so good for others.

Naturally we could make the argument about the cost. Still, Canada is not too poor to buy a pipeline, just to mention an arbitrary example. Canada is not too poor to chase a seat on the UN Security Council—which costs millions of dollars—even if it means casually shaking hands with Iran's foreign minister.

We have the money for lots of things. However, when it comes to the fair implementation of values shared by Canada and Quebec that we consider to be fundamental, we suddenly do not have the money. Clearly, we cannot accept that argument.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer studied the issue. He found that it would cost just over \$1 billion annually if all workers with serious illnesses received EI benefits for the entire period of 50 weeks. We know that very few people with an illness preventing them from working will actually be away from their jobs for 15, 25 or 30 weeks.

Therefore, the real costs are unknown, but they surely represent less than half the estimated amount. We are talking about amounts that the government readily allocates to matters that could be deemed to be less important. Employment insurance is a fundamental responsibility of the state.

This is ultimately all about compassion. Some of us are naturally a little more sensitive than others, while others are a little more ostentatious about it. I would like us to be less ostentatious and to take real action.

● (1040)

I would like to see us be unanimous, or at least in agreement, about Canada's and Quebec's shared values. I would like to see members stop hiding behind ostensibly economic arguments that may or may not be valid to put off doing the right thing. The government and its leader have expressed values, and I want nothing more than to take them at their word. I encourage them to be clear on their position today and for the vote tomorrow, so that we can put an end to this discrimination that is just as unacceptable as any other form of discrimination. I encourage everyone to show compassion, understanding, justice and fairness to the tens of thousands of people who are suffering in the worst possible way. I believe this to be our fundamental duty, and I urge the House to vote accordingly.

● (1045)

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly. I rose in the House last week, and I am very attuned to the matter we are debating.

The member spoke about compassion and discrimination, but what about the Canadians and Quebecers who are not employees but self-employed workers?

He told us about discrimination based on the number of weeks, but I find that not including all Canadians who contribute to Canada's prosperity is discriminatory.

I would like my colleague to speak to that.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, there are some subjects and circumstances that lend themselves to some minor adjustments and there are others that do not. The matter we are discussing falls into the second category. If our esteemed colleague would like to propose something, then, my goodness, that would be wonderful. We are listening.

Self-employed workers who register for the program can access employment insurance benefits. In addition to this change, which seemed necessary, everyone experiencing financial difficulties on top of an economic issue should definitely have support. That goes without saying.

In this case, we are targeting a specific and recurring issue that has already been raised, one that the government already said it would examine. We are asking if this can be resolved.

*Business of Supply*

If the Conservatives want to fix more than this one issue, if they want to expand the social safety net, they surely know that it is in our DNA to do so and that we will be pleased to see their concerns come to the fore. We are open to that.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank the Bloc leader for bringing forward this important debate.

The NDP has been bringing forward private members' bills to address this problem at least as far back as the 39th Parliament. Not only are the Liberals at fault, but also the previous Conservative government. This is one of the easiest fixes. I have dealt with so many constituents who fall in the gap between 15 weeks and one year. They need a year at least in order to qualify for Canada pension plan disability benefits, and it is such an easy fix.

The Liberals and the Conservatives have failed so many Canadians. This is an important debate. I really hope that in this 43rd Parliament we get this done. I ask the leader of the Bloc to add his comments to that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, it sounds like many of us are on the same page. Now all we need to know is where the government stands.

I recognize that other MPs have raised this issue before. Our riding offices actually deal with a lot of cases related to these issues.

I would imagine that government MPs have also been asked to intervene on this issue and that there will be discussions on the subject eventually. Recently, another issue came up that I will not name because I do not want to upset certain members, but some Liberal MPs indicated to their party that they are not comfortable with its position. That happens, and that is part of democracy.

Those people may also have had constituents come into their office with EI problems, so maybe they can push government higher-ups for progress on this file.

• (1050)

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to know why the Bloc Québécois opted for exactly 50 weeks.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, if a factory worker anywhere in Canada or Quebec were to lose his job, and if he had accumulated the number of hours required under the system to be eligible for benefits, he would get up to 50 weeks. It is merely the same number of weeks given to any other worker. That is why we decided on the same number, 50 weeks.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the leader of the Bloc Québécois talked about values. When I think of the values, I think of the literally hundreds of millions of dollars, record high amounts, that have been spent by this government over the years on health care. Many of those millions

went toward cancer. I also think of the hundreds of thousands of individuals lifted out of poverty.

On this specific issue, even in the days when we were in opposition, the leader of the Liberal Party often advocated for many Liberal members of Parliament to look at ways we could make further enhancements.

Why is the member fixated on the 50 weeks? Is there some sort of rationale that was used for the number 50?

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, I am happy to say it again. Someone who works for a company and loses his job has access to a certain number of weeks of benefits. Someone who must stop working because of a serious illness is entitled to a certain number of weeks of benefits. We should put in an "equal" sign to equate both situations. It is as simple as that.

Besides that, would we invest hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars in developing a new, amazing car but allow it to be missing a wheel? If it is missing a wheel, it is not a very good car.

In many respects, we have an excellent health care system; I do not disagree with that. It would be even better if the government were to mind its own business and transfer to the provinces the money it owes them by increasing health transfers to 5.2%, as all the provinces have requested.

In this case, however, this is an independent fund to which people contribute their own money. It is not even the government's money, in the traditional sense.

I think we can simply improve the system at a relatively low cost and turn this inequity into justice.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to commend my leader on his excellent speech. I also want to thank him for choosing this topic for the first opposition day.

There is one aspect that has not been raised. The employment insurance fund currently has a \$4-billion surplus. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates this measure will cost \$1 billion, but in fact it will cost roughly half that at \$500 million or \$600 million. In other words, it would cost next to nothing to adopt this measure.

The Sorel-Tracy regional association of unemployed people testified at the Standing Committee on Finance. It said that if the EI fund were empty, it would simply take a contribution of 6¢ an hour. Let's not forget that employees and employers are the ones who pay for employment insurance, not the government.

Why not implement this system immediately?

*Routine Proceedings*

• (1055)

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet:** Madam Speaker, it feels a bit odd responding to a colleague. Now I know how our friends across the way must feel most of the time.

The notion of little to no cost is absolutely extraordinary. I find it very interesting in this case because that brings us back to what we were saying earlier. It brings us back to the notion of values. It brings us back to what is supposed to characterize our work.

It brings me back to another thing I touched on. There are people among us right now who personally or whose loved ones have a serious health issue that is causing a great deal of concern. We should put ourselves in their shoes.

Imagine if one of our loved ones, one of the people or the person we love the most in the world, had a serious health problem. Would we not want to be free from worrying about other considerations—

[*English*]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I will let the hon. minister know that we will have to interrupt her speech at 11 o'clock.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to start by saying that our hearts are with Émilie Sansfaçon. She is incredibly brave, and we thank her for taking the time to come to Ottawa to meet with me and the Prime Minister to explain just how serious this situation is. We understand that it is very serious.

I am pleased to rise in the House of Commons to discuss the motion before us today. I want to acknowledge that we are on unceded Algonquin territory.

[*English*]

Today's motion touches on a key Canadian value, which is how we take care of each other when we are sick. We are not a country where the sick are abandoned; that is not the Canadian way.

[*Translation*]

We have a solid social safety net, and one aspect of this net is our employment insurance system.

[*English*]

I am proud to be responsible for this program in my new role as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. In this role, the Prime Minister has asked me to undertake a number of measures to strengthen this important Canadian program.

[*Translation*]

As everyone knows, workplaces and families are changing. Naturally, employment insurance sickness benefits need to change as well. The employment insurance system has remained a pillar of Canada's social safety net since it was created in 1940. Since then, life has changed considerably.

[*English*]

It is time to see how employment insurance sickness benefits can better support Canadians. I will first take a moment to describe what the program is currently meant to do and what it is like now.

Currently, the EI sickness benefit provides up to 15 weeks of income replacement for Canadians who are unable to work because of illness, injury or quarantine.

[*Translation*]

Employment insurance sickness benefits were designed to help Canadians stay connected to the labour market and to provide them with financial support during the healing process. This will allow them to return and contribute to the labour market without having to bear any undue financial hardship. These sickness benefits are in addition to other support measures available in the case of illness or long-term disability through the Canada pension plan disability benefits and employers' health care plans.

[*English*]

On average, people who claimed sickness benefits in the fiscal year 2017-18 used 10 weeks of the benefit and then returned to work. However, quite a large cohort, 36% or about 150,000 Canadians, exhausted their full 15 weeks before they could get back to work. Among these 150,000 Canadians, we know that women and older Canadians were more likely to need more than the 15 weeks. This is a very serious issue facing Canadians with sickness or injury.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

Imagine that someone is raising children alone and suddenly is unable to pay the bills. No one needs that kind of pressure—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** The hon. minister will have 16 and a half minutes to finish her speech when we resume debate.

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

### RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to begin by recognizing that we are on the ancestral land of the Algonquin people.

People are troubled by what they have been witnessing this past week. Young, old, indigenous and newcomers are asking themselves what is happening in the country. They are asking what lies ahead for themselves, for their communities and for Canada. They know that these protests are serious, that this is a critical moment for our country and for our future. So do I.

*Routine Proceedings*

On all sides, people are upset and frustrated. I get it. It is understandable, because this is about things that matter: rights, livelihoods, the rule of law and our democracy.

[*Translation*]

To those affected by the blockades and protests, I know that you are going through difficult times. Rest assured that our government is working hard to find a solution. Our government's priority is to resolve this situation peacefully, but also to protect the rule of law in our country. That is a principle we will always stand up for.

[*English*]

It is past time for this situation to be resolved. However, what we are facing was not created overnight. It was not created because we have embarked upon a path of reconciliation recently in our history. It is because, for too long in our history, for too many years, we failed to do so. Therefore, finding a solution will not be simple; it will take determination, hard work and co-operation. There is no relationship more important to Canada than the one with indigenous peoples. Today, as Prime Minister, I am once again formally extending my hand in partnership and trust.

Over the last 11 days, our government has been working on a path forward, even as many have been saying we should give up. We know what is at stake. We know that we cannot afford to fail. Therefore, we are creating a space for peaceful, honest dialogue with willing partners.

As we heard this morning from Mohawk leaders and from National Chief Perry Bellegarde, we need to resolve this through dialogue and mutual respect.

To the Wet'suwet'en and Mohawk nations, and indigenous leaders across the country, we are listening. We are not asking that they stop standing up for their communities, rights and for what they believe. We only ask that they be willing to work with the federal government as partners in finding solutions. They remind us, rightly so, that too often trust has been betrayed in the history of indigenous negotiations with Canadian governments. In fact, that underlines the difficulty of solving this situation today. However, our common ground is the desire to arrive at solutions.

We cannot resolve this alone. Just like we need indigenous leaders to be partners, we also need Canadians to show both resolve and collaboration. Everyone has a stake in getting this right.

[*Translation*]

Let us be clear. Our government will continue to work night and day to quickly find a peaceful solution. In the past, we have seen just how quickly these situations can change. I know that we all want to find a solution, and at the same time we must prevent things from escalating. I again convened the incident response group yesterday to discuss the situation and our path forward. I have also spoken with premiers across the country about the impact of blockades on farmers, entrepreneurs, families and workers across the country.

• (1105)

[*English*]

Over the weekend, the Minister of Indigenous Services met with representatives from Tyendinaga, as well as other members of the Mohawk nation. I have committed to the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs that the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations will meet with them any time. I hope the offer will be accepted.

This is our opportunity now to bring these perspectives together. What is the alternative? Do we want to become a country of irreconcilable differences, where people talk but refuse to listen, where politicians are ordering police to arrest people, a country where people think they can tamper with rail lines and endanger lives? This is simply unacceptable.

We cannot solve these problems on the margins. That is not the way forward. I know that people's patience is running short. We need to find a solution and we need to find it now.

I have spoken in the House about how my father faced protests over the debate about aboriginal and treaty rights in the Constitution. Over 30 years later, many of those questions still linger, which is why our pace of change must be even faster, and not only in this situation.

Despite having invested more than any other government to right historic wrongs, to close persistent gaps, we know that there is still more, much more to be done. It is unacceptable that there are people who still do not have access to clean drinking water, that indigenous women and girls still go missing and are murdered, that there are people without housing and good education. It is unacceptable that indigenous peoples are still denied rights and lands, so we need to keep finding solutions. That can only happen by working together and by listening.

[*Translation*]

As a country we are called upon to find a path forward. It is our job to choose respect and communication. We must not embark upon a path where we refuse to listen, or where we give in to hostilities. That is not the solution.

[*English*]

There are those who would want us to act in haste, who want us to boil this down to slogans and ignore the complexities, who think that using force is helpful. It is not. Patience may be in short supply and that makes it more valuable than ever.

Indigenous rights, climate action, law and order and building a clean economy, we will not achieve these things by degrading our—

*Routine Proceedings*

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** This is a very serious topic that we are discussing today and I am starting to hear heckling from both sides, which really troubles me. I want everyone to take a deep breath and listen to the speakers we have today. We have more coming.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat my last sentence. Patience may be in short supply and that makes it more valuable than ever.

In this country, we are facing many important and deep debates, debates about the future livelihoods of our children, the future of our environment, our relations with countries around the world and our positioning on things that are fundamental at a time of anxiety. More and more Canadians are impatient to see those answers. More and more people are frustrated that there is such uncertainty. More and more we see those debates carried with increasing intensity on the margins of our democratic conversations.

The place for these debates is here in this House. The place for these debates is around kitchen tables and community centres in the country. Yes, there is always a place for Canadians to protest and express their frustrations, but we need to ensure we also listen to each other. The reality of populism, and its siren song in our democracies these days, is a desire to listen only to ourselves and to people who agree with us and not to people of another perspective.

The concern with action before discussion and the need for reasonable, reasoned debate in this place are at the centre of what we have to continue to move forward with as a country. Indigenous rights, climate action, law and order and building a clean economy are things we will not achieve by degrading our democracy. We must be honest about why we are here. We must be open to working together to move forward, not just in the days ahead but as we make progress on everything from implementing indigenous rights and title, addressing historic wrongs and ending long-term drinking water advisories. As a country and as a government, we need to continue the work we are doing and we need to continue to walk this road together.

I say to everyone that we are extending our hands in good faith for dialogue. The opportunity is there on the table right now. We are in this together: the worker, the senior, the indigenous leader, the protester and the police officer. Let us have the courage to take this opportunity and take action together to build a better path for all Canadians.

• (1110)

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, that was the weakest response to a national crisis in Canadian history. I listened to the Prime Minister's word salad just now and at least two key things were missing: a clear denunciation that the actions of these radical activists are illegal and some kind of an action plan that would put an end to the illegal blockades and get our economy back on track. The Prime Minister's statement was a complete abdication of responsibility and of leadership.

We are at an important time in our country's history, a time when we have to decide who and what our country stands for. Will we be a country of "yes", where big national projects can get built and our

country can grow and develop, or will we be a country of "no", where a few loud voices can shut down development and prosperity for all?

Will our country be one of the rule of the law, or will our country be one of the rule of the mob? Will we let our entire economy be held hostage by a small group trampling the legal system that has governed our country for more than 150 years?

Let me be clear. Standing between our country and prosperity is a small group of radical activists, many of whom have little to no connection to first nations communities. They are a bunch of radical activists who will not rest until our oil and gas industry is entirely shut down. They may have the luxury of not having to go to work every day, and they may have the luxury of not facing repercussions for skipping class, but they are blockading our ports, railways, borders, roads and highways, and they are appropriating an indigenous agenda, which they are willfully misrepresenting.

The Prime Minister's elevation of these protesters to the same level as the thousands of men and women in first nations communities across our country who have been trying in good faith to right the wrongs of Canadian history is a disservice to the spirit of reconciliation.

The Prime Minister has emboldened and encouraged this kind of behaviour by cancelling other big projects based on political considerations instead of science and facts.

• (1115)

The reality is that a vast majority of members of the Wet'suwet'en people support the Coastal GasLink project. Every single elected band council on the Coastal GasLink route supports this project. Even the majority of hereditary chiefs support this project. The vast majority of first nations community members themselves support this project because it will create jobs and it will create opportunities. It will lead to investments in their communities and, in the end, it will help reduce global greenhouse gas emissions.

This is a fantastic opportunity for the Wet'suwet'en people, so why are these radical activists opposing this project? For them this is just a warm-up act. It is a warm-up act for what they consider to be the next fights against Trans Mountain and against Teck Frontier. In the end their goal is to shut down our entire energy industry.

*Routine Proceedings*

It is important to remember who the victims of this have been and who have been victimized by Liberal inaction. They are the farmers who cannot get their grain to market. They are the small business owners who cannot get their shipments in time. They are the homeowners who may face trouble getting their home heating fuel for the winter. They are the workers facing layoffs. The ultimate victims are the Wet'suwet'en members themselves who are looking for prosperity for their children.

Conservatives have been calling for common sense and appropriate recommendations to end these illegal blockades. We have called on the Liberal government to enforce the rule of law. What we were expecting today was some sort of an announcement about a plan that would put an end to these illegal blockades. Instead, today we heard literally nothing.

[*Translation*]

Everyone has the right to say their piece, regardless of whether we agree or disagree, but nobody, and I mean nobody, has the right to hold our economy hostage.

[*English*]

The blockades across our country are illegal and it is time the government stepped in and did something about that. On this side of the House, we stand with the farmers. On this side of the House, we stand with commuters. On this side of the House, we stand with workers facing layoffs. We stand with everyday, hard-working Canadians. Most importantly, on this side of the House, we stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people.

We stand in solidarity with the elected councillors of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation. We stand in solidarity with the majority of hereditary chiefs from the Wet'suwet'en First Nation who recognize that these types of projects and investments are the only way to lift first nation Canadians out of poverty, give them hope and opportunity, and give the next generation of indigenous Canadians the same quality of life that everyone else in this country enjoys.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I must clarify what the Conservative leader means when he uses the phrase “this side of the House”. We sit on the same side of the House, but clearly, no member of the Bloc Québécois would ever take sides within a first nation, calling some people bad guys and others good guys, depending on whether they agree with the Bloc.

Who are we, in white society, to get between them and pass judgment on them based on whether they agree with the common interest of the moment? The line between the members on this side of the House is here.

Furthermore, I have to ask the Prime Minister why it took him 12 days to intervene when it was clear from the very beginning that this would be a serious national crisis.

Also, why do I feel like I just heard an election speech from 2015? We heard statements about all sorts of highly laudable values, principles and virtues, but with nothing concrete behind them. I understand that negotiations must happen somewhere. I under-

stand that open lines of communication are needed. I understand that the Prime Minister does not want to negotiate in public.

That is fine, but the government does not convene Parliament to make a ministerial statement if it has nothing to say, and yet, that is what we just witnessed. The way forward does not seem much clearer, but the errors do. First, it seems we have to make a decision. It is almost like we have to choose today in the House between respect for first nations, respect they deserve, and the Canadian economy, as though those two things are automatically and hopelessly irreconcilable. It is almost as if it were impossible to find a solution to the crisis that would get key components of the Quebec and Canadian economies moving again without undermining the talks requested by the first nations. I, for one, think it is possible.

As a brief aside, I want to once again ask who we are to judge. After all, we are claiming our approach is legitimate based on a law passed in 1876 that imposed a governance model on first nations that stemmed from our great sense of white superiority. Some first nations members are not convinced that this is the best approach. This debate is theirs to some extent. That is mainly what this is about. We are somewhat obligated to respect and listen to first nations. In that respect, I agree with the fact that the government wants to finally have a conversation.

However, there are certainly some existing tensions. Members must remember that, not so long ago, the government either authorized or turned a blind eye to the use of snipers near Wet'suwet'en territory. I can see how that might create some tension. I can see how some people might not feel safe.

On the heels of that, the message is to avoid going down a path of tension and violence. I could not agree more. That should never have been allowed. We have heard a litany of excuses over the years. This is a good opportunity to apologize for allowing such a thing to happen, which is certainly a fundamental aspect of the current crisis.

I do not want to give anyone the impression that I am condoning certain actions. This cannot go on. Some first nations people have called for reason.

• (1120)

I can imagine everyone's relief at the thought that maybe, by their own initiative, there would be conversations, processes or reassurances that would produce the urgently needed result of ending the blockades. Negotiations necessarily involve people reacting to other actions.

That is what has to happen. It is also vital to be open to profound, fundamental cultural differences, instead of simply imposing our own values by banging on desks. First nations have the right to be different. I think we need that perspective and restraint.

Although the Wet'suwet'en are not unanimously agreed on the issue of the Coastal GasLink pipeline, I think it is important to at least have the wisdom to give them a space where they can have the necessary discussions.

What actions should be taken? I do not have the authority to answer that question, because I am an observer who only speaks for Quebec. However, this crisis is having a serious economic impact on Quebec.

This crisis falls within the purview of British Columbia, and we respect provincial jurisdiction. However, apart from all the otherwise highly commendable speeches and values, I wonder if it might be advisable to seek a complete suspension of the work, if only on a temporary basis. It would then be perfectly legitimate to ask the first nations to dismantle their blockades across Canada and Quebec.

I think that would be a clear, concrete and measurable action that the first nations could surely interpret as a gesture of genuine openness, one that would go beyond mere words, which have all too often only led to disappointment over the past few years.

I urge the government to take concrete action and propose a clear, measurable solution that I hope will be well received. I want to reiterate that the methods adopted by the first nations are unacceptable and are harming their own economy as well as the Canadian and Quebec economies as a whole. This issue needs to be resolved quickly and definitively. If that is the government's intention, it can count on our collaboration.

• (1125)

[English]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that while the Prime Minister has spoken today on a very important crisis, he has not shown leadership on this matter for over a month.

I want to begin my comments by acknowledging the fact that it is inspiring to see the youth rising and to see people of all walks of life standing up for human rights, standing up for climate justice.

[Translation]

I am inspired by young people fighting for the environment and human rights. It is inspiring.

[English]

I also want to acknowledge the helplessness and uncertainty that many farmers, local producers and business folks are feeling right now. I know there are a lot of workers who are not able to go to work now. There are a lot of people who are worried about whether they will be able to make ends meet because of the impacts.

I am thinking about all of these people right now, all Canadians. I am also thinking about the people at the blockade who are standing up because they are so frustrated. They are so angry, and they are right to be angry.

The context for what is going on, something the Prime Minister alluded to, is a deep frustration. It is historic, absolutely. If people have any compassion in their hearts, the bitter and horrible injustice

### Routine Proceedings

faced by the first people of this land should result in some frustration and anger.

This is a serious crisis we are faced with. Sadly, it is not what the Prime Minister referred to as an "infrastructure disruption".

[Translation]

We are facing a really serious crisis right now in Canada.

• (1130)

[English]

Canadians are expecting us to show some leadership. They are also expecting the Prime Minister to show leadership. Sadly, the reality is that the Prime Minister has let a lot of those people down.

There have been centuries of broken promises to indigenous people, and those broken promises are not just broken words: They have resulted in massive injustice, massive inequality and the deaths of indigenous people. Indigenous people have been denied basic human rights. The Prime Minister promised to be different, but he broke his promises and did not show himself to be very different.

Let us look at his record. The Prime Minister and the Liberal government members talk about their record, so let us look at what is going on in our country right now.

A Human Rights Tribunal decision found that the government did not just underfund or discriminate against indigenous kids, but did so recklessly, willfully, purposefully. To add insult to injury, the government is taking first nations kids to court and is not even being clear about how many millions of dollars it is spending to fight them.

Not only in child welfare has the Prime Minister and the Liberal government let down first nations, Inuit and Métis, but also when it comes to the funding of education for first nations and the funding of programs. Something as simple as the program to allow women to rightfully reclaim status has been underfunded. There have been massive inconsistencies between what the Prime Minister says and what he does.

We are in the year 2020. I can accept no excuse that the Liberal government, coming off of a five-year majority, cannot ensure that every single indigenous community in this country has clean drinking water. With the technology and the wealth of our country, there is no excuse why clean drinking water cannot be assured as a right.

[Translation]

It is completely unacceptable and incomprehensible that in 2020 we will not be meeting the targets and that not all indigenous communities will have access to safe drinking water.

*Routine Proceedings**[English]*

On top of that, when a young activist raised concerns about clean drinking water in a community at a private fundraiser, the Prime Minister mocked that young person in front of his wealthy donors. That was the response of the Prime Minister and it is part of why this crisis is where it is right now. The Prime Minister said he knew better than elders and that what young indigenous people really need is a place to store their paddles and canoes. That does not show a respect for the seriousness and gravity of the problem that colonialism has left for the first people of this land.

On the current issue, more than a month ago the Wet'suwet'en chiefs made a request for the federal government to play a role. They specifically asked for the Prime Minister and the federal government to play a role in resolving this conflict. New Democrats asked a question of the government weeks ago. At the time, that question was laughed off. At the time, the Prime Minister said it was not his problem. He said it was "entirely under provincial jurisdiction." I am glad to see that the Prime Minister now understands that a nation-to-nation relationship means that all levels of government must play a role and that the Prime Minister must play a role as well.

It is encouraging to see that the Prime Minister is not calling for police to be sent in. We have seen the consequences of that type of response and we do not want to go there. However, it is troubling that it has taken so long for the Prime Minister to realize that there is a role for him and the federal government to play.

*[Translation]*

It is disturbing to see that it has taken the government all this time to realize that it has a role to play in resolving this crisis.

• (1135)

*[English]*

The solution to all of this is going to require hard work. It is going to require that we respect the principles of a nation-to-nation relationship. It means having dialogue, having conversations. It means that the Prime Minister and the federal government have to play a role. It means we have to find a peaceful way forward that respects human rights, the freedom of the press and most of all the fundamental rights of indigenous people.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission laid a path forward. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples lays a course forward. However, the TRC's path forward has calls to action, not calls to empty words. It is time for the government and the Prime Minister to back up words with real action.

*[Translation]*

Now is the time to take concrete action. This is not the time for lip service; it is the time for concrete action to solve the problem and achieve justice for indigenous communities.

*[English]*

This is our chance to do better, not just say we will do better. If the Prime Minister is ready to move forward on a path of justice and fairness, then he can count on the New Democrats to work with

him to deliver real solutions that create a path forward for justice and fairness and create a path forward out of this crisis.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Madam Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for giving me this opportunity to speak about this emergency situation that confronts us all with the reality of injustice and the challenge of reconciliation.

*[English]*

This is a very important debate and this is a very important moment. During the constituency week when I was home in my riding, we discussed the blockades, the inconvenience, what it means for settler culture Canadians to face inconvenience when indigenous people have had their land, children and culture stolen from them, and efforts to annihilate who they are as people. We have to weigh our inconvenience against the challenge of the moment. One of my constituents, Priscilla, said that we should focus on the opportunity of such a rich conversation.

Listening to some of the words of my colleagues, the leader of the official opposition reminded me of something. On May 4, 1877, General Oliver Otis Howard spoke of the frustrations he felt in dealing with the Nez Perce and their chiefs as they discussed what mattered to them. He stated that, "Twenty times over I hear that the earth is your mother. I want to hear it no more, but come to business at once." This is not simple and it will not end overnight because it is based on a century and a half of injustice, oppression and colonialism.

It is also based on the reality that since 1997, the Wet'suwet'en have had every reason to believe that based on a Supreme Court of Canada decision, the federal government would come and talk about the title for the Wet'suwet'en, which could be 22,000 square kilometres, and about what it means that the Supreme Court of Canada has said that their title and indigenous form of government, which predate Canada by thousands of years, have status in Canadian law.

We must not ever set out the notion that there is a rule of law on one side and indigenous people on the other. Indigenous people have the law on their side. When the leader of the official opposition referred to "a small group of radical activists", perhaps he meant the nine judges of the Supreme Court of Canada. They are the ones who said that title is title is title and that indigenous title is collective and intergenerational. Acknowledging that will explain why we stand in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary leadership.

My colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith went up on January 19 and met with the hereditary leadership of Wet'suwet'en. The Green Party has been trying to appeal to the federal government from the beginning to not let the RCMP arrest people. The huge encampment cost Canada a whole year of a remote location of RCMP detachment encampment on the edge of Wet'suwet'en territory. It is very remote. My colleague from Nanaimo—Ladysmith went up there and found that they had offered an alternative route. This was acknowledged in the injunction case that granted an injunction to Coastal GasLink. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs had offered another location that would avoid the Kweese trail, but according to the court, Coastal GasLink unilaterally rejected the alternative.

The federal government has to step up. I am glad the federal government is stepping up. It is true that on February 5 in this place, the Prime Minister said that “This is an issue that is entirely under provincial jurisdiction.” That is true insofar as the pipeline goes. It does not cross a provincial border, but it is massively untrue. We talk about indigenous rights, the Delgamuukw decision of 1997, the Tsilhqot'in decision of 2014. The big question to ask when first nations win in our courts is this: What is the statute of limitations on us doing anything about it?

The Wet'suwet'en have been enormously patient and the Unist'ot'en camp has been sitting there for 10 years.

• (1140)

[Translation]

It should come as no surprise to see resistance from indigenous peoples across Canada. It is clear in all the agreements.

[English]

The indigenous leadership across Canada has been saying for quite some time that if someone marches on any indigenous territory, they will respond as if someone had marched on their territory. This is an aspect of solidarity. This is the solidarity of indigenous people across Canada and their allies, people like me who are settler culture Canadians, who recognize that this is a turning point for this country, where we actually mean what we say.

I heard a comment from the brilliant senator and former justice Murray Sinclair from the other place, who said, as in Paul Simon in *The Boxer*, “For a pocket full of mumbles such are promises.” We must set aside our pocket full of mumbles. We must be serious in our intent. This is a land issue. This is a title issue. This is a justice issue. It is only very incidentally a pipeline issue.

[Translation]

It is now clear that we must face the reality of injustice and the great promise of reconciliation. Now is the time to say yes to indigenous peoples and to reject the notion that they are a radical group, because they are not. This is a group that is committed to the grand project of justice.

[English]

Now is the moment for Canada to face its moment of truth, justice and reconciliation.

### *Business of Supply*

[Translation]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statements, Government Orders will be extended by 43 minutes.

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## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

### BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

#### OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SICKNESS BENEFITS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, today we are talking about the Canadian value of how we take care of each other when we are sick. We are talking about improvements to the employment insurance sickness benefit.

On average, people who claimed sickness benefits in fiscal year 2017-18 used 10 weeks of the benefit and then returned to work. However, quite a large cohort, 36% or about 150,000 Canadians, exhausted their full 15 weeks before they could go back to work. Among those 150,000 Canadians, women and older Canadians were more likely to need more than 15 weeks.

This is a very serious issue facing Canadians who are sick or injured.

[Translation]

Imagine being a single parent and then overnight no longer being able to pay the bills. Nobody needs that kind of pressure while trying to rest and get better.

It is the government's responsibility to put measures in place to keep the Canadian workforce strong, healthy and productive.

[English]

A healthy, strong and productive workforce means a healthy, strong and productive economy.

That is why our government has committed to increasing the sickness benefit from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. This commitment was praised by the Canadian Cancer Society and aligns well with the requests from The Conference Board of Canada and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada to enhance the support of people living with MS.

The main goal of the EI program is to support people and at the same time maintain their connection to the labour market. This is doubly important, as we know that employers face shortages in labour in all sectors across the country. Keeping Canadians connected to active work lives is important both for the well-being of Canadians and for the well-being of our economy.

*Business of Supply*

• (1145)

[Translation]

As the minister responsible for disability inclusion, I attach paramount importance to this matter. Part of my work, under the Accessible Canada Act, is to ensure that barriers faced by persons with disabilities are removed so that they can fully participate in society.

To explain the connection with employment insurance sickness benefits, let me use multiple sclerosis as an example.

Those with multiple sclerosis have what is called an episodic disability. This means that they go through periods when they are well enough to work, and others when that is not the case.

In 2018, we made changes to the employment insurance sickness benefit to allow claimants to use the rules governing work during a benefit period. Workers therefore enjoy greater flexibility in availing themselves of the assistance provided by employment insurance while doing part of their work in the same week.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, if those with multiple sclerosis could remain in or re-enter the workforce more easily, it could increase our economic activity by \$1.1 billion annually. That is a win-win situation.

[English]

Our government has committed to extending sickness benefits to 26 weeks. I want to impress upon my colleagues the importance of getting this right, of acting from the best evidence.

I encourage the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to study this matter as soon as possible. We do not want Canadians falling through the cracks.

[Translation]

As I mentioned earlier, we are determined to improve the employment insurance plan so that it better serves employees and employers. We are continuing to work hard to improve the program. I will talk about that now and let my parliamentary secretary add some details shortly.

[English]

I am very proud and pleased to say that Canada recently scored 100, a perfect score, on the World Bank's women, business and the law index. This was due in part to our recent reform regarding parental leave benefits that reserve five weeks of paid leave for the second parent, typically the father. With this step, we are ensuring that Canada is a place where everyone can be on equal footing in terms of work.

As Unifor national president Jerry Dias said, "In addition to making it easier for women to return to work this extra leave will help to even out childcare responsibilities and break down gender-based parenting roles."

[Translation]

Another major improvement was to reduce the time people have to wait before receiving their benefits. In January 2017, we reduced

it from two weeks to one week in order to ease the financial burden for those receiving employment insurance benefits. This change puts more than \$650 million into the pockets of Canadians each year.

[English]

I am also pleased to say that budget 2018 made the 50¢-on-the-dollar rules of the most recent EI working-while-on-claim pilot project permanent and grandfathered claimants who chose to revert to older rules under the most recent pilot project until August 2021.

[Translation]

In budget 2018, we also expanded the pilot project to sickness and maternity benefits, making them more consistent and providing greater flexibility for those who want to return to work while receiving sickness benefits. The new changes make it easier for claimants to remain in the labour force and get through gaps between periods of work.

[English]

We have also increased our support for caregivers. We know that millions of Canadians provide informal care and support for critically ill family members. Canadians told us that they want more flexibility and inclusive options to care for and support loved ones.

• (1150)

[Translation]

In budget 2017, we announced special measures to give families greater flexibility by making it easier for caregivers to claim employment insurance benefits. These measures are having a real impact on Canadians' lives.

[English]

An example of this is the creation of the employment insurance family caregiver benefit for adults. This new benefit is making a big difference in the lives of many Canadians who work hard, but must also take off work to care for a loved one. For a maximum of 15 weeks, it allows eligible family caregivers to provide care for an adult family member who is critically ill or injured.

I would also like to highlight that for the first time, immediate and extended family members of children who are critically ill now have access to a benefit that was previously available only to parents. This goes beyond immediate family and even relatives. Individuals who are not relatives but considered to be like family, for example, a neighbour, could be eligible to receive the benefit to provide care to a critically ill child. Caregivers can share the available weeks of benefits at the same time or separately.

[Translation]

We estimate that some 22,000 families have received the new EI benefit for family caregivers. These are positive changes that are already benefiting Canadians. We intend to deliver more of the same. We still have a lot to do to ensure that Canadians get the support they need to overcome barriers to full labour market participation.

[English]

As I mentioned, in my current role, I have taken on the mantle of further strengthening our employment insurance programs. This means improving our sickness benefit, but it also means making a number of other changes for the better. I will be working collaboratively with my finance and tax colleagues to make maternity and parental benefits tax-free. I will be introducing a 15-week leave for adoptive parents, including for LGBTQ2 families.

[Translation]

I will be working with the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to create guaranteed paid family leave. I will create a new career insurance benefit for workers who have worked for the same employer for five or more years and lose their job when the business closes.

This new benefit will kick in after employment insurance ends and will not be clawed back if other income is earned. This is essential in a world where jobs change so quickly that, 20 years from now, our kids will have jobs we have not even heard of.

[English]

I am tasked with improving the current pilot project for seasonal workers with a permanent program that provides consistent and reliable benefits. I will be working on this over the coming summer.

[Translation]

Lastly, together with my colleague, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we are creating a new EI disaster assistance benefit. This new benefit will be developed in consultation with experts, workers and employers. It will replace the income that is lost when families need to temporarily stop working to protect their homes or because they need to relocate to safety.

Since we want our improvements to the EI system to be evidence-based, I will be working with my colleagues at Statistics Canada to strengthen the data. With the ever-changing nature of families and work, it is important that we join forces to ensure that Canadians get the support they need.

[English]

After all, these supports will not only benefit Canadian workers, who are mothers, fathers, caregivers of children and the elderly, and some who are battling long-term illness in their day-to-day lives;

### *Business of Supply*

they will also go a long way toward ensuring a stable and thriving economy for our country. That is why we will continue to look for ways to improve the EI system so it can meet the needs of Canadian families and workers at every stage in their career, in sickness and in health.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank Minister Qualtrough for her remarks on EI and EI benefits.

I would like to ask her a question—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I would remind the member for Thérèse-De Blainville not to use the names of members of the House.

● (1155)

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Madam Speaker, I apologize.

When the EI benefit system for serious illness was first introduced 40 years ago, it was shown that 15 weeks was not enough to meet the needs of those who needed it.

The minister says she is committed to offering 26 weeks of benefits.

Why stop there? Why not offer 50 weeks of benefits in the interest of fairness for those workers?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I want to assure the House that this is a first step. We are committed to improving employment insurance benefits. In our platform, we committed to providing 26 weeks of benefits. That is what the Canadian Cancer Society and the MS Society of Canada asked for, and it is what the Conference Board of Canada recommended. It is closer to our other benefits, such as the family caregiver benefit.

We see this as a start. As ever, we are committed to working with all members of the House to improve the system.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, earlier in the debate I asked the leader of the Bloc Québécois why it was 50 weeks, and the answer he gave was that it is because it matches other benefits. From my experience with the system, people may have EI benefits available for anywhere between 15 and 45 weeks, depending on the local situation and where they live.

I would like to ask the minister if she is supportive of the number the Bloc has given, and if she does not agree with it, maybe she can give us her rationale as to why it should be a different number.

I really think we should not be pulling numbers out of a hat, whether out of an NDP hat or a Bloc Québécois hat.

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Madam Speaker, for a number of years, and before and during the election, we heard from such organizations as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada and even the Conference Board of Canada that 15 weeks was not enough. Almost 36%, a third, of Canadians on EI sickness benefits go beyond the 15 weeks. Clearly, there is a need to go further.

We also know there are a different number of weeks of benefits. For family caregivers, it is 15 to 35 weeks, depending on whether they are caring for a critically ill child or an adult. The point is that we try to match the benefits with the particular circumstances the benefit is trying to address.

We are committed to 26 weeks because that is what we heard from experts in different organizations. Right now, that is where we are. Of course, we are always open to making improvements to the EI system. It has been too long already.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have been working with the minister and trying to get extended EI for fishers in British Columbia who have been affected by the salmon emergency, and I want to thank her for taking time to meet with me.

I got an email from Gary Egli from Courtenay a year ago. Gary had paid into EI and he had worked his whole life. He is 55 years old. He was told he had cancer. He extended his 15 weeks. He knew he was going to be off work for about 50 weeks and his EI was going to run out 15 weeks later. He has paid into EI his whole life and has not received a nickel of EI during the whole of his working career. He was contributing the whole time and here he is now, at a time when he needs help, and the government is not honouring it. He has been filling EI coffers, but when he needs it the most, he is not getting the help he needs. He does not want to be on EI; he wants to be working.

He is sick and he is looking for the government to update its EI policy, which it has not done since 1971. Clearly it is outdated and it needs to be fixed.

One in two Canadians is going to get sick with some terminal or extended illness, so we are hoping that the government will support today's motion and we are urging it to do so. I want to thank the Bloc for putting forward this motion. It is something the NDP has supported for decades. Hopefully, the minister will make the neces-

sary changes to make sure Gary and people like him will get the support they need when they get sick.

• (1200)

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Madam Speaker, of course I sympathize, and my heart goes out to everyone suffering from cancer and other illnesses that impact their lives and their ability to earn their livelihoods and provide for their families.

We do have to update this law. It has been way too long. I happen to have been born in 1971, so I can say it has not been changed in my entire life.

We need to look at the average number of weeks people are taking, whether for cancer or for other things. We have to look at the complementary benefits that are put in place and we have to make sure we listen to constituents and organizations like the Canadian Cancer Society itself, which is calling for 26 weeks.

As I said, we are always open to further discussions on this issue, but we committed in our platform to 26 weeks, and that is currently the direction we are heading.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to point out that organizations in Quebec, such as the Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses, are asking that the time granted for sick leave be equivalent to what is granted to those who simply lose their jobs.

I take great offence to the comments of my Conservative colleague, who insinuated that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP do not know how to count. The maximum EI benefit period is one year. That is what we are asking for, because that is what organizations in Quebec are asking for. I am quite disappointed to see that it will remain capped at 26 weeks. As our leader said earlier, in my opinion, only a minority of people would need the full period. For those who have cancer and need a year to get back on their feet and get a little financial support, let us show a little compassion and extend it to 50 weeks, even though the Canadian Cancer Society is asking for 26.

In Quebec, we have a year of parental leave. That could never have been accepted in the House, because the values of its representatives are not sufficiently social democratic. That is what I am realizing today.

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**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Madam Speaker, my thanks to my colleague for his question. By way of clarification, this is a first step for our government. The benefits period was 15 weeks and we have increased it to 26 weeks. We are really open to the discussion about how to improve the employment insurance system in a compassionate way. We understand that, for many, the present system is not working. The fact that 36% of people take more than 15 weeks shows that we must go further. We are continuing to work with the other parties in the House to ensure that our fellow citizens are supported in difficult times.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I listened to the other questions that are being posed and I want to recognize that the government over the last number of years has made some significant changes.

On this topic alone, the minister is talking about increasing the number of weeks. For many years in opposition, I waited for the government to be more sensitive to employment insurance and the need to make changes. For the first time, we now have a government that is making progress on this issue. Can the minister provide her thoughts on why we have seen a current government move forward on changes for EI, compared to the previous government, which was completely closed to the idea of reforms or changes?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough:** Madam Speaker, I can assure everyone that this conversation is long overdue. Our government has invested significantly in ameliorating the entirety of the EI system, and this is indeed the next step forward. We know that there is always more we can do, and we intend to do it.

**Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to join the debate here in this House. It has been a great privilege to represent my constituents, first in 2011 as the member of Parliament for Okanagan-Coquihalla and since 2015, when the riding was redistributed, as the member of Parliament for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

I mention that because in the first Parliament of which I was a member, we spent the better part of our time in a majority government opposing opposition day motions. Such is the norm of majority governments. In the last Parliament, I experienced an opposition day motion on the other side of that scenario; in fact, I was privileged to submit my own opposition day motion.

If I may take a moment, it was an eminently reasonable motion, calling on the Liberal government to expedite the Comeau case in the Supreme Court. Members may recall that Mr. Comeau was ticketed by his home province of New Brunswick for purchasing alcohol in nearby Quebec. His efforts to economize by shopping for the best prices is a situation that I am sure more and more Canadians can relate to, and they would question why the state was cracking down on someone who had purchased products lawfully, as Mr. Comeau had done.

As many have overlooked, the Liberal government had actually joined in the fight against the Comeau case in the eventual Supreme

Court proceedings. It did not truly support internal free trade among all Canadians.

However, that is not the point of my sharing this memory. The point is that my motion, an eminently reasonable one, to expedite the Comeau case ended up in a vote, as opposition motions do, and that vote was one of the rare times, at least in the previous Parliament, when the NDP, the Greens and, as I recall, the Bloc Québécois all voted in support of my motion.

The Liberal majority government, to my surprise and of course disappointment, voted against it. Privately, after that vote, I had several Liberal MPs confide in me that they were whipped to vote that way and had no idea why the all-powerful inner circle and PMO had whipped them to vote against it.

I share this story today because we all know that in this minority Parliament, we collectively have the power to vote in favour of an opposition day motion and see it pass. To date, opposition parties have a pretty solid record of seeing opposition day motions getting passed.

To go on to this motion, once again I feel the need to share some personal comments. It does not happen often in this place, but there is the odd time when I very much want to support a motion but at the same time have strongly considered voting the motion down.

Why the dilemma? It is because I believe we are all here to help build a better Canada. However, at times we may have some disagreement on the best ways to do that. At times we may even agree on an idea or a program but have disagreement on the details of how that idea, project or program should be written into legislation. This is one of those times.

I have to say I will be splitting my time with the member of Parliament for Calgary Midnapore. I did not want to forget him in this important debate.

I absolutely agree that employment insurance sickness benefits are an important program. I also agree that extending the term in which these benefits are available is something that should be seriously looked at. The term has not changed since 1971, so as the minister said earlier, I believe this should go to the HUMA committee. I believe this should be looked at, because I have some issues concerning the motion and how the magic number of 50 weeks was literally drawn out of a hat.

Why 50 weeks? Why not 52? Why not 43? Why not 54? Why not 26? Some adherents of Douglas Adams, not to be confused with Tommy Douglas, would say the answer is obviously 42.

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Can anyone explain the logic and science of 50 weeks? Every week of added eligibility adds costs that both current and future workers and their employers have to carry. The member who spoke before me was the Minister of Employment, and she actually talked about more benefits that the government is looking to pass. We need to recognize that ultimately those costs would mean employers will pay more, which makes them less competitive, and employees would net less take-home pay in an era of ever-rising costs and taxes, which could create hardship and fiscal pressures.

What if very few people accessed this program? What type of serious illness would qualify or not qualify for this extension? These are all unanswered questions, but they are important ones.

• (1205)

When most of us in our personal lives sign a cheque, we want to know exactly how much it is for and what that cheque will actually buy. In many respects, I feel like this motion asks us all collectively to sign a blank cheque for a worthy and well-intended cause, but with a random number of 50 weeks just because someone liked the sound of 50 weeks, or roughly 11 and a half months. Again, when I asked the leader of the Bloc Québécois, he said that it was to match with what the program currently offers. Depending on one's local situation, how the labour markets are, it could be anywhere between 15 and 45 weeks. The number 50 seems to be in defiance of that. The minister had said that the Canadian Cancer Society had made a different recommendation, and that is where they are landing on this. We do need to investigate this further.

What could be done instead of 11 and a half months or 50 weeks? In the last Parliament, HUMA, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, studied the issue and recommended an extended time period. Unfortunately, the extended time period was not defined by the committee. Perhaps further study with relevant experts could help guide us all to having more information with more data and more evidence so we can collectively make a more informed decision.

Again, the minister said there is a potpourri of different additions she is planning to the EI system. Those need to be studied. I believe the more collectively we can study those, the better we can get a sense of what the costs are going to be. One impact added on may be incremental costs, but when one starts adding multiple different impacts, those complicated formulae do take more time to assess and do take more costs to deal with. It also must be pointed out that the Parliamentary Budget Office estimated this EI sickness benefit extension of 50 weeks would cost over \$1 billion immediately and would continue to rise every year.

I know there are those who would dismiss an extra \$1 billion annually in payroll costs, but in British Columbia today, we now have B.C.-based forestry companies shutting down their lumber mills in order to invest and open new mills in the United States. While there are many reasons why this occurs, one of the reasons is that the cost of doing business in Canada is no longer competitive for their business models. It makes more sense for them to operate outside of Canada.

When that happens, we lose thousands of well-paying jobs like we have seen in British Columbia. It also means we have thousands

of workers now unemployed, collecting EI and no longer contributing to it. That is why competitiveness should never be overlooked in a motion such as this one that ultimately proposes to create new costs that decrease our competitiveness. For those small businesses that cannot afford to expand into jurisdictions outside of Canada, let us not forget they are competing against other small businesses in jurisdictions outside of Canada that do not have to swallow these costs and pass them along.

We also need to bear in mind that such a change to medical employment insurance does not cover the employers themselves. I was recently contacted by an entrepreneur in my riding who complained that the government restricted her use of what is called a health savings account because her business was too small. I am sure there are many people in this place who have seen how agencies like CRA continue to assess and audit and audit and assess small businesses and make all sorts of demands, regardless of the health of the business or the entrepreneur.

In my home province of British Columbia, small businesses account for 98% of our total business. Oftentimes these are sole proprietors, partnerships and small corporations that often have to stop work when the entrepreneur does. We should be mindful that while there are some able to self-fund or purchase short-term disability, more often than not it is not practical for their enterprise. Entrepreneurs might welcome this change, some who want to see their employees supported when they receive a serious diagnosis, but when time after time these entrepreneurs and their family members are frequently told to give up more time, energy and cash, they might wonder where they factor in.

Ultimately, these are some of the serious concerns I have heard with this motion. EI premiums are paid for by workers and their employers. We should always be mindful that this is money that they have paid. When it comes to a time when people are facing potentially their greatest life challenge, the EI fund that they have paid into, working for their entire lives, should be there for them in their time of need. We are not talking about government money. We are talking about money that has been put aside by employers and their employees for them. That is money off the backs of workers and employers.

A serious medical illness is stressful enough. One does not need the added pressure of trying to pay the bills at the end of the month and coming up short.

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• (1210)

One final point I am saddened to share is that in some cases these serious illnesses may well become fatal. We all saw how quickly Canadians lost beloved journalist Christie Blatchford recently. If we can help individuals facing a fatal disease die with more dignity, we should not lose sight of the importance of that.

• (1215)

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am completely against this disastrous approach.

I would like to remind the House that Canada devotes merely 0.65% of its gross domestic product to the employment insurance fund. By comparison, the percentage is 3.6% in Belgium, 2.7% in Spain and 3.5% in Portugal. I would like us to be aware of that. In addition, a number of those countries provide employment insurance benefits to their sick workers for periods that can go from one to three years.

[English]

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Speaker, I am glad that we are able to talk about these issues. When I spoke to the CEO of the largest private employer in the area of west Kelowna, I asked him about competitiveness and he told me it was not Belgium or Spain that he was worried about competing with. It was the former eastern Soviet bloc countries where the labour is very adequate, costs and regulations are extremely low and there is a high availability of fibre supply. They have seen investment shift from some of those northern countries in Europe over to the eastern bloc countries. They have brand new state-of-the-art lasers and robotics which enable them to compete anywhere.

This is what we need to be mindful of and not just Belgium and Spain on certain things. I talked about the U.S., but we should also be worried about some of the competition arising from the eastern side of Europe.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is important that we look at the need for change and ways in which we can improve upon the system. We can work with stakeholders, like the Canadian Cancer Society as an organization, and at ways in which we can look at making some changes that would be of a progressive nature.

There is a lot of concern in regards to the 50 weeks, and I am not suggesting in any fashion 50 weeks. I think we need to look at what our stakeholders and interested parties are saying and recognize that the current level is not good enough. We have heard that for a number of years now.

Would the member agree there is a need for change? Would he agree there has been very little in that specific area and the time for us take some action would be now?

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Speaker, the simple argument in response is that the Liberals have been proposing a whole bunch of different changes and have not made this change to an existing program. That is part of the problem I think we have as a society, but more importantly, it shows up in the Liberal government time and time

again. Rather than try to consolidate and examine the current benefits that exist for supporting Canadians in their time of need, the Liberals tried to move into other areas that were never designed for the EI system.

I am not saying that those things are not important, but let us get back to the basics. Let us focus on whether or not a program delivers what it says it will do to make sure that it is supporting Canadians because, quite honestly, money is getting tight. The government may pretend that money is not getting tight, but Canadians know.

As I said, there is a competitiveness cost. We are also talking about our constituents. We should be trying to look at how we can get the greatest value for money, but we have to start by looking at what we are doing now before we start adding on all sorts of new benefits.

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there has to be a need for change. We have been saying this for years and years. One of the things we must recognize is that many employers have given up giving people group insurance for when they are off sick. My constituents in Hamilton Mountain have been asking me for a very long time about the 15 weeks and to make sure that it is extended.

Where did the year come from? That is what it used to be when people used to file for unemployment insurance, but we played so many games with this system we forgot about the people who are off sick. It is not just for cancer. It could be kidneys, transplants, the whole works. After 15 weeks some people are not well enough to go to work, but all of their income is lost. We have to extend it.

• (1220)

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to always be mindful that ultimately governments serve the people, and if the people are not being served, then we need to come here and deliberate that. I take the criticism that this should have been done a long time ago. Absolutely, it should have been, but ultimately, we have an opportunity here to examine and debate it.

I am personally open to listening to all sides of the debate. As I said in my speech, I think there are some competing interests here and perhaps this should be studied by the human resources committee, as a first step, but mindful that some members want to go farther and faster. I just believe that whatever we do, Parliament should deliberate, educate itself and then proceed with the right course and a good recommendation to government.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois for introducing this motion today.

I would like to start by saying that I am really torn over this motion. We have an expression that explains why.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

The phrase is to put one's money where one's mouth is. I think this is something that is very important to do. It means that we put our money in places that matter. In regard to this motion, as a nation and as a government, let us put our money where our people are. It is very important to put our money where our people are.

Sadly, like many people in the House, I am no stranger to cancer. My father had cancer. It is a very difficult thing to see any loved one go through. It is never a short process. Recovery takes a long time after an operation. Some people, after having gone through radiation, have to turn the heat up at night because they are cold. This stuff is very devastating and touches the lives of Canadians and everyone in this House personally.

*[Translation]*

I understand why the Bloc Québécois felt that it was a good idea to introduce this motion.

*[English]*

It really truly touches the lives of Canadians and has the potential to make life much better for Canadians.

I receive many cases in my office about people who face the things my family went through. I have a note here about a constituent who was dealing with cancer and whose doctor told him he needed to be off work for a specific number of weeks before he would be given a letter that he was in the clear. The gap between his sick benefits running out and his date for going back to work was significant. He said that he did not know how, other than remortgaging his home or borrowing from friends and family, he was going to be able to survive. He would have to either try to return to work before he was cleared to do so or remain at home with no money coming in. His wife was also dealing with health issues and had not been working for some time.

This motion has the potential to help people. As the previous speaker mentioned, it would allow for a lot less stress in people's lives as they could focus on their recovery and getting better, which is all that they want to do. It would allow them to focus on returning to work and becoming a productive member of society. Every Canadian wants to contribute to this amazing nation of ours. From a fiscally conservative perspective, I believe this would relieve billions from our health care system over time. Individuals would be given the time needed to fully recover before returning to work rather than being forced back to work before being ready or able to do so, as we have seen in these cases.

In the short three months I have been shadow minister for families, children and social development, I have learned that the system is broken. It is absolutely broken. This is why I have a difficult time supporting this motion. While it is a small change to go from 15 weeks to 50 weeks, it has life-changing potential, but so much more has to be done.

We are a nation that needs a national anti-poverty strategy. We are a nation that needs a housing strategy of \$40 billion over 10 years. We are a nation with seniors who are not able to make ends meet. OAS and CPP need a major re-evaluation. We are a nation where so many families rely on the Canada child benefit. To me, all

of this really speaks to the fact that our nation is broken. Our system is broken. Will this motion be enough? Sadly, I am really not sure.

● (1225)

However, I do know that there is a lot of waste. Until this point, 2020, there has been a cost of \$1.1 billion for this implementation. There will be \$1.3 billion by 2025. Those are not small amounts at all, especially with a 2019 budget projection of \$355.6 billion. That is just so much money that I am very torn about this as well.

As I said, I am torn because I see the benefit of this for Canadians in terms of their quality of life and time for recovery, but I also worry about the entire system and the costs of it as well.

We have seen no shortage of waste from the government, unfortunately, with \$20 million going to the food waste reduction challenge. That is a lot of money for such a challenge. The last time we sat here, we saw the government give \$50 million to Mastercard. That is a significant amount of money. We have to ask if this large budget is being spent effectively.

In the last Parliament, we talked about the \$12 million that went to Loblaws to retrofit fridges. These are not insignificant amounts at all. It goes back again to what I said about putting our money where our people are, rather than wasting it. As I also mentioned, the system is broken. I wish I could say the waste stops there, but it does not: \$950 million was allocated for an innovation supercluster initiative to create 50,000 jobs. We do not know if that is actually happening.

It is very hard to consider investing so much more money in our government on the backs of taxpayers when we have this incredible amount of waste, this incredible debt and this incredible deficit. These are definitely things that we have to consider.

As my colleague and the previous speaker alluded to as well, the government does things halfway. I saw in its 2019 platform that it was considering going to 26 weeks, not quite halfway but somewhere between the 1971 precedent, which I agree is outdated, and the amount of time proposed by the Bloc in this motion.

Again, it is a government that does things halfway, such as letting Trans Mountain go on and on with no approval, then finally purchasing the pipeline for \$4.4 billion, but to what end? We are seeing the government waffle and waver again here with Teck Frontier.

There is the government's inability to take a stand or make a decision on something. It just tries to find a sloppy compromise without being principled, really making a difference or changing anything. It is incredibly frustrating.

I thank the Bloc for bringing forward this motion today, although I was very disturbed to see that one of their final three proposed motions was to vote down Teck Frontier. It was a complete rejection of that. I feel that we as Conservatives have been very kind toward the Bloc and Quebec initiatives, especially in regard to NAFTA, steel, aluminum and those sorts of things. It was very disappointing to see that motion made it to potentially be one of the final three.

• (1230)

[Translation]

I often hear that the systems in Quebec are really superior, especially in terms of day cares.

[English]

I hear all the time about these incredible systems that they have there. Maybe this is a place where we can give the Bloc the opportunity to show leadership and lead the way for us together as one House of Commons and one chamber. Perhaps they are doing that for us in this moment.

However, I will finish by saying that I am very torn. I believe that the system is broken, but I also believe that we need to put our money where our people are. I look forward to further debate on this motion.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to mention that there has also been cancer in my family. My mother had it and campaigned by my father's side while wearing a wig.

I want to thank my hon. colleague. She understands the situation because her own family experienced it. I can tell she is very touched, but, from what I heard, I also think she feels torn.

I agree with what she said about putting our money where our people are, particularly because there is currently a surplus in the employment insurance account. That is not the government's money. It belongs to those who paid into it, namely employees and employers, which means that the money is available.

Some would say that this is a time for fiscal restraint or that there are deficits everywhere. However, the measure that we are proposing would not affect any of those deficits, because the money would come from a surplus in this independent fund.

That brings me to my question. If our measure does not affect the deficit, does my esteemed colleague think that she could vote in favour of our motion?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As I said, I imagine that all members have had cancer in their family. However, it is clear that we have a debt and a deficit, and there is a lot of waste. As I said in my speech, that bothers me.

When we think about where to spend money, there are good ways and bad ways to spend it. I would rather spend it on this than on some other things, but I think we need to stay vigilant.

### *Business of Supply*

The proposed measure is one possibility. I think that the idea deserves to be examined more closely before a decision is made. I am always open to initiatives that further the Canadian cause, but I think that, in this case, we need to examine the proposal more closely.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the critic for families, children and social development mentioned that we need a poverty strategy. We do have a poverty reduction strategy that targets a 20% reduction by 2020 and a 50% poverty reduction, relative to 2015 numbers, by 2030. We also have a housing strategy. We invested \$40 billion initially and are now up to \$55 billion to help Canadians find a place to call home.

The member mentioned the Canada child benefit that has helped 300,000 children get out of poverty and 900,000 Canadians get out of poverty. Programs like this are progressive and are helping Canadians.

In our campaign platform, we discussed having EI changed from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. Does the hon. member think that we are heading in the right direction in terms of supporting families, children and social development, and that this would be a very important part of that?

**Mrs. Stephanie Kusie:** Mr. Speaker, I recognized all of these programs to indicate just how broken our society is. In fact, I thank the speaker because I cannot think of a single better example. In the last four weeks, I had visits from the Minister of Transport and the Parliamentary Secretary for housing. They handed out 296 units to people in Calgary, in a province where they have lost over 100,000 jobs. This is exactly the problem that I am talking about. It is putting band-aids on the destruction of our economy as a result of the legislation of our entire livelihood and natural resources sector.

I am saying we cannot do this any more. We cannot put on band-aids and say to people we gave them a house or so many dollars a month. These problems go beyond that. Canadian families want to be independent, to take care of themselves and their children. They do not want to rely on programs like this, and the government is perpetuating that. This is not an example of a resolution. This is an example of the symptoms and the bigger problems.

• (1235)

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to thank my colleagues for bringing forward this important motion, allowing us to debate this important priority for the NDP. As many people will know, this was an NDP campaign promise in the most recent election. It put this idea forward in a bill in the past two Parliaments and is delighted to do so in the 43rd Parliament as well. However, this has not been the case with the Liberal government.

*Business of Supply*

When they were not in government, the Liberals voted for increases in special employment insurance sickness benefits, but as soon as they were elected, that support vanished. Instead, we were told that they would “revisit” the issue. The flip-flopping at the expense of sick Canadians is unconscionable and I urge my government colleagues to support this important motion.

While I am so proud to be a member of the New Democratic Party and am delighted to stand in support of this motion, I would like to take this opportunity to share a deeply personal story, which I hope will illustrate the need for the House to pass this bill.

On November 26, 2016, my doctor told me that I had a very aggressive form of cancer and would require emergency surgery and the removal of a significant portion of my large intestine. I was the mother of a nine-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter and I have never been more afraid than I was at that point.

My life very quickly changed. I went from being a very busy mother, driving kids to swim practices, hockey games and music lessons, and being the executive director of a non-profit organization, to a cancer patient who had non-stop medical appointments and tests. It took me months to recover from my surgery and cancer treatment. I could not do anything. I could not get groceries. I could not do the laundry. I could not drive or even get out of bed without assistance.

It was a terrible time in my life, but I still recognize how lucky I was. I had access to incredible medical care. I had an incredibly supportive husband and family, and my husband had a good job with benefits. We were able to continue to pay our bills, buy the expensive pain medication and medical supplies and make ends meet. I did not have the added stress of worrying about supporting myself and my family while undergoing medical treatment.

In a country with as much wealth and prosperity as Canada, I hope that no Canadian would have to bear the additional burden of being unable to pay their bills, buy the nourishing food they need to heal or access the medication they need.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer published a report entitled “Cost Estimate of an Increase in the Duration of Employment Insurance (EI) Sickness Benefits” and found that to increase the number of weeks of sickness benefits to 50 would require the employee premium rate to rise by a total of six cents from the baseline rate of \$1.62 per \$100 of insurable earnings.

The PBO found that 77% of recipients who used this benefit survived following illness, but were not ready to return to work once they had exhausted their 15 weeks. We are letting more than three out of four Canadians with major illnesses like this simply run out of options over an increase of six cents.

Almost one in two people in Canada will develop cancer at some point in their lives, an illness with an average treatment length of 52 weeks. Fifteen weeks of benefits are simply not enough to allow people to heal before returning to work.

With breast cancer, 25 to 36 weeks is the average time for treatment and recovery. For colon cancer, it is 37 weeks. With the benefit currently at 15 weeks, we know that it is not meeting the needs of patients experiencing these cancers. When will the government

finally commit to making this change to increase these special benefits to 50 weeks?

We know that 50 weeks is what we give mothers after they give birth. Why would people who have life-threatening diseases not be given the same benefits? The Liberal government has just given \$50 million to Mastercard and over \$10 million to Loblaws, yet it cannot uphold its own promise to increase EI benefits to the sick and injured.

Why is the government rushing to pay \$50 million to a big company like Mastercard, but dragging its feet when it comes to helping ill and injured workers?

● (1240)

More than 600,000 people have signed the petition, calling on the government to increase EI sickness benefits from 15 to 50 weeks for workers who are sick. The NDP wants to fix the employment insurance system that many Canadians need to rely on when they are dealing with an illness so it no longer falls short by not providing the flexibility to support those who want to work when they can.

I will be splitting my time, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to an increase in special benefits, the New Democrats would like to see expanded access to retraining and the creation of a pilot project that would allow workers with episodic disabilities to access EI sickness benefits.

We want to prevent the situation that occurred in 2010, when the federal government transferred \$57 billion from the employment insurance account into the government's general revenue.

Employment insurance is an important part of the Canadian social safety net. It is intended to assist Canadians who are facing financially challenging events like unemployment, injury and new parenthood. It is also intended to support Canadians who are afflicted with a serious illness like cancer and require lengthy periods of recuperation. They require the support the most.

Consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments have neglected our EI system, allowing it to become decimated and broken, unable to meet the needs of Canadians. It has not been revised since before I was born in 1971. It is time for an upgrade.

I urge all members to support the motion.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech.

It is no secret that the NDP fought for this bill. Former NDP member Claude Patry said that a vote for the bill was, and I quote, “a vote for workers and their families, for the most vulnerable in our society. Please, vote for common sense.”

Denis Coderre introduced that bill. At the time, he was a Liberal.

Why does my colleague think that common-sense legislation was rejected by the government?

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Speaker, I would also like to know why the government could possibly refuse me.

When the Liberals were not in government, they supported 50 weeks for people to recover from serious illnesses. Therefore, I have this question. What has changed in the time they were not sitting on that side of the House? Is the view from one side of the House so different from the other side? As soon as the Liberals get to the other side they are no longer interested in supporting Canadians who are suffering?

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government has responded in many different ways and has made changes to the EI program.

With respect to the sick benefits, we made a commitment to increase the number of weeks. If we look at the Canadian Cancer Society, it is one of the health care organizations that came up with a well-founded 26-week recommendation. We have committed to working toward that. If we compare the past to what we do today, that is a significant improvement.

Would the member agree that moving it forward is a positive thing for Canada's working class?

● (1245)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Speaker, if we can all agree that there needs to be significantly longer than 26 weeks for people to recover from cancer, it really does not matter if that is the recommendation from the government. We are saying, as one of my colleagues said earlier, we want to support Canadians when they need it so they can go back to work, so they can be healthy, can contribute and get back into the system. Regardless, 26 weeks does not meet the needs of those people who require longer to heal.

I understand that the government has talked to the Canadian Cancer Society and that it recommended the 26 weeks. However, it has not talked to the Canadian Labour Congress or labour movements about what they would like to see. We think they would be pushing for the 50 weeks.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the matter we are debating today is a very important. We must ensure we have a robust debate and ensure we get it right. I think all members of the House would agree with that.

Does the member agree that this should be sent to a committee as well, that a study should be undertaken to ensure there is a comprehensive review of the EI sickness benefits so we get it right for all Canadians?

### *Business of Supply*

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Speaker, it is a very important issue and we need to fix it. We have clearly seen that this system is incredibly broken. The fact that 1971 was a long time ago means that we do need a complete review of this to come up with a solution that will work. I would welcome having this looked at in more depth at the committee level.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the NDP for her speech. I have a question for her.

I remind members that the NDP moved a motion on this topic and the Bloc Québécois moved three. The Conservative Party introduced some, as well, in previous parliaments. In 2012, Denis Coderre, who was then in the Liberal opposition, moved a motion calling for 50 weeks of benefits. At the time, the current Prime Minister voted in favour of the motion.

Does my colleague agree that with just 26 weeks of benefits, some people will fall through the cracks? It is more than a question of math. People are sick. They have cancers and serious illnesses. Forty years ago, 15 weeks was not enough. Now, 40 years later, the government is talking about offering 26 weeks.

Does the member agree that some people will fall through the cracks?

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Speaker, absolutely people will fall through the cracks. I thank the good member for bringing up the fact that while we stand in the House and talk about numbers, such as numbers of weeks, and the vital role we have, we do not forget these are people. These are people who are suffering from serious illnesses. They possibly are at the worst moments in their life. To say that we as a country cannot afford to support them as they heal so they can rejoin the workforce is really quite an abysmal thing for our country.

People will slip through the cracks and that is a problem. A mother who has a new child is entitled to the 50 weeks. Therefore, people who need that time to heal should also be entitled to 50 weeks. It makes so much sense.

● (1250)

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak today to the importance of extending the EI benefit to 50 weeks for people who are suffering illness.

*Business of Supply*

Those who have followed the House for some time will know that in the last Parliament, the NDP had a private member's bill to accomplish exactly this. In the Parliament before that, the NDP had a private member's bill to accomplish exactly this. We are happy to continue pushing and arguing for this change, because we know it matters to a lot of Canadians.

I think everyone in the House and across the country who might be listening will have had the experience, either themselves or that of a loved one, a good friend or a work colleague, where they cannot perform their regular work duties due to an illness. We know what a difficult time that is in their lives, and that of their families and friends.

However, that difficulty is compounded, seriously, when they cannot pay their bills at the end of the month because there is no wage replacement in place. That is exactly why people might want to insure their wages, which is what Canadian workers do in conjunction with employers under the employment insurance program.

It is incumbent on us to allow that vehicle for Canadians to insure themselves. This is not a charity case. This is not a government handout. This is a program that employer and employees pay into to insure the wages of employees when they need it. Certainly, when people get cancer or some other form of serious illness that inhibits them from being able to go to work and do their jobs, that is exactly the kind of case in which they need that wage replacement. It is one of the reasons we have, and ought to have, employment insurance in the country.

Earlier in the debate today, a number of members asked "Why 50 weeks? What is special about 50 weeks?" The Bloc leader mentioned one reason why 50 weeks was important. If employees have been working for the amount of time required to qualify for employment insurance and they get laid off, those employees would get up to 50 weeks of coverage. It makes sense that if through no fault of their own, not because they were laid off but because they have become seriously ill, they would qualify for the same treatment as those who were laid off. That is certainly one very good reason why 50 weeks matters.

Another reason why 50 weeks matters is that one in two Canadians, in his or her lifetime, will have some kind of serious illness, with an average treatment length in the neighbourhood of 50 or 52 weeks. At some time, in all likelihood, half the people in this room will face a serious health challenge that will take almost a year to treat. It makes sense that if we are insuring ourselves against lost wages in the event of sickness, we do it in a way that is commensurate with the likely absence from work resulting from that.

A third reason why it makes sense to extend sickness benefits under EI to 50 weeks is because a lot of long-term disability plans kick in at the one-year mark. Right now, to get from the end of the 15-week coverage to when long-term disability would kick in takes somewhere in the neighbourhood of 40 weeks. If we had a 50-week sickness benefit, that would make that transition period a matter of only a couple of weeks, effectively giving every Canadian, no matter what workplace they work in, whether they are unionized or non-unionized, whether their collective agreement has a short-term disability plan or not, a short-term disability plan to help bridge them to when a longer-term disability plan might kick in.

Those are three very good reasons to set the goal at 50 weeks. The only reason not to would be if there was a significant financial cost that Canadians could not bear. However, the Parliamentary Budget Officer has done a study on this very issue and has said that the difference in premiums would be approximately 6¢ on every \$100 of insurable wages. Folks can correct me later if I am wrong. This sounds quite affordable to me. I think a lot of Canadians would not mind paying for this. That is purpose of having this debate.

● (1255)

We have had this debate many times in the House and we have heard a lot of compelling testimony as to why we ought to do this. It is frustrating for us on this side of the House that we have not been able to get there yet, because the reasons for getting there are quite compelling.

If we think about what that means for the plan, we are not talking about raising taxes. We are talking about somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion a year to provide this important insurance to Canadians who are sick and not able to perform their duties at work.

I recall when the Liberal government in the mid-nineties made significant changes to the EI program. That government made it harder to access EI and it raised the premiums. Over 15 or 20 years, a relatively short period of time for the amount of money we are talking about, that government accumulated a \$57-billion surplus in the EI account. The Conservative government then transferred it under the auspices of the PMO to do we know not what. We do not know where it went.

The idea that the employment insurance fund, which is funded apart from tax revenues through premiums paid by employees and employers, cannot afford to do an extra \$1 billion a year, when that represents only 6¢ on \$100 of insurable earnings, and when the government had such a massive surplus that was squirrelled away, is just a farce.

The fact is that \$57-billion surplus could have paid for the extension of this benefit, which will do a lot for many Canadians right across the country, for over 50 years. We had the money. Where did it go? That is the question.

Even without getting that money back, the go-forward cost of making this change is a reasonable one for a very concrete benefit to Canadians who are living out some of the worst times of their lives. The sickness and the health challenges are enough. They ought not to be compounded by further financial difficulty.

*Business of Supply*

Let us not kid ourselves either. Getting a 55% wage replacement is not exactly a financial paradise. It is not a panacea. Figuring out how to get by on that level of wage replacement is challenging enough for people who are facing serious illness. The least we could do is extend a hand to Canadians and ensure that the employment insurance program they already self-finance, along with their employers, covers them in times of great need.

That is why we are very proud to support the motion today. It is why we have been proud to bring this proposal forward many times in many other Parliaments. It is why, notwithstanding whatever might happen on this particular motion, the NDP is going to be there every step of the way fighting for this change until we get it done.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we on this side are supportive of taking steps to try to improve the lives of people in the situation my colleague described.

I would like to hear his thoughts on the use of the EI fund versus general revenue for these kinds of things. Generally speaking, in terms of the efficiency of taxation, having employment deductions, that is, taxing work, is a less desirable and less efficient form of taxation. To be formally correct, we would not say it is taxation exactly, but deductions at that point have more of a negative impact on the economy than revenue raised in other ways.

Does the member think there is an argument for providing this kind of support for people in this situation through other mechanisms not involving the EI fund? I am curious to hear his thoughts.

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Mr. Speaker, I am inclined to say that the problem with employment insurance to date is that there has already been far too much political interference in what ought to be a straightforward insurance plan.

When I hear the idea of governments providing this benefit directly, having seen what governments have done, even when they should have been arm's length, I prefer the idea that we do this in a way that is arm's length and managed in a transparent way. Canadians will then know they are paying a fair premium dollar for the insurance they are receiving, and employers will know they are paying a fair premium dollar for that.

We need to get government out of this one. We need to set up the fund in a way that is open, transparent and meets the needs of Canadians. We then need to leave well enough alone instead of having governments needlessly running up surpluses within EI while restricting access and then spending the money on something else.

I am all about less political interference on this one and more fairness.

• (1300)

**Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have heard different speeches discussing 15 weeks to 26 weeks to 50 weeks. Does the member agree that perhaps there is no one answer to fit everybody? I had a family member who had cancer and lost her battle with it. She could not work for two and a half years. I know we have done things with maternity leave like spread out the unemployment to a year and a half versus a year.

Would it not be the best path for something like this to go to committee? Members could examine it and come back with some good, firm recommendations. It is not just about looking after people for one year because, as I said, it was two and a half years that somebody could not work. She did qualify for other benefits, but still, there was no EI or anything like that.

Could the member comment on that?

**Mr. Daniel Blaikie:** Mr. Speaker, there is no question that each person is going to live out a major health issue differently. Some cases will be resolved more quickly and others will take longer. We know that approximately a third of the people who qualify for the benefit as it stands report that by the end of the 15 weeks they are still in need and in treatment, and that it is not enough.

We know the program is already not working for a significant cross-section of people, and we know the 50-week mark would help us transition to long-term disability plans and cover that gap. It seems to me that 50 weeks is the way to secure the maximum amount of flexibility and make things easiest for Canadians. That is why I support the 50-week amount.

I would also say we are in a funny position. If we look at the caregiver benefit under the compassionate care EI stream, Canadians can get up to 26 weeks off of work insured under EI in order to help a family member with a serious health issue, but that family member can only qualify for a 15-week benefit.

There is serious tension, and I am being generous by calling it only a tension, in the current EI policy. There are always questions about where we draw the line, but it is our job here to draw that line and I think it makes sense to draw it at 50 weeks.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with our whip, my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît.

We know that employment insurance needs to be overhauled. This government did not get the job done in the last Parliament. The Bloc Québécois has always advocated for improvements to the employment insurance program and all its benefits.

Improvements to the special EI benefit for serious illnesses are long overdue. We can really see the problem when we know someone dealing with a serious illness like cancer.

*Business of Supply*

On December 9, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and I spoke publicly in support of the demands of two cancer survivors. You will remember that Émilie Sansfaçon and Marie-Hélène Dubé came to the House as they had been fighting for years to have the federal government make necessary changes to the special sickness benefits and increase them from 15 to 50 weeks.

To that end, our motion is very simple and very clear. I am going to repeat it.

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

In its election platform, the Liberal Party promised to increase EI sick benefits from 15 to 26 weeks. That is fine, but it is not enough. It is not nearly enough.

● (1305)

Need I remind hon. members, as we did earlier, how this program got started more than 40 years ago? In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer talked about it. The original EI sickness benefit period of 15 weeks was based on surveys by the Department of Employment and Social Development showing that only 23% of claimants returned to work immediately after the 15-week benefit period ended. Among the remaining claimants, 82% took 16 weeks or more before returning to work.

Even when this benefit was created it was clear that just 15 weeks was woefully inadequate. The content of the program was therefore based on the proportion of claimants who returned to work more quickly rather than on the majority of the program's claimants. We could correct this mistake, which I would describe as historic, by supporting the motion before us today.

Let us imagine for a moment that we were diagnosed with a serious illness that prevented us from working and forced us to rely on these special sickness benefits. I am sure that we all have family or friends who are going through this. As if getting such news were not bad enough, these people also have to take the necessary steps and meet several criteria before they can access the program.

I will not get into details, but in order to qualify, a worker must have worked 600 hours to receive 55% of their earnings for 15 weeks. The House can raise that number from 15 to 50 to genuinely reflect the reality of those in need.

According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, extending EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 would cost an additional \$1.1 billion a year. To absorb the cost, EI premiums would have to be raised by six cents per \$100 of insurable earnings. That is feasible. We must not forget that this \$1.1-billion cost is based on a benefit period of 50 weeks. However, that is not the reality. The 50 weeks of benefits would be in line with what workers receive when they lose their job.

Not everyone will take full advantage of 50 weeks of EI sickness benefits. The goal of every worker is to go back to work healthy, and the purpose of this program is to protect people who are really in need.

In terms of fairness, compassionate care benefits are a special case. We do not object to offering 26 weeks of benefits to people

caring for loved ones at risk of dying within six months. What we find peculiar is that people caring for a loved one get more weeks of benefits than people who are sick themselves. That is not right.

When we say that the Liberals promised to offer 26 weeks of benefits because the Canadian Cancer Society and the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada called for it, we are talking statistics. When we talk to people who are affected, like Ms. Sansfaçon and others who have received multiple cancer diagnoses or been diagnosed with MS, people who have been unable to work for more than 50 weeks, people who have been fighting for years, and unemployed workers' associations from all of our regions and those of other provinces, it becomes very clear that extending benefits to 50 weeks is a matter of fairness and dignity.

It is possible that not everyone will use 50 weeks of benefits. However, one thing that is certain is that 26 weeks of benefits are not enough. We will be creating a space where we neglect people who need benefits. We do not want to create a black hole in EI sickness benefits as we have done for seasonal workers.

We absolutely must guarantee 50 weeks of benefits to avoid future situations like the ones experienced by two individuals who came to testify. When someone is diagnosed with cancer and knows they will need treatment, their first thought should not be how they will make ends meet. Financial considerations should not be a greater concern than care and treatment. The testimony was very compelling.

We are talking about returning to work. Everyone hopes to go back to work. Our system is based on that. People who lose their job want to find another one. People who need sickness benefits for serious illnesses also hope to recover and go back to work. According to the Supreme Court of Canada, the employment insurance power "must be interpreted generously. Its objectives are not only to remedy the poverty caused by unemployment, but also to maintain the ties between unemployed persons and the labour market."

The Conseil national des chômeurs et chômeuses provided some good statistics in the brief it submitted to the Standing Committee on Finance, including this fact: "Of all the G7 countries, excluding the United States but including Russia, Canada has the worst health benefits coverage of any country".

Here, we make choices. We take care of our people. Employment insurance provides only 15 weeks of special benefits to a person with a serious illness, while workers who lose their job are entitled to benefits for up to 50 weeks. We have to restore fairness and give sick people the chance to recover with dignity.

Several similar bills have been introduced in the House. In 2012, the Liberals, who were on the opposition benches at the time, introduced one such bill, and the Prime Minister, who was just an MP back then, voted in favour of it, so it is possible.

The Liberal government claims to be working in a spirit of cooperation. It says it supports the middle class and workers. That means this bill could be passed quickly.

• (1310)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to recognize that for many years there has been absolutely no change on this file. It has been stagnant.

We have seen changes in the last few years under this government, with different reforms to EI. We have been working with stakeholders, such as the Canadian Cancer Society, to see what we can do with the EI sick benefits. We are now looking into the possibility of increasing them from 15 weeks to half a year. That is a positive step forward.

We are not even saying that is absolutely final. Maybe there is a need for us to continue to have a dialogue and continue looking at the research and so forth.

I am concerned because it seems that whatever the commitment from the government, the NDP and the Bloc, although more so the NDP, think it is never enough. I remember the housing strategy, a multi-billion dollar commitment, and other commitments and it is never ever enough.

Would the member not agree that the increase from 15 weeks to half a year is significant? Maybe the Bloc would have been better off to suggest that the committee look at the potential for changes in the future.

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity to act. As a newly elected MP, I think we should seize opportunities when we have them.

To answer my colleague's question, I acknowledge that some mistakes in the EI program were corrected in the last Parliament. However, there are still more mistakes. Forty years on, we have an opportunity to fix the situation once and for all and make the program fair.

Going halfway is not enough. We do not need to conduct major studies or re-examine this well-documented issue. It is a matter of political will. What we are saying is that it is possible to do this right now.

Our motion must be adopted to allow us to move forward so we do not have to ask the question again in five years.

### *Business of Supply*

• (1315)

[English]

**Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have heard the compelling arguments on the half-measures by the Liberal government. We know that incrementalism kills in this regard. We heard it from various previous speakers. We also know that we must prevent the situation that occurred under the Conservative government in 2010, when it pilfered \$57 billion from the EI fund.

Do the Liberals agree that we need to protect the EI operating account under the law so that future governments cannot continue to raid it for general revenue?

[Translation]

**Ms. Louise Chabot:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

The EI fund is an independent fund paid for by employee and employer contributions. It is a guarantee, an insurance policy for people who lose their job or fall gravely ill. Special benefits have been added.

No government should be able to pilfer money from the fund and undermine the benefits that individuals are entitled to under a program that was developed over the years to protect ordinary folks.

I would take it one step further. This is a motion we need to adopt, but the EI system needs a complete overhaul. There are other types of benefits, such as those for seasonal workers. In the previous Parliament, the government promised to overhaul the system, which has not seen substantial change in 40 years. An in-depth study could be done in committee, but I think we can take action now on sickness benefits without pilfering from the fund.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise to speak to this motion that is so important to me. For the benefit of those who are watching us on TV and who may be wondering why I am wearing a green ribbon, I want to point out that this week Quebec is celebrating Hooked on School Days. The members of the Bloc Québécois who rise today are proud to support Hooked on School Days, which are so important to our nation.

As I have said many times, I am a social worker by training. Before I became a member of Parliament I worked in a CLSC. I worked with the most vulnerable members of our community, including the sick and those who needed support. I am very proud to share a little about my job today, because it shows why I support this important motion.

Social workers in Quebec's health care network are fortunate to have good, unionized, secure jobs with group insurance that guarantees they will get paid in case of illness. The union negotiates this insurance. It helps workers get treatment and return to work quickly.

Today, I can say that, over the course of my career, I have met many people who do not have the privilege of having insurance or of having a job that gives them everything they need to get through difficult times in their lives.

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The people we are talking about today and who will be affected by this motion, should the government support it, are the type of people who are not that fortunate, who do not have the privilege of having a job that guarantees them group insurance coverage at times of personal hardship. They are workers who like their jobs and have the misfortune of getting sick. When the doctor tells them about chemotherapy and radiation, the first thing they think about is how they are going to pay their rent if the treatment takes a long time or if the cancer comes back. I am not talking about a mortgage here, because people who own their own homes often have mortgage insurance that covers payments in the event of misfortune. I am talking about people in precarious jobs, who live in apartments, who do not own their own homes, and who get sick. I am talking about people who have to fight to beat a serious illness and quickly get back to work.

In my professional life, I met with people in this situation whose jobs were precarious, who were good workers, men and women who wanted to work and who paid EI premiums, fulfilled all their responsibilities as workers, but who became ill. This motion, this amendment of the Employment Insurance Act that the Bloc Québécois has been championing for many years, seeks to meet the needs of these people and of these workers in particular.

The government is telling us that it is too much to ask for 50 weeks, that benefits are increasing from 15 to 26 weeks. It is saying that the opposition always wants the maximum amount. That is a rather odd way of looking at things. As my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville stated, when someone has this serious illness and requires treatments that prevent them from working, when they become that statistic, the person who goes over the 15 or 26 weeks, it is not about exaggerating, it is about being compassionate, understanding and inclusive. This is a social safety net that Quebec and all provinces want to provide to their workers who become ill.

Let's now take a look at the 26 weeks that are provided to family caregivers. People in their mid-fifties like myself are often parents, grandparents and also family caregivers. As society is changing and people are living longer, people of my generation must support their children, grandchildren and parents.

• (1320)

Essentially, the Employment Insurance Act was amended to make things right and address this new social reality by increasing special benefits for caregivers to 26 weeks. It is a very good idea.

I have worked in a CLSC, and I can honestly say that this measure was really helpful, particularly for providing at-home support to seniors in rural areas. It enabled seniors and very sick people to leave this world with dignity, while surrounded by their loved ones.

Now, it is not right for someone to lose their income because they get sick and their treatments require them to miss work for more than 15 weeks. Clearly, the last thing someone in that situation wants to think about is how they will meet their financial obligations if they require further treatment.

When somebody has cancer and lives in a rural area, they must not only shoulder the burden of the disease, but also pay to travel in order to receive treatment, which is often only available in large urban areas. For example, if someone from Salaberry-de-Valleyfield,

which is in my riding, needs to get to Montreal for chemotherapy or radiation therapy, it takes an hour to an hour and a half to drive there and costs an average of \$45 to \$50.

Basically, people get only 15 weeks of employment insurance, even though they often have low-paying jobs that barely allow them to meet their financial obligations. These people have to pay out of pocket to travel for treatment.

The Liberals claim that the Bloc Québécois is being a bit greedy because they have already promised to extend the benefit period from 15 weeks to 26. They say that this is already a lot and that we should not cry wolf. They are suggesting that we keep thinking and that an amendment to the act, such as increasing the benefits to 50 weeks, could be introduced a little later.

I have seen a situation first-hand. A member of my family was diagnosed with cancer and fought it. His recovery and treatments lasted over 15 weeks. He was very happy, and so were we, to have group insurance so that he was able to honour his commitments.

We in the Bloc have a hard time understanding why it would be so complicated to amend the Employment Insurance Act and increase the benefit period to 50 weeks. We know that an amendment to such an important piece of legislation does not happen in every Parliament, and, as my colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville said, we have a great opportunity to settle this issue of inequity and injustice once and for all.

For us, giving up and settling for 26 weeks is out of the question. We want to support these people who have to fight for their lives day after day to regain their health, get through their illness, and return to work.

In debates in the House, we do not talk enough about workers in that situation. I do not know whether any members of the House are actuaries, but it does not take a genius to know that not all sick workers will need 50 weeks to get better.

I believe that we have the means to do this. We have a golden opportunity, and I hope that government members will support our motion and be inspired by our arguments. These are workers with precarious jobs. They are the most vulnerable members of our society. They have the right to legislation that gives them better protection than they have now.

• (1325)

[English]

**Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if my esteemed colleague could clarify for me who this program would apply to. She mentioned in her speech there are those who do not have other insurance to get them through, such as mortgage insurance. Does she mean to say that this program would be limited to a very specific group of cancer patients who do not have mortgage insurance or is this for all cancer patients?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

The answer is no. In our view, all workers paying into the EI program who become sick while working should be entitled to a maximum of 50 weeks of special benefits. We are not going to start dividing sick workers into different categories. Everyone who pays into the program should be protected.

In our view, a worker who is sick for a long time and needs more than 15 weeks should be entitled to up to 50 weeks. That would make things fair for all workers who pay into EI.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my question relates specifically to the Bloc's concerns about EI, but I think its members are missing the boat in that there is a lot more than just this one component that they are talking about. For example, if a woman is pregnant and working in a job she cannot be in while pregnant, she will access some of her EI sick benefits even though she is not sick.

I am afraid that what the Bloc is trying to do here today is to bring forward this attempt at resolving a problem by just throwing more money at it instead of trying to drill down and correct the problems we have with EI on a level that has more detail. Can the member comment on whether, in preparation for this motion today, they gave any consideration to some of the other problems that exist with EI?

• (1330)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at my colleague's comment and question.

The Bloc Québécois is not missing the boat at all. The Bloc Québécois is here to serve and defend sick workers. Our goal is not to move a motion that would make a small change for women or men on maternity or paternity leave.

As I said before, our goal is to ensure that, when workers who have contributed to the program get sick and need care for more than 15 or 26 weeks, they will not have to worry about their future. We want them to know that they will be able to cover their rent, food and care so they can focus on getting well.

I can assure the House that the Bloc Québécois is not trying to pull the wool over anyone's eyes. What we are trying to do is help the most vulnerable people, the most vulnerable workers. I am

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proud to be here today to put that on the record. Sick workers, workers in general and vulnerable people will always be able to count on Bloc MPs to stand up for them.

[English]

**Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am amazed to find the Liberals falling over themselves to find a reason to oppose this very simple measure.

Before I became a member of Parliament, I worked for a previous MP as a caseworker. For seven years, I was helping constituents who, in many cases, were caught in this trap. They needed EI benefits to deal with their sickness beyond the 15 weeks, but they were not sick enough to qualify for Canada pension plan disability benefits. I was often the person who had to pass on the bad news to them, saying that I was sorry but that the Employment Insurance Act said what it said and their benefits would end at 15 weeks. There was nothing more I could do. This is precisely one of the reasons I ran for politics, to come to this place to make a difference.

We have an opportunity here to help some of those disadvantaged Canadians in our society. I would like my hon. colleague to comment. Let us get this job done here in the 43rd Parliament. Canadians are waiting. This is something we should be finding unanimous consent on.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Mr. Speaker, as my NDP colleague said, this is an important opportunity that we do not want to miss.

It is not every day that we amend a law as important as the Employment Insurance Act. The government would be sending a clear message that it listened to workers and the most vulnerable members of our society. These people need all members of the House to come to a consensus to finally unanimously support our vulnerable workers who need care and who are fighting to survive. They need financial support. It is important to remember that this is not charity. They paid into this insurance plan, and they have the right to that support.

[English]

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Niagara Centre.

I am pleased to participate in the debate on the opposition motion on employment insurance and sick benefits.

[Translation]

For starters, I want to say that our government is not blind to the financial difficulties that Canadians may face during the most challenging times of their lives. On the contrary, we take them very seriously. Health problems can change a person's ability to earn a living at any time.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

We know that far too many Canadians are coping with serious illnesses, and are worried about being able to get the treatments they need and ending up relying on their families. A serious health problem can disrupt all aspects of their lives, whether it is a chronic or life-threatening illness, such as cancer, mental health illness, stroke, heart attack, etc.

- (1335)

*[Translation]*

We know that workers and their families face difficult, stressful situations because of this, particularly if they are also dealing with financial burdens. That is why we made changes to the employment insurance plan to make it more responsive to Canadians' actual circumstances.

*[English]*

First, I would like to highlight the employment insurance sickness benefit, which is an important measure supporting Canadians who are unable to work because of illness, injury or quarantine. It allows workers time to restore their health so that they can return to work.

*[Translation]*

Today, under the Employment Insurance Act, eligible claimants can receive sickness benefits for a maximum period of 15 weeks. Recipients have the flexibility to use their 15 weeks of sickness benefits during the 52-week benefit period. For example, in 2017-18, a total of approximately \$1.7 billion in sickness benefits was paid to over 412,000 claimants.

*[English]*

Of that number, 64% of recipients did not use the full 15 weeks of benefits to which they were entitled. That being said, some recipients use up 15 weeks before they are able to return to work, and we are sensitive to the experiences of these Canadians and their families. That is why our government is committed to extending the EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks in order to help workers pay the bills while they rest and recover.

*[Translation]*

The proposed extension would support Canadians who are diagnosed with a serious illness like cancer and who need to take time off from their jobs to receive treatment. Sickness benefits are a short-term income replacement measure for temporary absences from work.

*[English]*

It is important to note that in cases of chronic and long-term illness, workers also have other financial support measures at their disposal; for example, Canada pension plan disability benefits, private insurance plan benefits and support from provinces and territories.

Since 2016, our government has improved the flexibility of the employment insurance special benefits, which include maternity leave, parental benefits, sickness benefits, compassionate care benefits and family care benefits. Today, millions of Canadians provide

informal care and support for critically ill family members. Canadians told us what they wanted, and we found ways of being more flexible and more inclusive for all families.

*[Translation]*

We announced special measures in budget 2017 to make it easier for caregivers to access EI benefits and give families more flexibility. These measures are making a real difference in the lives of Canadians.

*[English]*

One example is the creation of the new employment insurance family care benefit for adults.

*[Translation]*

This new benefit has made a huge difference in the lives of many hard-working Canadians who must take time off work to care for a loved one. This benefit of up to 15 weeks allows caregivers to provide care for a critically ill or injured adult family member.

I would also like to point out that, for the first time, immediate and extended family members of children who are critically ill have access to a maximum of 35 weeks of benefits, which was previously accessible only to parents.

*[English]*

This goes beyond the immediate family and relatives to individuals who are not relatives but are considered to be like family. For example, neighbours could be eligible to receive the benefits to provide care for a critically ill child. Caregivers can share the available weeks of benefits at the same time or at a separate time. It is estimated that approximately 22,000 families have accessed the new EI caregiving benefit since its creation.

- (1340)

*[Translation]*

Another very important aspect applies to caregivers of both children and adults. More specialists, family physicians and even nurse practitioners will now be authorized to sign medical certificates confirming that a child or adult is critically ill or injured.

This also applies to caregivers who access compassionate care benefits while providing care, including end-of-life care, for a child or adult family member.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

This change makes the administrative process easier while allowing Canadians to focus on what really matters, being at the side of their loved ones. Every Canadian situation is unique, with different family and work needs, but every Canadian family deserves our support. That is why the EI benefit is now more flexible and more inclusive for Canadians.

*[Translation]*

In conclusion, what matters most to us is family. When a family member needs help, people must be able to provide care, and we must support these caregivers. We are committed to offering EI benefits that are more flexible, inclusive and, of course, accessible.

Our government promised Canadians that we would support parents and caregivers, and that is exactly what we are doing.

*[English]*

**Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am having difficulty with my colleague's speech. When he mentioned that the change the Liberals made last year had such an incredible impact, imagine all the benefits Canadians would get if we changed the UIC rules on sickness.

When he asks about the support system from the CPP, that does not take effect until one year off work, and then people have to make sure they cannot work in the foreseeable future. It is very difficult, so that is why we are asking for at least one year on sick benefits. If I need a hip replacement, I can no longer work. It takes six months to get a hip replacement, and then I have to recover. What is 15 weeks going to do for me? It is going to break me and it will be a financial burden on my whole family, so I ask the member to support the motion.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member has to look at the big picture, which is that 64% of Canadians only use up to 10 weeks of the 15 weeks available to them, and then 34% use up to 15 weeks. By moving forward and changing it up to 26 weeks, we are moving that target. We may have no Canadians needing more than 26 weeks. If there are more, we are going to have to deal with that as well, and that is why we are here.

Let us not forget that the HUMA committee reported that we should increase it. Members did not say 50 or 75; they said we should increase it. Moving the bar to half a year is a very productive approach, and we are going to be able to meet the needs of Canadians.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

I think I understand the arguments of the Liberals opposite. The cancer and MS associations have said that it takes an average of 26 weeks to recover, so the Liberals decided to increase the benefit period to 26 weeks. The Liberals say that there is no point increasing it to 50 weeks if people are back at work after 26 weeks. For the Liberals, it does not make any difference. That is their main argument in this whole debate.

In fact, it seems to me that the Liberals do not want to vote in favour of a motion moved by an opposition party and are looking for a reason not to.

According to my hon. colleague, if claimants go back to work after 26 weeks anyway, why not give them 50 weeks?

● (1345)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. Maybe I am just lucky, but it seems to me that every time I make a speech, he asks me questions. I invite him to continue, because it allows me to further explain to Canadians what our government's plans are and what changes it is making.

We need to be careful. One could argue that the Bloc knows that we already promised Canadians, based on consultation, to increase the length of benefits to 26 weeks. The Bloc is proposing that it be increased to 50 weeks. Is this not the Bloc playing political games? It is certainly not us.

We listened to Canadians. We made them a promise. The committee recommended that we expand EI sickness benefits and that is what we are doing. There are also other safeguards in place to help us do that, such as the Canada pension plan measures and other provincial and territorial services. Today, we are adequately addressing that need.

*[English]*

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, increasing the EI sickness benefit from 15 weeks to 50 weeks is essential if we want to ensure that hard-working Canadians have the protection and insurance they need when they face serious injury or illness. New Democrats put this forward in the past two Parliaments and are proud to support this motion.

I am disheartened that the Liberal government is breaking its commitment to sick and injured workers. When in opposition, it supported extending EI sick benefits to 50 weeks, but now the Liberals would rather give \$50 million to Mastercard. Why would they rather support a big corporation than support the sick and injured Canadians who need help?

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Mr. Speaker, we should not be playing politics with this. The member for Victoria is talking about the Visa cards and everything else, and she said in her opening statement that the Liberals are not following through on their commitments. I am sorry, but if one reads the platform correctly, one will see that we said that we were going to move the bar from 15 weeks to 26 weeks, which was the recommendation of the Canadian Cancer Society and various other organizations across the country.

We are following through on our commitments, and I am very proud of that.

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**Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today and to rise in the House to talk about the employment insurance program and, more specifically, about maternity benefits, extended parental benefits and parental sharing benefits.

Becoming a parent can be a stressful time for many Canadians. The weeks leading up to the birth can be fraught with nerves and worry at the best of times. In other complicated cases, mothers-to-be may be on bed rest or even hospitalized. Whatever the case, we want to give Canadians the flexibility to choose the option that best meets their needs.

Our employment insurance program is robust and covers a wide range of life situations during which Canadians may need financial support, and maternity benefits is certainly one of them.

We understand how hard it can be for hard-working families to balance their career and their family responsibilities. This is why we have done a lot for parents so far. In December 2017, we launched the extended parental benefit, helping parents across the country to find the right work-family balance. Parents of newborn or newly adopted children are now able to choose between two options. The first option is to receive 35 weeks of parental benefits paid at the standard rate of 55% over 12 months. The second option is to receive 61 weeks of parental benefits for an extended period of time, corresponding to 33% of their average weekly income. They may in fact be paid over a period of 18 months.

In March 2019, we launched the parental sharing benefit. This benefit helps support parents, including adoptive and same-sex parents, in sharing a more equal distribution of the joy and the responsibility of raising their children. It does so by offering two options: providing an additional five weeks of employment insurance parental benefits when parents agree to share standard parental benefits; or providing an additional eight weeks for those who choose to extend parental benefit options. The increased flexibility will support parents in their ability to spend quality time in raising their children.

In addition, eligible mothers are now able to receive maternity benefits earlier, up to 12 weeks before their due date. This is more flexible than the benefits provided under the previous government, which limited benefits to eight weeks before the expected delivery date. I am proud that our government can help Canadians when they need it most.

Since 2015, we have embarked on a journey to modernize the program so that it reflects today's realities. One of those realities is gender equality. As a side note, I would like to mention that since 2018, the fourth week of September is now Gender Equality Week in Canada. This has been an opportunity for people to celebrate the progress we have made in advancing gender equality in Canada while reflecting on the work that remains to be done to make sure that everyone, regardless of gender, could reach their full potential.

Gender equality week is now enshrined into law, which is a very good thing. It is a good thing because it reminds us to celebrate our progress as a society, but it is also a week to reflect on the challenges and work that still lie ahead.

I mention this today because even if Canadian women are among the most educated women in the world, they are still the least likely to participate in the labour market and most likely to work part time. On average, women in Canada earn 87 cents for every dollar earned by men on an annual basis. Canadian women are under-represented in positions of leadership, and businesses in Canada are overwhelmingly owned by men.

It has been estimated that adding more women to the workforce could boost the level of Canada's GDP by as much as 4%. Providing Canadians with the opportunity to realize their full potential is not just the right thing to do: It is the smart thing to do for our economy.

Now, what does gender equality have to do with employment insurance maternity and parental benefits? The answer is, everything. In 2017-18, women represented 84% of all parental benefits claims. This indicates that child care duties continue to fall heavily on mothers.

Our government is committed to making evidence-based decisions that take into consideration the impacts of policies on all Canadians, and it fully defends the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

● (1350)

If we are serious about gender equality, we have to integrate it into everything we do. That is why as government, we applied gender-based analysis plus to the decisions that Canadians have elected us to make.

Equality between Canadian women and men will lead to greater prosperity, not just for women and their families, but for all Canadians. Gender equality is a principle that has guided this government in all our budgets. It has allowed us to take important steps to a more prosperous Canada. It is what drives the employment insurance parental sharing benefit. It is intended to support young families and encourage gender equality in the workplace and at home. This benefit helps to support a more equal distribution of home and work responsibilities.

As I mentioned earlier, it provides an additional five weeks of EI parental benefits when parents, including adoptive and same-sex parents, agree to share parental leave, or an additional eight weeks for those who choose the extended parental benefit option.

Since it was launched, more than 32,000 parents established a claim for extended parental benefits, higher than the anticipated 20,000 claims per year.

As an interesting fact, in Quebec, 81% of spouses or partners of recent mothers claimed or intended to claim parental benefits in 2017, compared with only 12% in the rest of Canada. In large part, this is due to the Quebec parental insurance plan, the QPIP. This "use it or lose it" approach is designed to create an incentive for all parents to take some leave when welcoming a new child, and to share equally in the responsibility of raising their children.

Equitable parental leave may lead to equitable hiring practices, reducing conscious and unconscious discrimination against women by employers and reducing stigma against men for taking parental leave. This benefit has been enforced since March 2019. As many as 97,000 Canadian parents are expected to claim the parental sharing benefit annually.

In closing, I would like to say that for the employment insurance program to continue successfully and play a major role, the government has to continuously make the program more adaptable, more flexible, more inclusive and more accessible.

We are committed to doing so, and continue to listen to all Canadians. Their preoccupations are ours. We took action to further the well-being of Canadians and we will continue to do so. By promoting equality, our government will help to create long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, that is fantastic. I thank my colleague for his superb speech. It was interesting because he talked about all kinds of things, except the Bloc Québécois motion we are debating today.

We have been debating this motion all morning. I heard my hon. colleagues in the government tell us how proud they are to increase special EI benefits for serious illnesses to 26 weeks. However, I did not hear a single reason why the government refuses to increase those benefits to 50 weeks.

Here is my question. Can my hon. colleague explain why the government refuses to increase special EI benefits for serious illnesses to 50 weeks?

[*English*]

**Mr. Vance Badawey:** Mr. Speaker, since 2015, our government has reduced the EI waiting period from two weeks to one week. Since 2015, we introduced new legislation for caregiver leave. Since 2015, we made the working-while-on-claim provisions permanent, and expanded them to include people receiving maternity and sickness benefits. Since 2015, we created new EI provisions for workers in seasonal industries.

Finally, we gave parents the choice of taking either 12 months or 18 months for parental leave and introduced a new parental sharing benefit to make it easier for parents to share in the raising of their children, resulting in more equality.

Moving forward, we will further our commitments on EI to expand and build on our promise to Canadian workers and our commitment to equality for all Canadians, continuing to do what we have been doing since 2015.

[*Translation*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Niagara Centre will have another three minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on this motion.

*Statements by Members*

## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

### RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise again today to speak to the Wet'suwet'en situation, and the crisis that is gripping the country and about which this evening we will have an emergency debate.

The most useful thing that I can do in 60 seconds is quote from a letter that appeared in the national newspapers from one of my constituents, whom members will know. Ron Wright, Massey lecturer and author of *A Short History of Progress*, notes in this letter that in writing his book *Stolen Continents*, he spoke of the Oka crisis and he sees parallels. He stated that:

...[like] the Mohawks, the Wet'suwet'en have never [lost] their ancient sovereignty as an independent people.

Under international law, he added, there are only two ways to lose sovereignty: by armed conquest or by signing it away in treaty. Neither is the case here. He continued:

Like the Mohawks, the Wet'suwet'en have an ancient system of self-government that predates European occupation and is still alive.

Finally, he concluded that the elected band councils set up under the Indian Act merely administer the small territories defined as reserves.

It is clear that the rule of law in this case is not muddied and only on one side. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs also stand with the rule of law.

\* \* \*

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

### ACADEMIC SUCCESS

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by wishing my son, Gabriel, a happy birthday, as he turns six today.

[*Member spoke in Italian*]

[*Translation*]

The work we do in this House is for him.

This week we are celebrating Hooked on School Days, which highlights the hard work and efforts of our students.

[*English*]

Whether it is creating favourable learning environments or connecting youth with inspiring role models, we can now play a role in encouraging perseverance among the young people in our communities to help them reach their full potential.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]*

I invite my colleagues to actively participate in this social challenge by recognizing success and encouraging young people in their communities, since all such actions contribute to their success. That is what I have done for the primary schools in Alfred-Pellan, where grade 5 and 6 students who have excelled will receive a certificate of recognition.

I congratulate those students for all they do every day to contribute to their own success.

\* \* \*

*[English]***FAMILY DAY**

**Mr. Jeremy Patzer (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday I joined Canadians across the country in celebrating Family Day, and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all families for their contribution as the bedrock of our society.

I particularly want to thank the families who have members serving in the House who sacrifice much in allowing us to be here. I may be biased, but I am convinced no one does a better job of this than my wife Kyla, who is here today, along with our three children, Jacoby, Jada and Kenzie.

Several retired MPs have told me that if at the end of my political career I no longer have my family at my side, I will have gained nothing in my time in office, but if I leave with a strong, loving and intact family, I will have accomplished much. I can tell my wife Kyla that our work here has just begun, but it is because of her that I have every confidence we will accomplish much in the years to come. I thank her for being my rock.

If members will allow me, I have one word of advice, which is to always put their families first.

\* \* \*

*[Translation]***GUY CORMIER**

**Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to honour the memory of a great man.

Guy Cormier was a fisher and mayor of the village of Saint-Léolin, in my riding. Sadly, he died suddenly on January 11. Mr. Cormier had two dreams: to become mayor and to find a new purpose for the former school in his village. In 2014, he was elected to municipal council and became mayor in 2018. Thanks to him, the former school became a hydroponic greenhouse that is enjoying great success.

Guy, or Ti-Guy as he was known, was a friend to many. He gave countless hours of his time to various causes and was valued as a volunteer. Guy always had a smile and a good story to tell. He was a man who loved politics and never hesitated to give advice to elected members to help them understand the issues of our region.

His death is a major loss for the entire community. I offer my deepest condolences to his wife, Edwige, his daughter, Nancy, as well as his family and friends.

Ti-Guy, you will be sorely missed. Thank you for your incredible contribution to the riding of Acadie—Bathurst.

\* \* \*

**THE PATRIOTES**

**Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Saturday was a day of mourning for Quebec.

On February 15, 1839, five of our heroes, five Patriotes, were hanged at the Pied-du-Courant prison. They were executed for defending their nation's freedom.

François-Marie-Thomas Chevalier de Lorimier, Charles Hindelang, Pierre-Rémi Narbonne, Amable Daunais and François Nicolas lost their lives for the sake of justice and democracy.

Their voices were silenced that all Quebeckers might be heard.

The night before he was executed, Chevalier de Lorimier wrote these final words: “Although so much has gone wrong, I take heart and continue to hope for the future. My friends and my children will see better days. They will be free. Long live freedom and independence.”

\* \* \*

**FAMILY DAY**

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday all Ontarians celebrated Family Day, and the community of Orleans, which I am privileged to represent, joined me for some fun at a local bowling alley.

● (1405)

*[English]*

I was pleased to see such a great turnout as nearly 500 people joined me at the Orleans Bowling Centre to play with their friends and their families. It always gives me great joy to see two and three generations taking the time to share an activity together.

*[Translation]*

When elected representatives like us can organize that kind of community activity, in many cases it enables entire families to participate in recreational activities that would be too costly otherwise.

*[English]*

I want to thank Kevin, Jonathan and Rock from the Orleans Bowling Centre who made sure the event ran smoothly. They have been extraordinary partners and I thank them very much. I thank Orleans for showing up for bowling day.

\* \* \*

**DR. JOHN SPENCER MACDONALD**

**Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the passing of an exceptional Canadian, Dr. John Spencer MacDonald.

Dr. MacDonald was a graduate and esteemed professor of engineering at both UBC and MIT, who went on to receive office in the Order of Canada. He was also the co-founder of MacDonald, Detwiler and Associates, a high-tech company headquartered in Steveston—Richmond East, better known to Canadians as the company of Canadarm and the constellation of RADARSAT Earth-observation satellites.

I was an employee of MDA for many years. It is from this experience that I can say that MDA under Dr. MacDonald's vision and leadership was the incubator of many professionals within Canada's technology sector, a source of pride for the Canadian economy.

I know what a difficult loss this is for many within the MDA family. Not only will Dr. MacDonald be missed for his engineering genius, but also because he was known as an exceptional individual and a visionary. His death will leave a void in the lives of all those to whom he imparted his wisdom during his life.

\* \* \*

#### NATIONAL FLAG OF CANADA DAY

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on February 15, 1965, our national flag was raised for the first time on Parliament Hill. In 1996, February 15 was officially designated National Flag of Canada Day, thanks in large part to the advocacy of former MP for Parkdale—High Park and now Oakville North—Burlington resident, Jesse Fliss. Last Saturday, we celebrated our flag day from coast to coast to coast.

At the official ceremony inaugurating the new Canadian flag in 1965, the Hon. Maurice Bourget, Speaker of the Senate, said, "The flag is the symbol of the nation's unity, for it, beyond any doubt, represents all the citizens of Canada without distinction of race, language, belief or opinion."

Residents are invited to drop into my community office and pick up a paper flag poster that they can display to honour and show our pride in being a beacon of strength, fairness and freedom around the world.

\* \* \*

#### SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

**Mr. Terry Beech (Burnaby North—Seymour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Dr. Joy Johnson, who has been named the next president of Simon Fraser University. Throughout her career, Joy has done extensive work in gender and health studies and has worked on groundbreaking issues, including diversity in hiring processes and creating a culture of innovation.

Her appointment also means that in September, we will see the departure of our current president, Andrew Petter. I have been incredibly fortunate to work with Andrew on a number of files during the last decade. He has set a vision for an engaged university that would meet the needs not only of our community, but also those of Canada and the world. He has championed entrepreneurship education and has significantly grown all of SFU's campuses in significant and meaningful ways.

Andrew has left an incredible legacy on the SFU community, and I want to thank him for his service.

#### Statements by Members

[Translation]

We are proud of the outstanding work that has been done at SFU, and we would love to see more of it for an even greater positive impact in the future.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### IRAN

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while exposing the evils of slavery, William Wilberforce said, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."

We here know well the horrors inflicted by the Iranian regime, horrors most experienced by the people of Iran, but seen and felt by many Canadians after the downing of Flight 752. We have seen the photos of parents and children whose lives were cut short. We have felt with them the crushing loss and pain. Some may choose to look the other way, but we may never again say that we did not know.

In the midst of feeling this pain, Canadians and Iranians saw the images of our Prime Minister, grinning, hugging, bowing and shaking bloodstained hands during an interaction with the Iranian foreign minister. Did our Prime Minister know how this portrayal of obsequiousness and ease would be used by the regime and could impact its victims? After attending memorials and meetings with victims across this country, either he did not know, or he did not care.

Canada has a choice to make. We either embrace the regime or we stand with its victims. We cannot do both.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

#### CANADA SUMMER JOBS INITIATIVE

**Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about a program that is well appreciated in my riding of Mississauga East—Cooksville, the Canada summer jobs program.

The Canada summer jobs program is rolling out 70,000 jobs for our youth. In 2019, employers and youth satisfaction levels with this program were high. I am encouraging employers and youth of Mississauga East and across Canada to effectively utilize this program's tremendous opportunities. By encouraging our youth into these high-quality jobs, we are helping youth, particularly those facing barriers to employment; employers of 50 or fewer employees; and our communities.

*Statements by Members*

A summer job is an important way to earn money while gaining valuable work experience and will help our youth on the road to a successful career. In my riding, hundreds of employers and youth have benefited by taking part every year. I encourage employers to come forward with their applications during the employer application period that is now open until February 24.

Let us help our youth build our future workforce.

\* \* \*

**CARBON PRICING**

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has stood in this place on occasion after occasion and stated that Canadians would be better off under his Liberal carbon tax. Well, the reality of the Liberal carbon tax is setting in, and the Prime Minister would be hard pressed to find someone in my riding who is better off.

Simply put, this assertion fails to acknowledge the basic realities of living in rural Saskatchewan, and my constituents deserve better from the government. The cost of everything is going up and they are feeling the squeeze, none more so than our farmers and our agricultural producers. From grain drying to hauling crops, rail transportation and other major farm expenses, their bottom lines and their ability to compete are taking a direct hit.

It is time that the Prime Minister abandons his carbon tax scheme that unfairly punishes rural Canadians and agricultural producers, and deliver a real plan for the environment.

\* \* \*

**GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES**

**Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, professional protesters and well-funded NGOs have seized the opportunity to divide indigenous communities and threaten their chance for financial prosperity. The very fundamentals of our country, our unity, our security and our economic well-being are under attack. Where is the Prime Minister while this is happening? He has been traipsing around the world trying to get us a seat at the UN Security Council.

As if the Prime Minister's absence did not already send the message loud and clear that he really does not care, he took it one step further. While in the Republic of Senegal, he was discussing the attractive growth potential of their oil and gas sector. That is right. Our Prime Minister was in a country in west Africa advocating for them and his vanity project, while ignoring what is going on in his own country. This is not leadership.

We on this side of the House call upon the Prime Minister to take seriously the responsibilities that have been entrusted to him as the prime minister of this country. We ask that he make sure that the rule of law is upheld and that we as a country would enjoy a united, strong, free and prosperous future.

\* \* \*

**RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

**Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing across this country is not just about one resource

project. This is about generations of underfunding, broken promises and broken treaties. The federal government has backed indigenous peoples into a corner. Food, water, safe housing and infrastructure are fundamental human rights that the federal government has promised us and continues to deny us.

The anger around Wet'suwet'en territories is about the failed policies that have let indigenous peoples down. The federal government has ignored or threatened our well-being and our very existence as indigenous peoples. How can we talk about reconciliation when the federal government has stolen our lands, slaughtered our sled dogs, refused us our rights and continues to give us impossible choices?

The situation is complex, but here is a simple start: The RCMP needs to stand down and the Prime Minister needs to get involved and meet with hereditary chiefs.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**MATHIEU GIROUARD**

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the riding of Drummond is in mourning. Last Friday, a traffic accident claimed the life of a man who was dearly loved by his family, friends and entire community.

Lieutenant Mathieu Girouard, 44, was a fireman in Drummondville for 18 years. Mathieu was also a super dad of five children, a real family man, and very involved in his community. As a model fireman, he exemplified the best of his profession's values. Last Friday evening, on Valentine's Day, Mathieu was driving with his wife Karine in Saint-Célestin when a drunk driver struck them, killing Mathieu and seriously injuring Karine, who is fighting for her life.

Here, in the House, I want to offer my most sincere condolences to Mathieu's family and friends. Mathieu was a firefighter lieutenant, badge number 630. I wish his family much strength and serenity in the days and weeks to come. My thoughts are with Karine, his wife, who is currently recovering in hospital. The tight-knit community of Drummondville will support her throughout this ordeal. The riding of Drummond has lost a hero.

\* \* \*

● (1415)

[*English*]

**CHRISTIE BLATCHFORD**

**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, over the generations, Canadians have been served by many great journalists, eloquent chroniclers reporting from city halls, cop shops and courtrooms, locker rooms, rinks, sports fields, battlefields, sites of disaster and human tragedy.

Christie Blatchford reported and opined from all those places over almost a half-century, but she was like none before. Her news-gathering skills ranged from gritty to compassionate. She inspired colleagues and rivals. She challenged conformity and authority, and very often her editors. As a former editor remembered last week, she made every newsroom better.

Christie won more awards for her work than time allows to list. When she was inducted into the Canadian News Hall of Fame, she told a colleague, "I care about stories that tell us why the system matters, why things are worth protecting, why the rule of law is important."

It is an honour today to remember a journo's journo, a truly great Canadian.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

### HOOKED ON SCHOOL DAYS

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we all know that education is a vital part of children's lives. Historically speaking, the school drop-out rate in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve is one of the highest in Montreal. Approximately 33% of elementary school students have a disability or adjustment or learning difficulties, and two-thirds of elementary and secondary school students are immigrants.

I would like to commend the people of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve who have been taking action for over 10 years to keep kids in school. I thank the members of Chantier promotion et valorisation de la persévérance scolaire for their work.

In order to succeed in school, children, adolescents and young adults rely every day on the help of teams and organizations who help meet their needs. Group mentoring and simple acts, such as providing encouragement and celebrating accomplishments, promote success because staying in school is not a matter of performance.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

### INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is almost 4,400 kilometres from the Wet'suwet'en territory to the protesters in Ontario, and the Prime Minister this morning spoke of dialogue with the people who are breaking the law. Does the Prime Minister think these protesters have more to say about what is in the best interest of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation, including those elected councillors who want jobs for their kids and their grandkids and who support the Coastal GasLink project?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, earlier this afternoon I was pleased to sit down with three parliamentary leaders to talk and discuss concretely the approach we are taking in constructive dialogue to resolving this situation not just peacefully, but for the long term.

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The leader of the official opposition, the leader of the Conservatives, excluded himself from this conversation with his unacceptable approach to not have constructive dialogue but to follow an approach that would hurt the very people he supposes he wants to help.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, dialogue is not going to pay the bills for people who are facing layoffs because of people breaking the law who have no connection to the Wet'suwet'en First Nation. He is elevating people who have no connection, people who constantly protest and try to blockade energy projects, to the same level of those indigenous Canadians who have been working hard for reconciliation in this country, and that is shameful.

I have a simple question. On what day will these illegal blockades be taken down?

• (1420)

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada continues to demonstrate that it does not understand that the path forward is concrete actions in reconciliation, in dialogue—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** The heckling is getting a little out of hand. Name-calling that was on this morning is not something that is parliamentary and I do not think we want to hear it during question period. I would point that out to anyone who is thinking of name-calling again.

The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, we need a long-term constructive solution. The short-term forceful approaches proposed by the Conservatives would end up harming the very farmers, small business owners and workers across this country with their heavy-handed approach that would plunge the country into long-term chaos.

We will exhaust every action possible to resolve this situation peacefully and rapidly.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what the Prime Minister seems to be talking about today is action if necessary but not necessarily action. Does he not understand that the Wet'suwet'en First Nation supports this project? The elected band councillors support this project. The majority of the hereditary chiefs even support this project.

When he talks about dialogue, moving forward and a path, does he not realize that he has an obligation to stand up and defend the interests of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation and their support for this project?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as Prime Minister, I have an obligation to stand up for Canadians, and that is exactly what I am doing.

*Oral Questions*

We are engaged in actions that will lead to a long-term resolution of these issues in partnership and respect. That is how we ensure that for farmers, for workers, for small business owners, over the coming months and years, they can rely on our transportation system, because we will not have engaged in the kind of short-term, forceful actions that the Conservatives are proposing.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, who is he talking about sitting down with in partnership? These people in Ontario are ignoring the demands of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation. They are using them as an excuse to protest and block projects that they have always been opposed to.

Once again, why is the Prime Minister elevating people, activists, who have no connection to the first nations that we are talking about, and elevating them on the same level as hard-working and well-meaning indigenous leaders who are actually interested in reconciliation in this country?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have seen this approach from the Conservatives through 10 years of Stephen Harper that did not get projects built, because they believed in picking and choosing who spoke for whom. They believed in picking and choosing how to engage and characterized anyone who disagreed with them as their opposition or as enemies of the national interests.

That is not the approach we have. We will stay grounded in actions of respect and move forward constructively to help Canadians right across the country for the coming years.

**Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is talking about picking and choosing who speaks for first nations communities. Let us talk about who speaks for the Wet'suwet'en First Nation: the elected band councilors, the majority of the hereditary chiefs and the people living in these communities. They realize that the only way to have the same quality of life as every other Canadian is to have these kinds of partnerships with natural resource corporations and the jobs that they create.

Once again, who does the Prime Minister think he is going to sit across the table from? Is it the people who are breaking the law and who have no representation for the people who are affected by this project?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, five years ago, Canadians made a clear choice to support parties that were committed to reconciliation. Unfortunately—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Can we proceed?

The right hon. Prime Minister.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau:** Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party of Canada continues to demonstrate that it wilfully and deliberately tries to misunderstand the reality of reconciliation in this country. That is why they were excluded from a constructive conversation on how to move forward as a country on the path of reconciliation, to support all Canadians from coast to coast to coast in their economic livelihoods and in their sense of what this country is.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about the fact that, right now, Quebec and Canada are being seen by the world as pitting oil and indigenous people against each other, when the fundamental issue, for the good of everyone, involves finding a solution to end the blockades, which are an expression of something very real.

The Prime Minister invited a certain number of people to a meeting, and I do not think the tone is aggressive. However, I would ask the Prime Minister if he could give us an indication of the key times, the deadlines, the benchmarks, and the ways of measuring progress that will help people, such as members of the first nations, to see that we are moving toward putting an end to the blockades.

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his question and his co-operation.

We recognize that if we want to find solutions and develop the necessary process, the first step and next steps must involve constructive dialogue and concrete action with the Wet'suwet'en people.

We are ready to meet with the Wet'suwet'en people any time to talk about how we can address these issues, and that will be the key to ending these protests across the country.

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the first nations are nations, much like Quebecers make up a nation and Canadians make up a nation. That is the kind of relationship that needs to be built and established. With that in mind, all party leaders who wish to participate respectfully should be invited.

Will the Prime Minister agree to hold more meetings like the one held this morning on a regular basis, because this Parliament as a whole must address the first nations as a whole?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. Yes, I am very open to ensuring that all parties in the House who want to work constructively will be regularly informed of our approach and our strategies.

The meetings may not always be with the Prime Minister, but the ministers will engage with all interested members and parties to ensure that we can work together and set party differences aside to advance reconciliation and help all Canadians succeed.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we have asked this question before and not received a response, but after today's speech, it seems that the Prime Minister recognizes there is a federal role to be played in rectifying and solving this crisis.

[Translation]

When will the Liberal government meet with the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Coastal GasLink pipeline project, this is certainly an issue of concern to British Columbia. Of course, the issue of indigenous rights and the rights of the Wet'suwet'en people heavily involves the federal government as well. That is why what we need to do is meet with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs as soon as they want to and as soon as they can. We would have liked to meet with them yesterday, if that had been possible.

We are here to engage in direct and constructive consultation with the Wet'suwet'en.

**Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, what we need right now is real action.

[English]

We learned recently that the ministry of indigenous services does not keep accurate details. It does not know how many indigenous kids are being taken from their families or how many are in care. These are kids we are talking about, and the federal government is not keeping accurate records about where these kids are.

If the government is not keeping accurate records, it amounts to a systemic negligence of these kids. Will the Liberal government commit to protecting indigenous kids and keeping accurate records of where these kids are being cared for?

**Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as we well know, the question of child and family services is something that deeply involves the provinces across the country. We have moved forward on legislation that restores support to indigenous communities for their kids. That is something we have made historical movements on.

We will continue to work with indigenous communities. We will continue to hold certain provinces that are resistant to this to account. We will ensure that no children in Canada get raised far from their language, far from their community or far from their identity. Those are the building blocks for success that everyone deserves to have.

\* \* \*

● (1430)

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the transport minister issued a statement saying that “tampering with rail lines, railcars or signalling systems is illegal and extremely dangerous.” If rail lines are being tampered with, the consequences could be deadly. Canadians deserve to know what is happening and deserve to be protected.

If the minister is indeed aware of rail lines being tampered with, then why is he and his government doing absolutely nothing to stop this illegal activity and these illegal blockades?

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, indeed I am concerned by the fact that some people are going near rail lines, on rail lines or in rail yards and doing things that are

#### Oral Questions

potentially dangerous. In addition, we have had some indication of tampering on the rail lines, which is not only dangerous but criminal activity and can affect not only those people but those who might be affected by it.

We are trying to pursue this to find out where it comes from, and I would urge Canadians to be safe near railroads.

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is a serious situation. As the minister acknowledged, illegal activity is going on, so either the rule of law applies in Canada or it does not and we have anarchy.

I will ask the minister again. If he is aware illegal activity is going on, and tampering with rail lines is an illegal activity, why are the Liberals just giving Canadians words and word salad, as the Prime Minister is so good at delivering, instead of delivering real action to protect Canadians from these illegal blockades?

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me explain it to my colleague. When an activity of tampering occurs and we detect it, we try to follow up. Because it is a criminal activity, we need to have clues and evidence to find out who the perpetrator is. It is called detective work and that is what we are doing.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it took 13 days for the Prime Minister to finally seem to grasp the extent of the crisis that is rocking this country. Protesters are illegally blockading rail lines across the country, which is having disastrous safety and economic consequences.

We know that the Minister of Public Safety has the authority to ask the RCMP to take action. When is he going to do it?

[English]

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the last thing this very difficult situation requires is politicians trying to score political points by pretending that governments can instruct the police on how to do their job.

**The Speaker:** I am having a hard time hearing the minister's answer. I am sure the person who asked the question is having an equally difficult time.

I will ask the hon. minister to continue.

**Hon. Bill Blair:** Mr. Speaker, the concept of police independence requires that police officers be free from political direction or influence in carrying out law enforcement functions and making operational decisions. As the Supreme Court of Canada has said, police independence underpins the rule of law and is necessary for the maintenance of public order and the preservation of the peace.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I can assure the minister that what Canadians are asking is for politicians to take action, not say words, like he is doing right now.

[*Translation*]

What we have here is a government of neglect. Last week the Prime Minister refused to say a word for two days, while his ministers would only say they could not do anything and that it was up to the provinces to enforce the law.

What we want today is for the government to enforce the law. However, it does not want to do so, and that is disappointing for Canadians. Canadians want a government that takes action in a positive way for the future of Canada.

Why does the government refuse to enforce the law?

• (1435)

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct my colleague. The federal government knows it has a role to play and that this role is extremely important.

To answer the question, when there is an injunction, we must respect the authority of the provincial police, which has the discretion to decide how to handle the matter.

That said, the federal government has an important role to play, and that is why we will work with our provincial counterparts to solve this problem.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister was off wining and dining African dictators and kowtowing to Iranian despots, anti-energy activists were busy derailing the Canadian economy here at home.

It has been nearly two weeks and the Prime Minister has done nothing to assure Canadians that the rule of law will be upheld. His own anti-energy rhetoric has given courage to those who are willing to defy the courts with their illegal blockades.

Does the Prime Minister agree that these blockades are illegal? If so, when is he finally going to do something about it?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as I have already indicated, it is not the role of government to give instructions to the commander of the RCMP.

Let me share with the House the RCMP's procedure for dealing with this. The RCMP operating manual for dealing with aboriginal demonstrations says very clearly that their responsibility is to preserve the peace, to protect life and property and to uphold the law, and every enforcement action shall be measured, incremental and as non-confrontational as possible, and they shall always try to negotiate the conflict before taking enforcement action.

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's empty words have done nothing to de-escalate the situation. In fact, these protesters have been emboldened by his lack of meaningful action.

This morning a group of extremists in British Columbia attempted to carry out a "citizen's arrest" on Premier John Horgan in his

home. This is happening in Canada, under the Prime Minister's watch.

Will the Prime Minister realize that appeasement is no longer an option and finally make it clear that the rule of law will be upheld and enforced in this country?

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am always shocked when someone invokes the rule of law and then chooses to ignore it.

The Supreme Court of Canada has been very explicit about this: Police independence underpins the rule of law. It is necessary for the maintenance of public order and the preservation of the police.

The police in this case are following their training and their procedures. They are working diligently to resolve this matter peacefully, and they have our confidence.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the rail blockades are holding the public hostage. In my riding, more than 3,000 people no longer have access to public transit.

Last week, I tried to contact the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations; no answer. I contacted the Minister of Indigenous Services; no answer. Then I found out that the questions need to be directed to the Minister of Transport, but I saw him on television saying that this is a provincial matter.

I know that the Prime Minister is in Africa and I wonder where the Deputy Prime Minister might be.

My question is simple: Who is going to address the concerns of my constituents?

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are extremely concerned about the impact of these blockades on those who rely on public transit, not only Canadians, but also those who rely on the freight system. We are seized with the issue. We are well aware of the problem and want to resolve it as quickly as possible. As we have been saying from the outset, we will resolve this matter through dialogue.

\* \* \*

**INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first nations expect to have nation-to-nation relationships with the government, but there must be leadership to manage this type of relationship. Stakeholders must be present. When the crisis broke, the Prime Minister was in Africa. You would think that he took the minister with him, because we did not hear from her for the entire week. The minister made light of the first nations' anger.

What is she now doing to re-establish dialogue?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government believes that dialogue is the best and most appropriate way to address these issues.

We are committed to establishing, together with indigenous peoples, a relationship based on the affirmation of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

We recognize that these are difficult times. That is why, together with the Government of British Columbia, we wrote a joint letter to the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs asking to meet with them as soon as possible.

\* \* \*

• (1440)

[English]

#### UKRAINE INTERNATIONAL FLIGHT 752

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians were horrified to see the Prime Minister grinning, hugging and bowing during his interaction with the Iranian foreign minister, providing the regime a major propaganda victory and revictimizing families whose loved ones it killed.

Could the Prime Minister update the House as to whether this servile display led to any concrete progress on compensation for flight 752 victims' families or on a proper independent investigation?

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was very clear and very firm with the Iranian foreign minister. He made a promise to families in Canada that we will do everything we can to make sure that they get full disclosure, accountability, transparency and justice.

Equally, in Munich the Minister of Foreign Affairs and our allies sent a strong message that Iran—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I want to interrupt the hon. parliamentary secretary. There is quite a bit of shouting while he is trying to answer. There are one or two voices. I do not want to have to point the members out, but they know who they are. Their voices carry very well, and I am sure they would not want to be pointed out.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Robert Oliphant:** Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has taken every opportunity and was extremely clear and always firm with Iranian officials, the Iranian prime minister and the foreign minister. He made a promise to families in Canada that we will do everything in our power to make sure they get closure, accountability, transparency and justice.

**Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, when former prime minister Stephen Harper met with Vladimir Putin, he said, “get out of Ukraine.” Now that is real leadership. The Iranian community and the families of the victims of flight 752 deserve that kind of leadership. Instead they had the insulting spectacle of the Prime Minister glad-handing, backslapping and of course bowing to the Iranian foreign minister and chief propagandist.

#### Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister apologize to the families and the Iranian community for this blatant disrespect? Will he say sorry for once again embarrassing Canada on the world stage?

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, now more than ever as families grieve, as families try to make sense of this situation, it is important for us to be united in the House and in Canada and for Canadians to stand in the wake of this terrible tragedy.

I would ask my colleagues on all sides of the House to avoid trying to score political points on this very important and deeply personal issue to many Canadians. We have brought together Canadians and international partners to hold Iran to account. We will do that and we expect members to help us with it.

\* \* \*

#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, at the Munich Security Conference last week, our closest ally, the United States, once again emphasized that reduced American intelligence co-operation would be the consequence for countries considering letting Huawei build next-generation telecommunications networks. Canada depends on U.S. intelligence sharing. Is the Prime Minister prepared to compromise Canada's national security and NORAD intelligence sharing by approving Huawei?

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on every issue, we use an evidence-based approach. We ensure that we take into account our allies' positions, which are not unanimous. We will continue the discussions around the Huawei decision and do it thoroughly, carefully and expeditiously.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the theme of this year's Munich Security Conference was “Westlessness”, highlighting a more divided and uncompetitive NATO alliance.

In response, France advocates for a Europe-first approach to security, arguing that Europeans need to preserve their own sovereignty in a world dominated by an increasingly nationalist United States and an ambitious Russia.

On this side of the Atlantic, Canada needs allies, but with Europe turning inward, Canada has never been more alone. How is the Prime Minister protecting Canada's sovereignty when no one has our back?

*Oral Questions*

● (1445)

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our foreign policy is based on renewing a rules-based international order that Canadians have built together, protecting universal human rights, supporting democracies.

We are a leader in the world on critical issues, whether it is in Venezuela, or in the Middle East or in China, all around the world. We will continue to stand with our allies, with NATO partners, as we continue to ensure Canada's leadership is strong and heard in our world with allies and like-minded who work with us.

\* \* \*

**INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the government uses the concept of the rule of law when it comes to helping their corporate friends build development projects without the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous people. We can all agree that upholding the Constitution, which includes section 35, aboriginal title and treaty rights, requires the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous people prior to developing. It is the rule of law.

Why does the Prime Minister have a double standard when applying the rule of law in this country?

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to receive in my mandate letter something that pertains precisely to the hon. member's question, and that is the implementation of UNDRIP into Canadian law. We plan to implement this declaration by the end of 2020 and will be engaging with Canadians and working in partnership with indigenous people to implement the framework that will, in part, be the answer to her question.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation were defending their rights and lands and solidarity protests were being held across the country, the Prime Minister was taking selfies around the world. The crisis is here.

Today, the leaders of the Assembly of First Nations proposed realistic and reasonable conditions for finding a solution. They have a plan to put an end to the crisis.

Obviously, the Prime Minister does not have a plan. Will he agree to the Assembly of First Nations' plan? Will he take this outstretched hand, meet with the hereditary chiefs and promote true reconciliation?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government believes that dialogue is the best way to deal with this issue.

Discussions with the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation are under way. What is more, I spoke with Chief Woos on Sunday.

I would like to reiterate our government's commitment to a joint meeting with the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en nation and the Province of British Columbia. This commitment was confirmed in joint letters between our government and the Government of

British Columbia. We are open and available as soon as the opportunity presents itself.

\* \* \*

[English]

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last week, in Niagara Centre, I was proud to share more great news about the Canadian economy with my constituents, 35,000 new jobs. In just the first 31 days of 2020, that is an incredible accomplishment by our Canadian folk, a credit to all business and fantastic news for Canada's workers.

Could the Minister of Labour tell us some of what she will be doing to continue making Canada a place to build a business and support Canada's workers?

**Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Labour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, February 7 was indeed another great day. Our government is and remains committed to Canada's workers.

We have repealed unfair labour-targeting legislation, introduced protections to address workplace violence and harassment and introduced more flexible work arrangements. Our plan for the future is a \$15 federal minimum wage, implementing the Pay Equity Act and modernizing labour protections.

We remain committed to Canada's workers.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CONSULAR AFFAIRS**

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, 43 Canadians in Japan have contracted COVID-19, including three Quebeckers: Mr. and Mrs. Ménard and Mr. Bergeron.

In all three cases, and for other Canadians too, family members are extremely worried and are getting conflicting information. These people want to return to Canada as soon as possible. This is a serious situation, and people need clear, specific answers, but the problem is that the government is moving at a snail's pace.

Will the government finally tell us the plan for the 43 Canadians who have tested positive for the virus in Japan?

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are still working to bring the Canadians home. We understand the concerns of the families and individuals involved. Our embassy in Japan and our consular officials are in constant contact with these Canadians, including Mr. and Mrs. Ménard. I would like to thank our officials again for their important work. We will continue to provide consular services to all the Canadians involved.

• (1450)

**Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, other countries are bringing their citizens home, but our citizens are still there. A woman on another cruise ship, the *MS Westerdam*, has now tested positive for COVID-19. The ship docked today with 1,455 passengers on board. This could be an extremely problematic scenario, because most of the passengers flew home not knowing they might constitute a risk.

Can the government tell us where the 271 Canadians are and their current health status?

[English]

**Mr. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Let me be very clear, Mr. Speaker. Ensuring the safety and security of Canadians abroad and at home is our top priority.

We have been engaged in this issue since the very beginning. The minister has spoken with his Japanese counterpart, international colleagues and other allies regarding the safety and security of Canadians. He has also spoken directly with the families and the CEO of the cruise ship company. Our chartered flight is now en route to Japan.

Again, I want to thank our tremendous consular services team, which is working night and day, literally all weekend, to ensure Canadians have the right information.

\* \* \*

#### HEALTH

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, our community was surprised to learn late Saturday night through social media that a coronavirus quarantine site would be established at the Nav Centre in Cornwall. The mayor and local officials were not advised. Local residents and employees who work there were left in the dark for nearly two days, with valid questions about the suitability of this building, which has hundreds of general public going through it daily. The rollout of this site was a communications failure that was completely avoidable.

Could the minister explain why the people of Cornwall and local elected officials, including myself, were left in the dark on such a critical issue?

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the accommodations at CFB Trenton are currently at capacity because of the previous repatriation efforts. The Nav Centre was chosen because there are existing supports to coordinate processing and provide support services for all repatriated Canadians coming from Japan. It also has a facility available to house individuals in separate accommodations. These Canadians have been through a stressful experience over the past couple of weeks.

The member was offered a meeting directly with the minister. My understanding, to the best of my knowledge, is that the member turned that meeting down.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to clarify for the member, the minister offered

#### Oral Questions

a meeting after the news was made late Saturday night through social media, a little too late. That is for clarification.

To clarify, the Nav Centre is not a military base like CFB Trenton. It is one large building, open to the public 24/7. While flood victims and asylum seekers have been hosted at this site before, they have never hosted a quarantine for a global health emergency.

It is apples to oranges to compare to past practices when it comes to protocols, security and safety for the employees and those who visit the site. Basic information should have been provided immediately, not days later or—

**The Speaker:** The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is important to know that before boarding the plane, passengers will be screened for symptoms. I remind the members on the other side—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** I just want to clarify that when I mentioned earlier one voice coming across, I did not mean that everyone should coordinate and have many voices at a lower level. That is not what I had in mind.

I will let the hon. parliamentary secretary continue.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Mr. Speaker, I remind members on the other side that those who get on this plane are healthy Canadians. They have been screened multiple times. Those who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 will not be permitted to board and will be transferred to the Japanese health system to receive appropriate care. Those who remain in Japan will continue to receive full consular services from the Government of Canada.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the consequences of the railroad blockades are very real for Quebeckers. We are fast approaching a propane shortage for our farmers, our hospitals and our CHSLDs. The cost of groceries will be going up for all families. Quebeckers are being laid off. We are in danger of running out of chlorine for our drinking water. Soon, the port of Montreal will even have to turn ships away.

What we are going through is called a crisis.

Since the Minister of Transport does not seem to be aware of the gravity of the situation, is the Prime Minister going to show leadership and deal with the problem?

• (1455)

**Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

*Oral Questions*

I agree with him that the situation is serious. We are well aware of the impacts this is currently having in Quebec and throughout Canada, namely the shortages of important commodities, the impacts on other goods and the movement of people. We are working on a solution and we believe that we must find it through dialogue, which is what we are in the process of doing.

\* \* \*

**EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

**Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the government is being discriminatory in its discrimination. It condemns the wrong discrimination while engaging in the right discrimination. For example, Émilie Sansfaçon got 15 weeks of employment insurance because she had to quit her job due to serious health problems. Meanwhile, someone who loses their job can get up to 50 weeks of employment insurance. There is a form of discrimination here that we find absolutely unacceptable.

Will the Prime Minister address this issue and end employment insurance discrimination?

**Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We all agree with Émilie Sansfaçon. Her courage is truly remarkable.

We have made a number of significant changes to the EI system over the past four years and we are continuing to improve it. In our platform, we promised to increase sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks, and that is what we will do.

\* \* \*

[English]

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are moving the goalposts and dragging out their political decision on Teck Frontier and 10,000 Canadian jobs. The evidence and experts are clear. It is in Canada's public interest, it will reduce global emissions and every single local indigenous community supports it. One already promises legal action if the Liberals deny this opportunity.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is promoting oil and gas in Senegal while funding pipelines in Asia and giving grants to pipeline protesters in Canada. The reality is that he emboldens activists shutting down Canada today. Why?

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012, which is the law under which this project is being assessed, the legislated timeline for cabinet to make a decision on this particular project is the end of February. As it can with any project, it can approve the project with conditions, it can reject the project or it can extend the legislated timeline.

We are certainly actively considering this project and all the relevant information before we make an appropriate decision.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the truth is that Liberals are lobbying Liberals and pushing petitions to shut

down the oil sands and to kill Canadian jobs. Liberal MPs selectively quote the joint panel report. What they do not say is that Teck Frontier is “not expected to threaten the sustainability” of local ecosystems or wildlife populations and that rejecting Teck could result “in exporting emissions to other jurisdictions with higher emissions intensity.”

The reality is that Teck surpassed every measure. Last week, the finance minister even said that there was no barrier to a timely decision.

Will the Liberals stop using Teck Frontier as a cynical bargaining chip and approve it on its merit?

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the purpose of an environmental assessment is to go through the process and have the effects identified. The joint review panel found that there were significant negative adverse environmental impacts associated with the project. It now comes to cabinet to have a conversation about whether or not those effects can be justified under the circumstances.

There is a legislated timeline to make a decision by the end of February, and we will make a decision.

\* \* \*

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

**Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Public Safety knows that Ralph Goodale issued a number of directives to the RCMP in the past. He simply has his facts wrong. No one should be surprised by that when we see a government that has no plan to restore the rule of law, no plan to get our transportation network moving again and no plan to even get fuel to parts of our country.

What is the Prime Minister doing to address the propane shortages in Quebec and in Nova Scotia that are causing the layoff of hundreds of employees?

● (1500)

**Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, for the member's edification and for the benefit of members of the House, the Minister of Public Safety does have the authority to issue directions to the RCMP pursuant to the RCMP Act. However, this is circumscribed by two very important principles. First, the directions cannot in effect require the RCMP to disregard any of its lawful duties. Second, the directions cannot infringe on the independence of the RCMP regarding its law enforcement functions.

### REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last September our government unveiled a new long-term and strategic vision for Canada's Arctic and north with the release of the Arctic and northern policy framework.

Could the Minister of Northern Affairs comment on the co-development process of the framework and update the House on the next steps?

**Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Northwest Territories for his hard work in the north.

The Arctic and northern policy framework is historic because it was co-developed with our provincial, territorial and indigenous partners.

Northerners have told us that they want Arctic people at the centre of the framework and we have listened.

The framework takes an inclusive approach to the northern region and reflects the unique interests, priorities and circumstances of its people. We are now moving from co-development to co-implementation.

Together with our partners we will work to implement a shared vision for a strong, prosperous and sustainable Arctic.

\* \* \*

### IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Global News is reporting that a refugee judge told a woman that her choice to keep a baby meant that she was never raped. The judge asked the victim during her interview, "If you're raped, why would you keep a child of rape?" The line of questioning taken by the government official is appalling and further traumatizes the victim.

Could the Liberals confirm if this individual is still employed as a refugee judge?

**Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to be absolutely clear. The comments as reported are completely unacceptable.

The IRB has provided my office with assurances that it is overhauling its complaints review process and it is making sure that sensitivity training is mandatory for all of its members. These are two critical steps that will ensure that everyone gets a fair hearing absolutely free from all forms of discrimination, including gender bias.

**Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, to be honest, I really hope that judge was fired.

The Liberals must take immediate steps to stop IRB adjudicators from revictimizing vulnerable claimants. There have been several reports of mishandling sexual and gender-based cases, including the demand for nude photos of a sex trafficking victim. Another victim was asked why her abuser did not just kill her. This pattern of sexist remarks suggests IRB judges have no understanding of assault whatsoever.

### Oral Questions

What is the government going to do to ensure that victims of sexual abuse and exploitation are protected, and when are you going to do this?

**The Speaker:** I want to remind hon. members that when they place a question, to place it through the Speaker and not to the speaker.

**Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I understood the intent of my hon. colleague's question. As I said, these comments are completely unacceptable.

The IRB has provided assurances to my office that it is overhauling the complaints process, that it is ensuring that mandatory training is being provided to all members so that we maintain the highest professional standards, and that every person who appears before the IRB gets a fair hearing that is free from all forms of bias, including gender discrimination.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the House spoke and the Auditor General listened. Light will be shone on the \$186-billion infrastructure plan. This minority government boasts about being open and transparent at every opportunity it can find.

Can the Prime Minister assure all parliamentarians in the House that the Auditor General will have the resources to investigate the Liberal infrastructure fiasco?

**Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for this excellent question. There are two things. First, the Auditor General will have the necessary resources to carry out this important work. Second, we expect that he will find again and again what the Conservative members may have forgotten: Over the past four years, four times as many infrastructure projects have been developed in Canada, and six times as many in Quebec, as in the previous four years.

\* \* \*

● (1505)

[English]

### FINANCE

**Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Kitchener Centre, the cost of living continues to increase for middle-class families. Families are asking that our government take more steps to make life affordable.

*Business of Supply*

Can the Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance please update the House on our government's plan to make life more affordable for middle-class Canadians?

**Hon. Mona Fortier (Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Kitchener Centre for his advocacy and hard work on behalf of his constituents.

In 2015, Canadians elected our government to strengthen the middle class. As our first order of business, we lowered taxes for middle-class families.

In 2019, we once again lowered taxes for 20 million Canadians by increasing the basic personal amount. Once fully rolled out, this measure will put \$600 back in the pockets of the average middle-class family each year. These tax cuts are in addition to investments our government has been introducing, such as the Canada child benefit.

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**INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in the summer of 2019, the minister came to Nunavut and apologized for the federal government's failure to provide "proper housing, adequate medical care, education, economic viability and jobs."

Apologies without action mean nothing. How do Liberals think they can move forward, along with indigenous peoples, on situations like we are seeing in the Wet'suwet'en territories if they refuse to back up their words with concrete action?

**Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to working in partnership with territorial, provincial and indigenous partners to co-develop priorities for the north. Together, we revised the Nutrition North list of subsidized food and lowered the cost of the northern food basket. We have signed an agreement in principle on the devolution of Crown lands and water rights in Nunavut, and we launched the Arctic and northern policy framework in September 2019.

We will continue to work on solutions for the north, by the north.

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, some two years ago the Prime Minister stood in the House and committed to the recognition and implementation of indigenous title and rights in legislation. That long-overdue work has not happened, and we continue to see the challenges across the country due to that inaction.

As was committed, and speaking of concrete action, will the government introduce legislation that upholds the minimum standards of UNDRIP?

Equally important, will it actually implement those standards domestically, so that indigenous peoples are supported in their self-determination, can rebuild and can exercise their authority in clear and predictable ways for their own people and for all Canadians?

**Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to receive, in my mandate letter from the Prime Minister, the immediate priority of implementing UNDRIP in Canadian legislation.

We will be engaging with Canadians and working in partnership with indigenous peoples to implement the declaration as a framework for reconciliation.

\* \* \*

**PRESENCE IN GALLERY**

**The Speaker:** I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of Ms. Elin Jones, Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I want to elaborate a little bit further and ask the parliamentary secretary if he would withdraw his misleading statement to the House. For a government that is committed to doing politics differently and not taking cheap political shots, that was absolutely what happened today.

Will he withdraw his misleading statement about my being offered a briefing? I was not offered a briefing until a meeting that I had in the House of Commons, or rather, in the parliamentary precinct yesterday, 48 hours after the issue became news.

I would ask that he would—

**The Speaker:** I am afraid that falls into the area of debate.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

• (1510)

[Translation]

**BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SICKNESS BENEFITS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I wish to share my time with the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

The Bloc Québécois is once again calling on the government to take action on employment insurance. This is not the first time that we have made this request. We have always been working for a thorough reform of the program. Whether it is for a separate fund, for improved access to regular benefits—

**The Speaker:** Order. I will have to interrupt you for a second.

I would like to remind everyone that there is a debate taking place and if anyone has something to say they should whisper or go to the lobby.

*Business of Supply*

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the Bloc Québécois is again calling on the government to take action on employment insurance. This is not the first time we have made this call.

We have always been committed to a thorough reform of the program, whether by establishing an independent fund, improving access to current benefits, ending the classification of the unemployed based on their claims, or, of course, improving benefits, all benefits.

For almost 30 years now, we have been demanding that the EI program be designed for our world—not for the needs of the government, but for the needs of our people, those who have given us the privilege of representing them in the House.

Right now, we have a program that is a direct attack on those who are already in precarious situations, that hurts seasonal workers in our regions and that leaves out those who are ill, seriously ill. The reason is very simple, and that is a lack of political will. The EI program cannot adequately and properly support those truly in need.

This is precisely why the Bloc Québécois moved the motion we are debating today, which calls on the government to increase the special employment insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

The main motivation for this demand, if one is necessary, is that the period of special employment insurance sickness benefits was based on the use of barely one-quarter of recipients. When the special benefit program was created, the government knew that the number of weeks was insufficient for over three-quarters of recipients. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the Department of Employment and Social Development chose the number of weeks based on survey data that indicated that just 23% of recipients returned to work after the 15 weeks of benefits.

In other words, the government at the time and successive governments since then have known that the EI benefits provided do not adequately meet demand. It is completely unfair that every government elected since has knowingly accepted this situation.

The EI sickness benefit is inequitable because of the number of hours required to qualify. No matter where they live, be it Vancouver or Blanc-Sablon, claimants need to accumulate 600 insured hours of work to be eligible for benefits. It is also more difficult to qualify for sickness benefits than for regular benefits if the regional unemployment rate is greater than 8.1%, which, according to various economic indicators, is the case for one in four economic regions, despite strong overall job numbers. I shudder to think what things would be like if the economy were doing poorly.

In my riding, people in Minganie and the Lower North Shore have to work 180 more hours to qualify for sickness benefits than for regular benefits. The same goes for people in the Gaspé and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

It seems that no government has wanted to admit that the purpose of employment insurance is not to have a petty cash fund alongside the budget, so that it can dip into it to cover up its deficits or make money off the sick. The purpose of employment insurance

is to make life easier for people who are forced out of the labour market for reasons beyond their control. It is insurance, a social safety net to which workers contribute in return for the guarantee and assurance that they will be compensated following an unfortunate event, such as the loss of a job or a serious illness.

The worst part of it all is that no one chooses to get sick. There is no such thing as someone getting up in the morning and saying to themselves, “I think I am ready for a little serious illness. I am ready for a tragedy. I am ready for some misery.” Getting sick is a tragedy. It turns people's lives upside down. It is a daily struggle. It is stressful and demanding for people. We should be there to support them.

It is not right for a person to worry and fret about their financial health before their personal health. Situations like that of Marie-Hélène Dubé should not exist. Because she did not work 600 hours, she had to mortgage her house several times while she was fighting cancer.

In such a wealthy society, no one should ever be unable to pay their rent and end up on the street when they are in remission. It is not right for people to be left with nothing when they are going through one of the most difficult ordeals of their lives. It is not right, because we have the power to change things and to enable our people to have some measure of dignity during those trying times.

● (1515)

Also, the government might want to remember the last time it was in opposition when it responds to our motion. In 2012, the Liberal Party overwhelmingly supported a bill that would have extended EI benefits from 15 to 50 weeks and eliminated the wait times.

Today, we are reaching out to the Liberals. We are inviting them to follow our lead and to do what should have been done a long time ago, namely make life easier for people who are forced to take time off work because of illness.

During the vote on the motion, I would like each member of this House to remember that every second person living in Canada will get cancer during their lifetime. If we set aside every other serious or chronic disease that could affect our lives and think only of cancer, half of us will have to rely on EI benefits. We could have to cope with the disease and all the added expenses that go with it with only 15 weeks of benefits.

*Business of Supply*

I think that it is time we did what we should have done a long time ago, namely help people who cannot work and give them time to heal. Providing 50 weeks of benefits is the only way of giving the sick time to heal with dignity.

In closing, I would like to point out that I am thinking about all the people in my riding, about all Canadians, and about one person in particular, who has long fought for the unemployed and who is now fighting an illness. I would like this person to have peace of mind, and I know that the only thing that will do that is to abolish all inequities for all EI claimants, in particular those who are sick.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as many members of the Liberal caucus will say, it is important to recognize that as a government, we all believe very passionately in EI benefits for sickness.

We have seen many EI reforms take place over the last number of years. We have listened to the stakeholders, in particular to the Canadian Cancer Society, which has recommended 26 weeks. We have now seen the Liberal government, this government led by the Prime Minister, say that we are moving toward a half-year of benefits. That is significant progress. For many years I sat in opposition, and back then the Conservatives completely ignored the issue. We now have a government that is taking tangible action in moving towards a half-year.

Would the member from the Bloc not agree that at the very least, we could recognize that? Maybe what we could do or should be doing, because we are not saying "absolutely not" into the future, is advancing the idea of expanding, not only in this area but other possible areas, by recommending that this issue go to a standing committee as opposed to just adding additional weeks.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague opposite for his question.

I am a bit disappointed to see that his passion has subsided over the years. I remember that, in 2012, the Liberal Party, which was then the official opposition, wanted to extend benefits to 50 weeks. Now here we are, eight years later, and we can do that, but we are being told that 26 weeks is enough.

When a person is really passionate, there are no limits, especially when the means are there. I therefore expect to see benefits extended to 50 weeks.

● (1520)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saenich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Manicouagan. Today is the first time that I am participating in this important debate about this key motion.

I would like to thank the Bloc Québécois for giving us this opportunity to change the EI system and offer 50 weeks of benefits to those struggling with major health crises, such as cancer.

I would simply like to ask my colleague if she would like to raise any other matters, because she spoke very movingly about the consequences such crises can have on the life of every family member.

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, if I understand correctly, my hon. colleague's question is about what all members of Parliament should do.

In my opinion, we have talked at length about figures and actuarial, but we are beyond figures now, and we have the opportunity to act. People do not get sick for predetermined periods of 26, 15 or 32 weeks, so the program needs to be flexible.

In a spirit of fairness, given that people who lose their jobs receive 50 weeks of benefits, we believe that people who are sick should also receive 50 weeks of benefits. Obviously, I am also appealing to my colleagues' sense of compassion: I am certain that they will see that 50 weeks is the right solution.

[English]

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member who previously made comments spoke at length about gender equity. In Canada, one in eight women will experience breast cancer in her lifetime, and the average time for treatment and recovery is 25 to 36 weeks.

However, this is not just about gender equity; it is about justice for all. For those with colon cancer the average treatment and recovery time is 37 weeks. As the member mentioned, one out of every two Canadians is going to experience cancer at some point in his or her lifetime, with an average treatment and recovery time of 52 weeks.

I ask the member across the way for her thoughts on the Liberal government's comfort with half measures when sick and injured Canadians are waiting.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marilène Gill:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her question, and I would be pleased to answer it.

In my opinion, it is absurd. We can do it. Everyone wants to cooperate. Everyone agrees. We do not want half measures, we want full-fledged measures. The government has no valid reason to refuse.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to use my time to thank my fellow citizens in Laurentides—Labelle who placed their faith in me. This is the first opportunity I have had to do so.

*Business of Supply*

I would especially like to thank all of my volunteers, including Samuel Gervais and Alexandre Dubé. I would also like to thank everyone in my team. People will soon get to know them. I would like to thank Maryse Larente and Annie-Claude Poirier at the Mont-Laurier office, and Isabelle Paré at the Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts office. Lastly, I would like to thank Mathieu Laroche Casavant, who now works on Parliament Hill.

Our loved ones make a difference in our lives. My mother was instrumental in my being here today, addressing members of the House in an effort to improve the collective well-being. I would also like to thank my in-laws. Work-life balance is a challenge that many of us are currently facing.

Of course, I would also like to thank my children, Anne-Sophie and Ève-Marie, and my spouse, Yanick Thibault. They have been there from the start, and they have faith in me. I must honour them, since what happens here during the 43rd Parliament will determine what happens in Canada in the coming years.

I would also like to recognize someone who gave me the courage to do this, and that is former MP Johanne Deschamps. She was a member of the House for four Parliaments, from 2004 to 2011. She made a significant contribution to the well-being of constituents, particularly when it came to employment insurance.

I would like to explain why I decided to go into politics. In my short life, I have worked in various sectors where employment insurance was very important. I am talking mainly about the forestry industry, which experienced a crisis, and the health sector, which underwent a significant reform.

I also worked in the arts, in the community sector and in social development. That brings me to the positive impact that an increase in EI sickness benefits would have, and we sincerely hope that will happen. I am sure that members of the House will agree to quickly increase the number of weeks of benefits from 15 to 50.

As I was saying earlier, I hope that we will be able to improve the employment insurance program during this Parliament. I am sure that we can do so. That is what we have been talking about since this morning. Right now, the system is unfair because it provides only 15 weeks of sickness benefits. People have no control over their health, just like they have no control over a plant closure. This warrants analysis.

I have to admit that the employment insurance system has been improved in recent decades. I will admit that, but there is still work that needs to be done to make the system fair. This system is not accessible to most people who contributed to it.

Let's look back in time, since the best way to know where we are going is to know where we have come from.

I want to remind everyone that until 1990, in Canada, the government paid into the EI fund. In 1990, the Conservative government upset the balance by putting an end to federal contributions to the EI fund, meaning it had to be funded entirely by employers and workers. This created a very large deficit. What happened? The government tried to make up for the deficit by slashing the coverage provided by the system, reducing the amounts paid to claimants and tightening the eligibility rules for workers.

• (1525)

This had a major impact. It cut the number of people covered by the system in half between 1989 and 1997. It also created a huge surplus, and I have proof. Figures show that labour income accounted for 2.3% of Canada's GDP in 1990 and 0.6% in 2015. The people of Laurentides—Labelle were directly affected by those rules, which put them in an extremely vulnerable situation. I must admit that I even experienced it myself, and I could go on and on about it.

Those cuts helped amass a slush fund of nearly \$50 billion. Who suffered? Our workers and employers suffered. For the last 30 or 40 years, they have been the only contributors to the fund, and every year, the surpluses in the fund are swallowed up by a federal machine whose appetite knows no bounds. I would like to know why taxpayers' money is being used for things that are not in their best interest. It saddens me today to know that many of our friends, colleagues and relatives have been deprived of this program.

Now I wonder. I think the employment insurance program in its current form is no longer about helping workers. Should those who benefit from this program not be the ones who contribute to it? Some of these people spend their whole life building up this fund without ever being able to access it when they really need it, especially when they involuntarily contract a serious illness.

We all know that no one chooses to get sick. I would like to share with the House an experience I had a few years ago when I was a political staffer for the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle, Johanne Deschamps. I was having a hard time helping a constituent when he told me he had just one week of benefits left and was not even halfway through his chemotherapy treatments. I checked the law. Indeed, this person had no other options, since he was not eligible for EI benefits because he had several assets. That bothered me because we had no way of giving him something he was perfectly entitled to receive.

I would like to share another thought with the House about the term “insurance”. In my opinion, insurance exists to cover real needs, such as theft, fire or disability insurance. When workers have needs due to illness, the program does not do enough to assist them.

Do hon. members agree that the assistance should be equivalent to what a worker gets when they lose their job?

I am sure no one can object to improving the well-being of our constituents. We have to make this program fair. Right now, it is not fair to everyone who contributes to it. I am calling on all hon. members to agree to extend sickness benefits to 50 weeks.

*Business of Supply*

• (1530)

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech.

She addressed the financial aspects of the employment insurance fund, which is very well managed. Members will recall that the situation was worrisome for several years. This fund is meant to provide support for people who lose their jobs in the conventional way. The fund now also provides support for people on maternity leave, among others.

If we expand the program too much and then there are massive job losses, this would lead to huge demand on the fund. Would we be prepared to increase premiums?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Earlier I mentioned that some improvements have been made. We have made adjustments based on needs, and we have come a long way. We have made improvements to benefits for new parents and for people providing end-of-life care for loved ones.

There is just one glaring inequity left, and that is EI sickness benefits. We need to go just a little bit further. This issue has been talked about for a long time already. This is nothing new, and I am confident that this is something we will do together.

• (1535)

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating my colleague on her magnificent speech and her extremely well-structured arguments.

If I may, I would like to address the question asked by the Liberal member who just had the floor about whether we are prepared to increase premiums. I would like to remind her that, in recent years, the EI fund has posted an average annual surplus of \$3 billion to \$4 billion. Every year, the government, whether Conservative or Liberal, has taken this surplus and transferred it to the consolidated revenue fund.

Had money not been taken out of this fund, which is paid for by employers and employees, we would now have a surplus of some \$20 billion from the past five years alone. That could have financed all of my colleague's proposals, including not only EI sickness benefits, but also compensation for the seasonal workers' black hole, which is the five-week period between the end of their EI benefits and the date they return to work.

The money could also have been used for the preventive withdrawal of pregnant women. When these women return to work and then lose their job, their months on preventive withdrawal should not be taken into account in the determination of whether they are eligible for EI.

I would like to ask my colleague if she agrees that the implementation of the intentions stated in today's motion is not a matter of money, but a matter of political will.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Speaker, I am in complete agreement with my hon. colleague.

The billions of dollars transferred to the consolidated revenue fund are gone. The slightly more than \$1 billion we are talking about is so small, and, in any case, it comes from workers and employers. The figures are there, and they are very reassuring. There is no reason not to support the motion and agree to this request.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her speech.

The NDP agrees with the proposals that have been put forward. It is unbelievable that sickness benefits last only 15 weeks, but that compassionate care benefits for informal caregivers last 26 weeks. Caregivers can take more time off work than sick people. This is an inconsistency in the program that must be corrected.

Does my colleague agree with our party that we should reduce the number of hours required to be eligible for benefits in general, since less than 40% of unemployed workers are eligible for EI?

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau:** Madam Speaker, I will address the two points raised by my colleague.

I am wondering about something. If I am a fisher and am eligible to receive EI for seasonal work, but I happen to get sick, is it better to claim as a fisher or as someone with a serious illness? When a seasonal worker is off work, they are fortunately entitled to 50 weeks of benefits. However, if that worker falls ill, they are only entitled to 15 weeks. There is a contradiction.

That said, the program certainly must be made available to all people who need it. For the time being, let us start by increasing benefits from 15 weeks to 50. We will propose other improvements to the program later.

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak about the employment insurance program.

[*English*]

I will be splitting my time with the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

[*Translation*]

Our government is proud of this long-standing program that has offered support to Canadians in times of need for 80 years. When a Canadian loses their job through no fault of their own, the EI program is there. When a mother or father needs to care for their newborn child, or when someone needs to take care of a gravely ill family member, EI is there.

*Business of Supply*

[English]

Since its creation in 1940, EI remains a pillar of Canada's social safety net. Today, I would like to talk about our continued support for workers through the employment insurance program.

• (1540)

[Translation]

Since 2015, our government has made a series of changes to the employment insurance program that benefit Canadian workers across the country. For example, we reversed the 2012 changes to the employment insurance program that specified the types of jobs that unemployed workers were expected to search for and accept. The long-standing requirements that claimants must search for and accept available work while on employment insurance will continue to be upheld. This change took effect on July 3, 2016.

[English]

In 2016, we also helped workers living in the regions most affected by low oil prices. We did that by temporarily extending the duration of EI regular benefits for all eligible claimants by five weeks in 15 targeted regions. Up to a maximum of 20 additional weeks were provided to long-tenured workers.

[Translation]

That same year, we announced that as of January 1, 2017, the waiting period for EI benefits would be reduced from two weeks to one week. Today, I am able to say that as of October 1, 2019, approximately 5 million claimants combined have benefited from this change.

Reducing the waiting period from two weeks to one week relieves the financial burden on claimants when they need it most.

[English]

In addition, about two-thirds of claimants return to work before they exhaust all of their weeks of benefit entitlement. As a result of the waiting period reduction, these claimants gain one extra week of benefits. In fact, it is estimated that this puts an additional \$650 million in the pockets of Canadians annually.

[Translation]

The reduced waiting period applies to regular, sickness, maternity, parental, compassionate care, family caregiver, and fishing benefits. This means that Canadians in all workplaces are benefiting. The package of changes to the EI system does not stop there.

[English]

The new measures put in place also include eliminating new entrant and re-entrant rules to increase access to EI benefits, making permanent the working-while-on-claim rules and simplifying job search responsibilities for claimants. Let me provide a little more detail.

First, we amended the rules to eliminate the higher eligibility requirements that restricted access for new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market. Under the previous rules, new entrants and re-entrants to the labour market had to accumulate at least 910 hours of insurable employment before being eligible for employment insurance regular benefits.

[Translation]

As a result of the changes we have made since July 3, 2016, those who enter or re-enter the workforce are subject to the same eligibility requirements as other claimants in the region where they live, namely from 420 to 700 insurable hours.

[English]

Also, we made changes to working-while-on-claim rules, which help claimants stay connected to the job market and allow them to earn some additional income while receiving benefits. These improvements, which took effect August 2018, are that the 50¢-for-every-dollar-earned rule became a permanent part of the employment insurance program, and that the working-while-on-claim rules were extended to now apply to sickness and maternity benefits.

[Translation]

We are also helping seasonal workers through a new pilot project announced in August 2018. This pilot project provides up to an additional five weeks of EI regular benefits to eligible seasonal claimants in 13 targeted regions. It is estimated that 51,500 seasonal workers will benefit from this initiative each year.

[English]

Finally, we are supporting adult learners through skills boost. EI claimants now have more opportunities to go back to school to get the training they need to find new jobs without fear of losing their EI benefits. During our last mandate, we also improved conditions for workers.

[Translation]

Many Canadians are struggling to balance work, family and other personal responsibilities. That is why we brought in amendments to the Canada Labour Code to ensure a better work-life balance and to strengthen labour standards protections in federally regulated private sector workplaces.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

In 2017, our government introduced legislation to give federally regulated workers the right to request flexible work arrangements, such as flexible start and finish times. Subsequently, in 2018, we introduced further amendments to support even greater flexibility in the workplace. Among these changes are new breaks and leaves, including personal leave of up to five days with three days' pay. This new leave can be used for, among other things, medical appointments or sick days, or to take a dependant to a medical appointment.

- (1545)

*[Translation]*

We also introduced leave for victims of family violence of up to 10 days with five days paid, and leave for traditional indigenous practices of up to five days unpaid.

Access to many existing leaves, including critical illness leave and reservist leave, was also improved by eliminating length of service requirements.

*[English]*

Also, changes were made to increase annual vacation entitlements, so that workers have more downtime to spend doing the things they love. These legislative changes came into force on September 1, 2019.

*[Translation]*

We know that many employees struggle to balance the demands of work and family due to lack of time and scheduling conflicts. These changes to the Canada Labour Code will provide better work-life balance.

*[English]*

Without a doubt, we are taking the necessary steps to support hard-working Canadians. The situation of every Canadian is unique with different family and work needs.

*[Translation]*

By making employment insurance benefits more flexible, more inclusive and easier to access, and by modernizing labour standards, we are providing hard-working Canadian families with more options to better balance their work and life responsibilities.

*[English]*

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, my colleague spoke about EI benefits in Alberta. I want to jump off on this point, because we hear over and over again from the government that it is doing things for energy workers, that it extended EI.

Of course, EI should be available for people who are not working, but what we could really do to support energy workers in Alberta is actually establish the conditions where they do not need to collect EI and they could be working. We have members of the Liberal caucus actively speaking out against the Teck Frontier project and supporting petitions opposing that project. We have members of the government caucus as well as other parties who are actively

opposing these projects, which have indigenous and community support and are necessary to allow people to get back to work.

I would say to the hon. member, on behalf of the people in Alberta who I represent, that our priority is not EI but it is actually establishing the conditions that allow people to have hope and opportunity through employment.

Would the member recognize that the primary thing he could do for energy workers is to support the development of vital projects, such as Teck Frontier, pipelines and other projects that have community and indigenous support and are in the national interest?

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Madam Speaker, with respect to EI and the situation in Alberta, as the member is aware, we have also been working on TMX and bringing it forward. As the parliamentary secretary in the last Parliament, I was working hard to make sure that this project moved forward in the right way. We are seeing it develop and continuing. This is creating thousands of jobs in Alberta and British Columbia.

Another project is Line 3. The Canadian side has been approved, we approved it, we are in support of it, and we are now in talks with the U.S. to make sure that extension is provided.

Also, there is Keystone XL. I was in Washington last year at a mining conference and I took the opportunity to talk with governors and senators in the U.S. about the issue of Keystone and where it was at, because on the Canadian side it had been approved and ready to go, but it was basically on the U.S. side.

As well, there is LNG. Three weeks ago, I was in Kitimat at the Roundup conference in Vancouver. I told my team that I wanted to visit the LNG plant in Kitimat to show support. I spoke with the Haisla First Nation chief as well as the mayor of Kitimat and did a tour of the LNG plant.

We are working hard to have these projects advance and create good jobs. There are billions of dollars of investment in Canada that would create thousands of jobs. We realize that and that is what we are working hard towards.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

The NDP is certainly in favour of increasing EI sickness benefits to 50 weeks. That would be the most acceptable and compassionate approach, and it would be more in line with people's reality.

I have a question for my Liberal Party colleague. Only 40% of unemployed people get EI benefits because the hours of work eligibility threshold is too high. In other words, 100% of workers contribute, but only 40% of workers who lose their job have access to benefits.

*Business of Supply*

Why does the Liberal government not have an action plan to fix this problem so that all unemployed individuals can get support from this social program when they need it?

• (1550)

**Mr. Paul Lefebvre:** Madam Speaker, that is an important question. Our government has already reduced the number of hours required, but I understand workers' anxiety about premiums and access to benefits.

With respect to the 15 weeks of benefits that are currently offered, the government wants to extend the period to 26 weeks. That was in our election platform, and that is what stakeholders such as the Canadian Cancer Society told us was needed. They clearly asked us to extend the period from 15 weeks to half a year. That is where the number 26 comes from. It will make a big difference for people who are suffering. My father got cancer while he was employed. He had a hard time, because he was only allowed 15 weeks off. Increasing the benefit period to 26 weeks would help a lot. We hear what is being said today in the House, and we will see if we can do more, but the government wants to propose what we campaigned on. We want to make sure we can offer 26 weeks of benefits.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise in the House today to talk about how we have enhanced employment insurance.

The employment insurance program is one of the pillars of our social safety net. We are taking measures to ensure that it continues to serve workers and employers in a spirit of fairness and compassion.

Generally speaking, EI benefits are extremely effective. They fulfill the purpose for which they were created. They provide support for Canadians who are looking for a job, working to improve their skills, dealing with an illness or preparing to become a parent or caregiver. However, Canadian jobs and Canadian families are changing. This means that the program must change as well.

[English]

As a result, we are committed to improving the employment insurance program so that it continues to serve people. Part of our government's commitment to Canadian workers includes expanding the EI sickness benefit from 15 to 26 weeks. This commitment was welcomed by the Canadian Cancer Society which said:

The proposed extension would support Canadians who have been diagnosed with cancer and need to take time away from work to seek treatment.

In addition, our commitment to expand EI sickness benefits from 15 to 26 weeks matches the recommendations from the MS Society of Canada and the Community Unemployed Help Centre that were brought forward at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

We have already worked hard to make improvements to the program. Let me detail a few of these now.

In January 2017 we shortened the employment insurance waiting period from two weeks to one week. The goal of this change was to

ease the financial strain on claimants, and I am proud to say that we reached that goal. By October 2019 about five million claimants had benefited from the reduced waiting period.

Another change we made is helping to make the EI program more flexible. Eligible pregnant workers are now able to receive employment insurance maternity benefits earlier, up to 12 weeks before their due date. This gives women more leeway to consider their personal, health and workplace circumstances as they decide when to start their maternity leave. As of December 2018, about 8,000 workers had made use of this new flexibility.

We know how challenging it can be to raise a family. That is why we improved the employment insurance parental benefits. Since December 2017 parents have been able to choose a longer parental leave at a lower benefit rate. It turns out that a lot of parents are taking advantage of this option. As of December 2018 approximately 32,000 parents had chosen the extended parental benefit option.

To further demonstrate the government's commitment to parents, the employment insurance parental sharing benefit was launched in March 2019. Its main objective is to promote greater gender equality in the home and workplace by encouraging parents to share parental leave.

More precisely, it offers an additional five weeks of employment insurance standard parental benefits reserved for a second parent. This approach is designed to create an incentive for all parents to take some leave when welcoming a new child and to share equally in the responsibility of raising their children.

There is also the family caregiver benefit. Our government knows that many Canadians have to take time off from work to care for a loved one. We wanted to help them as well. That is why we made changes to make employment insurance benefits for caregivers more flexible, inclusive and easier to access. These changes came into effect in December 2017.

Caregivers can access up to 15 weeks of benefits to provide care to an adult family member with a critical illness or injury.

• (1555)

We have also enhanced the benefits available to parents when they provide care or support to a critically ill child by extending eligibility to include additional family members who may provide care to the child. Also, in order to improve access to EI caregiving benefits, both medical doctors and nurse practitioners are now able to sign medical certificates.

*Business of Supply*

As I mentioned, the Government of Canada is looking for ways to improve the EI program so that it meets the needs of Canadian workers. That is why changes were made to improve the sickness benefit. As of August 2018, the EI working while on claim rules were extended to EI maternity and sickness benefits, including those for eligible self-employed persons. This measure provides Canadians who are dealing with an illness or injury with greater flexibility to manage their return to work and keep more of their EI benefits.

Also, EI claimants in receipt of parental benefits, compassionate care benefits or the EI family caregiver benefit can switch to the sickness benefit if they become ill or injured while on claim.

Finally, I want to mention one more change to the EI program. I am talking about our new EI skills boost measure, which was created to better support claimants who have lost their job after several years in the workplace. Through skills boost we are providing claimants with more opportunities to take full-time training while continuing to receive employment insurance benefits. The promotion and expansion of employment insurance flexibilities for training will encourage more claimants to upgrade their skills while receiving benefits.

I also want to mention some important changes the Government of Canada recently made to the Canada Labour Code. These changes provide better work-life balance and strengthen labour standards protections in federally regulated private sector workplaces. Changes include new leaves such as personal leave and leave for victims of family violence, improved access to existing leave and general holiday pay, improved annual vacation entitlements and leave for traditional indigenous practices. These changes came into force on September 1, 2019, and exemplify the flexibility and work-life balance we are trying to achieve for Canadian workers.

[Translation]

The reality is that families and workplaces are changing, so EI must also change.

[English]

Employment insurance needs to keep up with the modern realities of today's labour market. It needs to continue to serve workers, and it needs to work well for employers too.

[Translation]

It is all a question of balance.

[English]

Giving employees flexibility is good for our economy as all of Canada benefits.

• (1600)

**Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we are often fixated on the full term of EI, but we know individuals do not necessarily always need 100% of the 15 weeks, or the full term. One can actually utilize EI by being, as the member referred to it, flexible.

Perhaps the member could reiterate that what our government has done to utilize the current term is very beneficial. Again, I think he used the term "flexible".

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate my colleague's concern on this issue. Illness is disruptive and often devastating to families and Canadians. We know how much the EI sickness benefit means to Canadians. We know that over 400,000 Canadians utilize EI sickness benefits annually and we also know that about one-third of those Canadians max out their claim benefits.

We agree with the Canadian Cancer Society, which stated that 15 weeks is simply not enough. It does not provide the amount of time or the flexibility Canadians require, which is why this government is committed to extending the duration of EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks, which is half a year, or six months. This is the first serious modernization in 40 years.

We understand that this is a first step. This is a critical and crucial first step. We know it is just the first step, and we are committed to continuing our dialogue with the members of this House and other stakeholders across Canada.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the member said that his government cleared the backlog for EI claims, yet I have heard from members who are seeing serious wait times for EI claims and are told that staff will get to them when they can. Could the member tell us what the current timeline is for an EI claim?

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Madam Speaker, this government has reduced the wait times from two weeks to one week. In terms of the wait period, I do not have that answer at this point in time, but I would be happy to find that information and meet with my colleague after this session to provide him with that critical information.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, my colleague made reference to some of the things we have done as a government to enhance and make some changes to EI. Earlier today I mentioned how important it is to recognize the significant achievement of going from 15 weeks to a half year. We are moving forward with this, after the number of years during which there was no action taken on this front.

I would like the member to provide his thoughts on why it is important that we make this change.

**Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk:** Madam Speaker, indeed, Canadians want an EI system that is responsive and flexible. They have been waiting 40 years for changes to the system. It has been 40 years since a government has introduced any serious modernization of the EI system.

*Business of Supply*

This government is 100% committed to modernizing EI and sickness benefits. That means reducing the EI waiting period from two weeks to one week. That means extending parental benefits and parental leave for an additional five weeks. That means making working while on claim permanent, providing flexibility to Canadians who are looking to reintegrate into the workforce.

Now we are committed to extending EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to a full 26 weeks. That is six months. This last change is absolutely critical. It represents the first significant modernization of the EI sickness benefits in 40 years. It is just the first step. We are committed to continued dialogue. We are committed to listening to Canadians on this very important issue.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limouilou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Shefford.

The issue we are debating is a delicate one, especially for me. Yesterday, at 1:30 a.m., a close friend of the Fermont community passed away after a long struggle with illness. Her struggle was made easier because the entire community was behind her. I do not just mean the residents of Fermont, but people from Fermont who have moved all over the province and across Canada as well.

We were all behind her. Some offered their time, while others quietly paid for her groceries or heating oil. She had a community to support and help her, but we did not talk to her about it, because she had too much pride and strength of character to accept that kind of help. That is often the case. Please forgive me if I am particularly emotional today. The ordeal this woman went through is something that my mother-in-law, my grandmother and my father went through as well. I would not wish it on anyone.

Roughly 23% of sick people have access to these 15 weeks of benefits, so already, not many people have access to employment insurance even though this is supposed to be a universal measure. With only 23% of sick people getting better within the 15-week period, it is no longer universal, it is discriminatory.

Illness, whether it be cancer or any other form of illness, is an ordeal for the person who is sick and for that person's friends and family. However, it is also a financial hardship. Perhaps some members have never been unemployed even once in their lives, so for those who do not know, employment insurance benefits are equal to 55% of the person's income. That is hardly a gold mine.

Sick people who are fighting for their health and their lives on 55% of their income are being told that they can have 15 weeks of benefits. What if they need 26 weeks to recover? Too bad.

However, healing requires not only family, friends, the community and money, but also good morale. It undermines people's chances of recovering when the morale is not there and when they are constantly stressed and do not know whether they will be able to put food on the table for their children the next day. That gives cancer or any other illness more power over the person's system. It has been shown that stress can have an irreparable effect on the immune system. If the immune system is already compromised and

continues to grow weaker, there is less chance that the person will be able to recover from the illness or at least keep it in check. This may be difficult to understand for someone who has never been unemployed, who has never been sick or who has been lucky enough to have help. The purpose of my comments is to make members think. I am a teacher, as members know.

I was saying earlier that 23% of sick people will get better within 15 weeks. Most take 30 weeks to recover. That is probably why the Liberal government has suddenly agreed to increase the number of weeks of sickness benefits to 26.

• (1610)

However, that still leaves 20% to 25% of people who will need 50 weeks or even more. That is a significant percentage. We are talking about human beings. I am not talking about 1% or 2% or even 0.5%. I am talking about 20% to 25%, or one-quarter of the population.

There are 338 MPs in the House. If we all became sick tomorrow, one-quarter of us would need 50 weeks. How many of us would want to be without any income from the 26th week to the final week of recovery? How many of us?

This is a matter of compassion, but also common sense. We have a duty to our constituents, and this is their own money. Workers and employers contribute to the fund. This is not the government's money.

When the employment insurance fund gets above a certain amount, the government starts dipping into it. The government needs to stop doing that. This fund exists for the future and for hard times. It is our nest egg. When the nest egg is full because regular contributions have been made day after day, year after year, we are able to provide adequate, caring and compassionate support to those around us.

It is unacceptable that a person without group or private insurance ends up without money at week 16, unable to pay for rent, groceries or socks in the winter. It is unacceptable that the person is unable to support themselves or others. Worse yet, that person is getting poorer. Their morale is low, and the money is no longer there. If they are lucky, they have a nest egg. If they are luckier still, they have a network to help them, and they start a fundraiser.

Is that what Canada is? Is that the Canada we want for our people? Is that the Canada we want for the most vulnerable and marginalized members of our society?

Surviving cancer is one of the biggest victories a person can have. Even more extraordinary is that all those who win their battle go on to get involved in society, volunteering in their own community.

*Business of Supply*

How much is this help worth? How much is a life worth? How much is it worth for a person to be able to return to work and get their confidence, their honour and their pride back?

We are talking about \$1.1 billion if every sick person who is entitled to EI sickness benefits takes the full 50 weeks. When a person manages to heal and recover, they are eager to get back to work, because 55% of their salary is no gold mine, as I was saying. It is our duty to help our constituents, especially those who need it most.

I am calling on all hon. members to fulfill not only a duty of compassion, but also a duty of conscience and an economic duty.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the member gave an extremely passionate and well-delivered speech.

I apologize if I missed this in an earlier part of the debate. Maybe the subject has come up so I do run the risk of asking a question that perhaps has already been asked. I wonder if the member can share with the House why the Bloc Québécois thought that 50 weeks was the magic number. Why is it not 60 weeks, why not 40, why not 120? Where did the 50 weeks specifically come from? The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities did a study on this. Did the number of weeks come from that study?

I wonder if the member can share some insight into that.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Madam Speaker, the question has already been asked, but it bears repeating.

If I were still a teacher and I lost my job tomorrow morning, I would be entitled to up to 50 weeks of EI, depending on the number of hours I had worked. It is simply a matter of fairness. If I have to leave my job because of illness, it would only be fair that I receive benefits for the same number of weeks as someone who loses their job for any other reason. It is simply a matter of fairness and justice.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very compassionate and touching speech that was full of poignancy. She spoke to Quebeckers about what they are going through or have been through.

She said something that struck me when she was talking about the nest egg that belongs to the workers and not to the government, which has been helping itself to the fund for years now.

Could we all agree that the money in that fund belongs to the workers and should be used to help workers when they need it?

Why does the Liberal government not understand that?

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I wish I could give him an answer, but I do not have the Liberal philosophy needed to answer that question.

I do not understand either. If I build a nest egg for myself, I put my own money into it, and I do not understand how my neighbour can tell me how to use my nest egg.

I think the government would be better suited than me to answer that question.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we unfortunately do not have a permanent cure for cancer. As the member stated, I cannot imagine there are more than two degrees of separation before we know somebody who has been affected by cancer.

However, we have made a lot of strides and moved the yardstick forward through a lot of funding. Of course, there is a cost associated with this.

Even though there is a very large cost, would the member acknowledge that the commitment of moving from 15 weeks to 26 weeks is still moving the yardstick forward?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Madam Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for his question. We all recognize that we have moved the yardstick forward.

Let me use an analogy. People are happy when they build a house. First the foundation goes in, and then the walls go up. Installing the doors and windows is like getting 26 weeks of benefits. However, the roof has to be put on to protect the interior of the house. Progress has been made, but the roof still has to be put on.

**Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I do not really have a question. I just wanted to rise to congratulate my colleague for her very poignant and touching speech. The fact that she lost a friend yesterday and gave a speech on this subject today took a lot of courage and strength, and I congratulate her for it.

I will make a further comment about today's subject. Much has been said about the cost of the proposal we put forward today, but it is important to remind the House that there are surpluses year after year. There are billions in surpluses. This measure would not be that expensive.

As our colleague opposite asked, why cover 26 weeks when it would not cost more to cover 50 weeks? This is about fairness.

That is just a comment I wanted to make in addition to my heartfelt congratulations to my colleague. It was extremely moving and very courageous of her to give this speech today.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

I thank all members for listening to and reflecting on such an important motion. I hope that members and their families will never need it.

*Business of Supply*

• (1620)

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank my colleague for sharing her time with me and giving me a chance to speak to this important matter. I also thank her for her very touching and poignant speech. She is a tough act to follow.

How many people successfully recover from cancer in 15 weeks? I would also ask the following: How many caregivers stop helping their loved ones or abandon them after 26 weeks? To ask that question is to answer it.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to this important Bloc Qu b cois motion:

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

It is just common sense. We need to solve this problem now.

I will structure my speech around three points: my work in the past as a political aide, which taught me certain things; the many cases that we are still seeing in our ridings these days; and, lastly, the impact that this blatant lack of compassion is having on sick people.

First, I was an assistant in a riding office from 2007 to 2009. People who were suffering used to come in in tears because their benefits were running out and they would no longer be getting the money they were entitled to from the plan they had contributed to. From 2009 to 2011, I worked as an assistant on the Hill, where I saw the work that the Bloc Qu b cois was doing. The Bloc Qu b cois was already working hard on this important issue at that time.

I recently had the opportunity to talk to a former MP, who reminded me of all the work that was done on this file, making it possible to really bring this and other similar bills to the fore. He even personally worked on helping pregnant women get the employment insurance benefits they deserve when they have to withdraw from the workforce because their job is too risky. In short, the Bloc has always been there speaking out on this issue, and this problem has been going on for far too long.

Second, now that I am an elected official, I recently met with someone who was receiving compassionate care benefits. Let us remember that compassionate care benefits are equivalent to about 55% or 56% of a person's income and do not take into account expenses, such as adaptations to the home, medical equipment or home care workers. In a region like mine, the cost of travel must also be factored into this already long list of expenses. It is the same thing for special sickness benefits. This adds stress and really undermines the recovery of people who just need to take care of themselves.

Third, it is clear that we can measure the effects of inequality in this case. In 2016, the Coalition des Sans-Chemise called on the Liberal government to take its employment insurance reform even further and adapt the EI system to the realities of today's workers. The coalition, which brings together many associations and unions, had launched a post card campaign with the theme "Employment insurance is for everyone", a theme that still resonates today.

Although the coalition commended the many improvements the Liberals made to the employment insurance system, it wanted to make the government aware of the need to overhaul the program. The coalition also asked for an increase in the number of weeks offered to workers with a serious illness. The spokesperson for the Conseil national des ch meurs et ch meuses, Pierre C r , pointed out that caregivers can now get 26 weeks of benefits while those who are sick can get only 15 weeks. This is quite the contradiction and quite sad, honestly.

In December, my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly was joined on Parliament Hill by the labour critic and hon. member for Th r se-De Blainville and by  milie Sansfa on and Marie-H l ne Dub , as well as their loved ones. They were calling on the government to take action and change the employment insurance system to ensure that those with a lengthy illness can get the help they are entitled to and need throughout their battle.

Ms. Sansfa on thought she had beaten cancer, but when she was told that the cancer had returned, she had already exhausted all her weeks of employment insurance. She is not getting any support from the federal government and had to go into debt to deal with her illness.

• (1625)

People need our help when they are facing adversity, not when things are going well. We know what the problem is and we also know how to solve it. There is no point in dragging our feet. We have to fix this now.

The Bloc Qu b cois decided to take up the demands of this group of citizens and have the federal government expand special EI benefits from 15 to 50 weeks to let the sick battle their illness with dignity. The program has not been enhanced since 1971 despite the demands of many stakeholders. Seven bills have been introduced to solve this problem, but nothing has ever been done.

 milie Sansfa on and Marie-H l ne Dub  chose to fight for their lives, their families, for those battling illness, but there is no reason why they should also battle the machinery of government. It is time we gave them some respite and dealt with this issue once and for all.

I experienced a lot of heart-wrenching situations like this when I was an assistant to a member of Parliament from 2007 to 2011, and I am still seeing them in 2020. For quite some time now, I have seen that 15 weeks is not enough time to recover from an illness. Employment insurance must change to allow people to seek treatment with dignity. Again, 15 weeks of benefits is not enough.

*Business of Supply*

As you can read on the Conseil national des chômeurs et des chômeuses website, “The sickness benefit plan has not been changed since 1971, which is a long time ago!” Employment insurance must change and provide better protection for the thousands of people without group or private insurance who will go on to deal with health problems. To fix the situation, the Conseil national des chômeurs et des chômeuses is proposing to increase the sickness benefit period to 50 weeks in order to address cases of serious illness. That is what we are proposing as well.

In closing, I cannot ignore my titles as critic for seniors, status of women and gender equality. This motion targets these groups in particular. For more fairness and less poverty for our vulnerable groups, let us take action. No one should have to choose between medicine, food and a place to live. The question is not whether we will one day be a caregiver or receive care, but when.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I have often talked about the realization that we have seen a significant increase, based on stakeholders, from 15 weeks to a half-year. We see that as a positive.

Listening to some of the members from the Bloc, there have been some inaccuracies that have been put on the record. I would like some clarification from the member. The Bloc keeps on repeating, inaccurately, that if seasonal workers are laid off, they get 50 weeks. This is factually incorrect, as the duration varies based on the unemployment rate.

Does the Bloc support the duration of sickness benefits varying based on the unemployment rate?

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. As my colleague said, just because we have made progress, just because we are moving towards the goal and we can see it does not mean that we need to stop moving.

We recognize what has been done. The Liberal government, when it was in opposition, even proposed this increase from 15 to 50 weeks. It is a matter of fairness and common sense.

I will repeat myself once again. I think that in 2020, after all these years of discussion, and given this is something even the Liberals have already proposed, we should come back to it.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech and her important work.

Clearly, the NDP agrees that the benefit period should be extended from 15 to 50 weeks. It is the right thing to do. It is the most compassionate and logical thing to do.

I have a question for my colleague about another flaw in the existing system. When a woman takes maternity leave, she is away for 12 months. If she returns to work and then loses her job a few weeks later, the system will not give her credit for any insured hours because she was on maternity leave.

Would the Bloc Québécois agree that the system should take into account the previous 104 weeks, including the year prior to maternity leave?

• (1630)

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, I think we can agree on that.

As the critic for status of women, I can certainly understand the needs related to maternity. As I said, I have already spoken with a member who worked on the EI issue for pregnant women back in 2006-07. My colleague, Ms. Pauzé, even introduced a bill about that, so I think we can agree. At the moment, we are talking about the 50 weeks, but we can broaden the scope.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I would remind the hon. member for Shefford that she cannot refer to her colleague by name.

The hon. parliamentary secretary, questions and comments.

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, the member did not answer the question. The Bloc is telling Canadians that a seasonal worker who is laid off gets 50 weeks, and that is not accurate. Factually, it is incorrect, as the duration varies based on the unemployment rate. Does the Bloc support varying the duration of sickness benefits based on the unemployment rate?

[Translation]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Madam Speaker, again, this is about equity.

There have been studies about this. We said we wanted the entitlement to be the same as for people who lose their job. We are open to discussing other improvements. As we have said, we are open to overhauling the employment insurance system.

In answer to my colleague's question, as I said, studies have shown that it is a matter of equity.

[English]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey Centre today.

I was really happy to hear the last exchange between the NDP and the Bloc Québécois, on maternity assistance in particular, because this is exactly where I was going to start my discussion today to highlight something that happened in the previous session of Parliament that perhaps a lot of the new Bloc Québécois members are not informed about.

I was very lucky to be chosen as one of the first members to have a private member's bill. I brought forward a private member's bill in 2016 that specifically dealt with women who work in hazardous jobs and the hardships they were put through as a result of the employment insurance system when they were told they could not continue working in those hazardous conditions.

This bill called for a couple of things. It called for an increase in sick time. It called for a national maternity assistance program to look at the various ways that we could help women in hazardous working conditions, given that the labour force is changing.

I will say that the bill went through a lot of ups and downs. There were some discussions along the way. It did not receive unanimous support at the beginning, but it did make its way to committee. It was discussed at committee, where ideas were brought forward. It finally came back to the House, and this House almost unanimously voted in favour of it. All the Conservatives voted for it. All the NDP voted for it. All the Liberals voted for it. The Green Party member voted for it.

Who did not vote for it? The 10 Bloc Québécois members in the House did not vote for it. They were the only members who did not support this private member's bill that was specifically about employment insurance sick leave for women who were working in hazardous jobs. I do not know why. For a while I thought they did not support it because the word "national" was in the title of the bill. I was not sure, but at the end of the day, we did not end up getting unanimous support.

I respect the fact that a lot of the current members of the Bloc Québécois were not here then. However, I am really glad to see that this is one of the issues that they are so focused on this time around, because it is critically important. For that matter, I want to give them credit for bringing forward this very important discussion today.

I asked a few minutes ago about the difference between 50 or 60 weeks and 120 weeks. How did we come to 50 weeks? I did appreciate the answer. I thought I was given a really good answer by the member that specifically touched on the fact that this had to do with employment insurance benefits and what people were getting when they were going off on unemployment. It made a lot of sense to me, and I appreciate the answer.

However, the problem is that we went into this election with a commitment. That commitment was to change from the existing 15 weeks to 26 weeks. We decided that this was the right thing to do. In fact, we saw that it was widely endorsed by various organizations and agencies, in particular those that are advocating on behalf of people who become sick or injured. For example, the Canadian Cancer Society said:

The Canadian Cancer Society (CCS) welcomes the Liberal Party of Canada's commitment to extend the Employment Insurance Sickness Benefit from 15 to 26 weeks if re-elected.

The proposed extension would support Canadians who have been diagnosed with cancer and need to take time away from work to seek treatment.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives said:

The federal government's commitment to extend employment insurance (EI) sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks is a welcome and overdue expansion of the Canadian social safety net.

### *Business of Supply*

The MS Society at the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities was quoted as saying:

Harmonize the EI sickness benefits duration of 15 weeks to match the 26 weeks duration of compassionate care benefits.

I would argue that not only are we doing exactly what people asked for, but we are doing stuff that was reported back through committee and that the committee had studied. There were many witnesses in that open and transparent process who could have been questioned and challenged on certain things they were saying.

• (1635)

If we just focus this debate on talking about the time and whether 26 weeks or 50 weeks is the right number, we are going to pay a huge disservice to a lot of the other work that is going on in our country, particularly as it relates to people who become sick or injured and as a result have to take time off work.

I want to focus a bit of my time on talking about some of that research and some of the work that is being done to help sick people to have better lives and a better quality of life.

The main agency that the government works with by funding its research is the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, in particular to look into things like finding a cure for cancer or giving people who have terminal cancer a better quality of life or making sure that people have the resources that they need.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, CIHR, spends \$1.2 billion every year. Approximately 13,000 Canadian health researchers and trainees are supported under this program throughout the country. They research health and chronic illnesses, support the development of preventive treatments, and aim to get Canadians healthier and back to their normal lives.

Over the last five years, the institute spent \$305 million on mental health, \$859 million on cancer research specifically, \$522 million on cardiovascular diseases and \$94 million on chronic pain. Last year in particular, the CIHR partnered with the Canadian Cancer Society for a joint \$10-million investment aimed at improving the lives of those with cancer.

It is important to bring up all of this because the issue we are talking about here is not going to be solved just by giving more time and throwing more money at it. I do recognize that employment insurance has its own fund, but we need to ensure at the same time that we are helping to improve the quality of life for these individuals by making sure that we research these illnesses and chronic illnesses so that we can give people better treatment.

*Business of Supply*

I want to give a couple of examples relating to cancer specifically. The money that is being used through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is working to improve the lives of cancer survivors. Often this includes long-term treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation. Patients have to go through these treatments for several months, and they involve a lot of hospital visits and sick days. The patient, the family, and the caregiver have to endure a lot of hardship as a result.

We also know the economic impact of living with cancer. We need to pay more attention to the economic effects that cancer has on individuals. I know I am running out of time, but I wanted to highlight what is being done in terms of ensuring that research and resources are put towards cancer specifically.

Research is also being done on chronic pain. One in five Canadians lives with chronic pain. It is one of the most common reasons that people seek health care in Canada. The economic impact of chronic pain on this country is estimated to be \$56 billion a year.

In 2019, the government established the Canadian pain task force, which is tasked with better defining the causes of chronic pain and providing recommendations to Health Canada with respect to prevention and management. The objective is to reduce the overall impact of chronic pain. This is where the Canadian Institutes of Health Research comes into play. It funds organizations such as these to make sure that we do the research that we need to do.

As I indicated a few moments ago, it is vitally important that we look not just at EI. Based on the private member's bill that I discussed before, I am always interested in having a discussion about the employment insurance system and how we can improve upon it. However, at the same time, it is important that we look at how we can better the lives of individuals from a research perspective to give them a better quality of life and better care during the time of their illness, whether it is cancer or chronic pain, the two examples that I have used.

I appreciate the time I have had to participate in the debate today.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I also like to base my comments on research, but today's debate is not about research or what research says. Research does not help the patients who are fighting every day to survive. This debate has to do with the fact that patients have to fight for their lives every day.

I would like the member to get back to the substance of the debate.

[*English*]

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Speaker, this is what I was trying to address. It is not just about the time that is being assigned to EI sick benefits. It is also about a government taking the responsibility of researching and looking into how to give people a better quality of life. The research and the product that is produced as a result of it can be used in addition to things like employment insurance to better the quality of life for individuals. From my perspective, that

is what is important. It is more of a holistic approach, as opposed to saying that 50 weeks, 26 weeks or 80 weeks is the answer. We need to look at this a lot more holistically to find out how to improve the lives of people dealing with these illnesses, in particular when they are in the workforce.

**Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is somewhat ironic that this member is talking about employment, unemployment and benefits today. As we found out over the weekend, he paid to have a petition from Queen's University put forward that asks to get rid of the Teck Frontier project. If we took more people off of employment insurance, there would be more room for people who need it, like people who are injured or have cancer.

Does the member think what he is doing right now is appropriate, using taxpayer-funded dollars to ensure that people in Alberta and Saskatchewan do not have jobs so they will be on unemployment longer? He is using money from his office to ensure that Canadians are not working. I do not think that is right. Does he?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Speaker, the question has a very loose connection to the issue of employment insurance, but I am very happy to address it.

At the end of the day, this comes down to giving Canadians the opportunity to have discourse on all issues, whether that discourse is on the issue of employment insurance, which we are discussing today, jobs in Alberta or something happening on the east coast. In my social media platforms, my aim is to make sure that people have the opportunity to have a discussion and go through the deliberative process, because that is what our democracy is based on.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

[*English*]

I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleague for the tremendous work he did on his private member's bill. I remember very well the work he did on it.

Listening to the hon. member's comments today, I think we would all agree that in the previous and current Parliament, our government has taken some steps to improve our EI system. Could my colleague elaborate on the changes we have made to the caregiver benefit and how that change alone has helped many Canadian families?

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the compliments with respect to my previous private member's bill. It certainly was a very fast learning curve to understand what a private member's bill was only shortly after I was elected.

To the hon. member's question with respect to caregivers, we know that we can help not only the individuals who are benefiting from the care they are receiving from their caregivers, but also the health care sector by making sure that people have access to their health caregivers, as opposed to their having to visit doctors or make repeat trips to the hospital. I am sure studies show that it is much more beneficial to have somebody with them, and that is where the caregiver comes into this.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today to the motion on employment insurance.

First, I would like to say that more people have come off employment insurance in the last four years than ever before. In fact, one million more jobs were created in the last four years, creating the lowest unemployment rate this country has ever seen.

The employment insurance program pays billions of dollars in benefits to over two million Canadians every year, including to constituents I represent in Surrey Centre. It is one of the most important programs that make up the foundation of our social support system. The employment insurance system provides essential support to workers who have lost their jobs without being responsible for this, to those who cannot work due to illness or pregnancy and to those who have been absent from work to care for a newborn baby, recently adopted child or a seriously ill family member.

An essential component of the EI program is the EI sickness benefit that helps Canadians who are unable to work because of illness, injury or quarantine. Currently, this program provides up to 15 weeks of income replacement. While a majority of Canadians are able to return to work before the end of the 15-week period, about 36% exhaust the full amount before they are able to go back to work. That is why our government and our Prime Minister have included expanding EI sickness benefits to the minister's mandate letter and why our government is committed to expanding the EI sickness benefit from 15 weeks to 26 weeks.

This is an important initiative. It means Canadians will receive financial support at a time when they need to heal and can return as contributing members to the workforce without having suffered undue financial hardship. This commitment was lauded by the Canadian Cancer Society, which said, "The proposed extension would support Canadians who have been diagnosed with cancer and need to take time away from work to seek treatment."

Canadian workers benefit from a dynamic employment insurance program that is designed to automatically adapt to changes affecting the unemployment rate of an employment insurance economic region. This helps to ensure that people who live in regions with similar labour markets are treated the same, with the amount of assistance provided adjusted to changing labour market conditions. In regions and communities across Canada, our employment insurance program provides income security to our families and workers during periods of unemployment.

Of course, it also provides support to seasonal workers during periods of unemployment. Our government understands the importance of seasonal industries for the success of our country as well as the reality of seasonal workers. Significant sectors, such as the construction industry, agriculture, forestry and fishing, contribute to

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Canada's economic prosperity. That is why we are working so hard to support these industries and their workers from coast to coast.

The recent decline in unemployment rates in some EI economic regions has resulted in an increase in the number of hours of insurable employment that is required to qualify for regular EI benefits. This increase has resulted in a reduction in the number of weeks of benefits to which claimants are eligible in these regions. This means that some seasonal workers stop receiving EI regular benefits before they are called back to their seasonal job. We know that regions such as eastern Quebec and Atlantic Canada are more severely affected by this lack of income, which is often referred to as the "black hole".

We sympathize with the workers who find themselves in this situation every year, and I can tell members that our government is closely examining measures to be taken to help these workers. We are working with stakeholders to find solutions to this problem. Our government is committed to improving the employment insurance program to better meet the needs of workers and employers.

When I was a teen, I worked on my uncle's farm in the summer picking blueberries. I saw how hundreds of farm workers helped harvest fruit and produce during the spring and summer and relied on EI during the winters.

Many of the changes we have made over the past four years are already in place and can help seasonal workers. For example, in 2018 we made permanent the rule allowing recipients to keep 50¢ of every dollar earned during the benefit period, and we extended this to maternity and sickness benefits. We also provided five additional weeks to regular benefits to eligible seasonal workers in 13 targeted regions. We estimate that approximately 51,000 seasonal workers will benefit from this measure each year. This government listens and helps Canadians.

● (1650)

We have provided opportunities for eligible claimants to upgrade their skills and increase their employability while receiving their benefits. In particular, we have provided up to \$41 million over two years to implement, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, wage subsidies and professional training and employment assistance programs for workers in seasonal industries through labour market development agreements. We are committed to improving the job security of seasonal workers and providing them with more support, especially when employment insurance is interrupted due to a changing job market.

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In this regard, we will enhance a recent pilot project that has provided additional assistance to tens of thousands of seasonal workers. At the conclusion of this pilot project, we will set up an ongoing program to give seasonal workers greater and more reliable benefits. These benefits will help them better meet their needs and those of their families between work seasons. We will also collaborate with Statistics Canada to strengthen data collection on local labour markets so that employment insurance can better take into account the realities on the ground, particularly in rural and diverse regions where this is needed the most.

We are aware of the modern realities of the current job market. Society is changing and so is the employment insurance system. It needs to continue to meet the needs of workers and employers. It is a question of balance.

I want my colleagues to understand that our government has committed and remains committed to supporting Canadians from coast to coast to coast when they need it. We have promised to reform the employment insurance system and that is what we are doing. That is why we are working so hard to improve the benefits and supports that Canadian workers receive.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

We are not close-minded in the Bloc Québécois. We gladly welcome the additional provisions, for seasonal work, for example.

I am from Charlevoix, and from Isle-aux-Coudres specifically. It is only accessible by ferry. I am quite familiar with the notions of worker retention and employment insurance. I welcome our friend's announcement about the additional weeks of benefits provided through training. I acknowledge that this will be helpful.

I would, however, like to get back to the topic of employment insurance for serious illnesses. We cannot expect a worker to come work in the region, in Isle-aux-Coudres, in Charlevoix, on a seasonal basis without some sort of guarantee of peace of mind and the assurance of being insured.

When we invite workers, whether they are newcomers or people leaving urban centres in search of fresh air, they do not want to lose any economic status. We really go all out to try and encourage people to come and work in the regions. Then we have to tell them that, if they fall ill, they only have 15 weeks to recover. After that, they can either die or get better, because they do not get any more. That is a real problem, because people say that they would have liked to come and work, but perhaps some other time. They turn their backs and disappear.

The big question at the heart of the motion that we are introducing today is also an economic issue for the regions. There is a direct impact. If we do not arrange to fix EI so we can reassure people who want to come work in the regions, we are going to compromise the regions economically and jeopardize their economic vitality. That point has not been raised much today.

There have been a lot of emotional speeches, and I can do that too. Our colleagues opposite are really fond of figures, so we are going to give them some. They have to understand that.

Given that my colleague seems to be open to seasonal work, I wanted to ask him whether he can guarantee that his party is open to giving sick workers 50 weeks of benefits.

That does not mean that sick people will use 50 weeks as a matter of course. As my friend was saying earlier, people are eager to go back to work. Nevertheless, we want to make sure that people who are very sick have 50 weeks to get better.

• (1655)

[*English*]

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Madam Speaker, I commend my colleague's party for this motion. It is a good initiative to discuss. It involves thousands of people, and very vulnerable people, working hard to help do those jobs that many others cannot do. They are for short periods of time and are very labour-intensive jobs.

When it comes to time off during sickness, I have a close friend who recently went for routine back surgery and was nearly paralyzed due to it. His wife is having to take time off. Her whole world changed. This was supposed to be routine surgery, with him being out in a couple of days. Now she does not know when he will walk again or if he will ever walk again. She will need a significant amount of time off.

The Prime Minister has recognized that with a mandate for leave up to 26 weeks, which is six months. As we have seen through trends in the past, two-thirds of Canadians that use this applicable sickness leave will use it within the 15 weeks. However, 36% still do not.

Obviously this will not cover everyone, but it will give them time to readjust. It helps those with a long-term sickness or those have loved ones with a long-term sickness.

This is a great start. The dialogue should continue, as we have data coming back, to see if this is an adequate measure.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am going to share my time with my colleague.

In recent months, the Bloc Québécois has raised the issue of sickness benefits many, many times—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Order. Which colleague is that? What is his constituency, please?

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Madam Speaker, it is my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

The Bloc Québécois has raised today's issue many times. We have made it our priority for debate on this opposition motion day, and with good reason.

The motion reads as follows:

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

We say “such as cancer” because, according to the figures that were circulated earlier, it is a significant target. However, we are not just talking about cancer. We want the act to be amended to increase benefits for adults with a serious illness from 15 weeks to 50 weeks, or more, if the government wishes.

As members can see, we are deeply committed to this issue, as are many members of other political parties and a majority of the public. Most of us are moving in that direction.

For the past three months, the current government has been saying that it wants to compromise and work with the opposition. In good faith, we in the Bloc Québécois are inclined to believe it. For the government, improving employment insurance presents a wonderful opportunity to act on this desire for partnership and to show that we are capable of working in a non-partisan way for the benefit of all our constituents.

During the last election campaign, the government said that it was in favour of increasing employment insurance benefits from 15 to 26 weeks. We said this before, but we will say it again: kudos. It is a step in the right direction, but it is clearly not enough for us.

Why do we need to amend this legislation?

First of all, it is completely outdated. It came into force in 1971, and there have been no major adjustments since. That was 50 years ago, and a lot has happened in the past 50 years. Society has evolved, and, more importantly, needs have changed. In fact, over the past 50 years, there have been many employment insurance bills aimed specifically at amending the 15 weeks of sickness benefits, but none of them passed.

Since 2002 alone, there was Bill C-442 to improve the employment insurance system, introduced by Yvon Godin, a former NDP member for Bathurst. That was followed in 2004 by Bill C-278, introduced by Paule Brunelle, a former Bloc Québécois member for Trois-Rivières.

In 2006, Mr. Godin reintroduced his bill, this time as Bill C-406. That same year, there was Bill C-269, introduced by former Bloc Québécois member Johanne Deschamps with the same objectives. In 2011, as we mentioned a couple of times this morning, there was also Bill C-291, which was introduced by Denis Coderre, the former Liberal member for Bourassa.

In short, bill after bill has tried and failed to amend the sickness provisions of this EI legislation or to bring them in line with a reality that, over time, had become quite different from what it was in 1971. Given that this issue has been dragging on for all these years, is it not time to settle it once and for all? Is it not time to stop dithering and take action?

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Here is another reason we need to change this legislation. Statistics show that one out of every two claimants does not return to work after 15 weeks off. In other words, one out of every two people dealing with a serious illness needs much more time for treatment or recovery than the 15 weeks that are currently provided.

• (1700)

There is another reason to make this change. In a 2008 ruling, the Supreme Court said that the employment insurance power must be interpreted generously.

What is more, let us not forget that, when it comes to employment insurance, Canada is the least generous country in the G7, with the exception of the United States, which is a completely different context. If we look at the percentage of GDP that is spent by each country, we see that Belgium devotes 3.6% of its GDP to employment insurance, while Canada devotes only 0.65%.

Portugal devotes 3.5% of its GDP to employment insurance. Ireland and Spain devote 2.7% of their GDP to employment insurance, and Denmark devotes 2.2%. I would remind members that Canada devotes only 0.65% of its GDP to employment insurance.

On top of that, employment insurance in many of these countries does not last a mere 15 or 26 weeks as the Liberals are proposing. People in these countries can receive employment insurance benefits for one to three years. That is a far cry from our 15 weeks.

Common sense, compassion, equity and social justice are some other reasons to amend this outdated act. The government needs to treat its people right. Treating people right means recognizing the importance of workers, respecting them and making up for the injustices of life. Getting sick and having to take months and months off work is not a choice, it is an injustice of life. We have the duty and power in the House to take quick action to correct this long-standing injustice.

In closing, as an old Tuareg proverb says, in the desert of life, the strong must help the weak because those who are strong today may be weak tomorrow.

• (1705)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I have listened a great deal to many of the Bloc members, and a couple of things have surfaced.

One example is the situation where those members have been factually incorrect. For example, I commented on the statement that seasonal workers were entitled to 50 weeks.

Here is another example that I would like to share with the member. The members have said that 23% of those who receive the benefits get better within that 15-week period. It is almost three times that number.

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Having factual information is of great benefit during this type of a debate. I wonder if my colleague and friend from the Bloc could reflect on the importance that we have the facts and that we provide them in this debate.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Madam Speaker, I believe I provided a number of specific facts.

For example, I mentioned the GDP of 15 or so countries that invest four, five, six or seven times more than we do in employment insurance. That is one example.

With respect to the 50 weeks my colleagues mentioned, I do not see the point of debating that again. It has been said.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Madam Speaker, there are a couple things to keep in mind in this debate. For a period of time, the Paul Martin administration took \$54 billion of employment insurance and put the money into general revenue. It is a fact that employment insurance is not really the government's money; it comes from employees and employers and we are just custodians of that.

My question is with regard to the extension of benefits. We have seen the improvement to maternity leave, going from one year to one and a half years. People can take that one and a half years, but their benefits are then stretched over the extra time. They are not actually increased, and that is a sad thing. When somebody is off for a longer period of time, not only is it good for the child but also for the employee, because that time allows someone to have a stable job for much longer and his or her skills get better. Therefore, it is better for our economy, too.

I would ask the member to comment on the fact that if we extend these benefits, the training, expertise and stability in the workforce are also improved, which makes us more competitive as a nation. It is very much an improvement for our economy in that way, too.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Desilets:** Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague's statement. The NDP and the Bloc are similar in many ways, especially on humanist issues.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am honoured and pleased to speak to the motion moved by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, which is now before the House under business of supply.

This motion is as clear as can be and deserves the unanimous support of all parties in the House. The government should be guided by logic and compassion on this matter, and it should set aside partisan imperatives that detract from this extremely important issue. Let me therefore say that I sincerely hope we will come together to adopt this motion, making it the first step toward a major change to the Employment Insurance Act.

The wording of the motion is very simple:

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

As we all know, the government is currently holding extensive pre-budget consultations aimed at informing the Minister of Finance's reflections on the important budget speech he will deliver in the House before too long. This important exercise includes its share of issues that are fundamental to the well-being of the population. It is time for the government to seize this opportunity and show some compassion for people with serious illnesses, particularly cancer. I could build a very detailed and convincing argument in that regard and I am confident that common sense would prevail amongst the members of all parties.

The motion we are debating is quite simple. EI has always been at the core of the concerns and progressive positions developed by the Bloc Québécois over the years. The Bloc Québécois has always fought to improve and enhance the EI system, including creating an independent fund, eliminating the black hole, improving access to regular benefits, ending the classification of unemployed workers based on the claims submitted to the program and, obviously, increasing all types of benefits.

Right now, anyone who has been around a person diagnosed with cancer can see that the special EI benefits for serious illnesses are baffling and absurd. No one in the House can say they have never faced this difficult, stressful reality.

The current system is blatantly unfair to different categories of EI recipients. Some colleagues have already raised concerns or questions about our proposal to extend the existing benefits system from 15 to 50 weeks. I do not think it could get any simpler than that. It is a matter of social justice and equity.

Speaking of equity, I would like to talk about a problem faced by one of my constituents with a serious illness. She was diagnosed with two autoimmune diseases. Her life was turned upside down in a matter of six months. She was entitled to 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits, but that was not enough. After the 15 weeks were up, she ended up on social assistance. That is completely unacceptable. She was battling her illnesses and also battling the system to get benefits so that she could pay her rent and grocery bills. This situation is unacceptable.

According to an in-depth study on the issue by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the 15 weeks of special EI sickness benefits were originally based on survey data from the Department of Employment and Social Development. According to those data, roughly 23% of claimants return to work immediately following the 15 weeks of benefits. Of the remaining claimants, 82% would take an additional 16 weeks off or more before returning to work. This is a serious situation, as everyone will agree. These people have to struggle not only with illness, but also with immense stress due to financial insecurity. Living on a reduced income is stressful for anyone, but for someone who is also facing a life-threatening health problem, the stress can become unbearable.

As its name suggests, the employment insurance system provides insurance of a certain income threshold in the event of job loss or forced absence due to extraordinary circumstances.

- (1715)

Since the creation of the special sickness benefits program nearly 50 years ago, the labour market as a whole has evolved significantly. The day-to-day reality of millions of individuals has transformed, but very little has changed in terms of the urgent challenge of achieving work-life balance.

Currently, a person who is laid off is entitled to regular employment insurance benefits. The birth or arrival of a child also triggers maternity leave or parental leave. However, if a worker finds out they have a serious illness that requires frequent or prolonged leave, the current system provides the same number of weeks of benefits as for a worker who has to take leave to recover from a physical injury such as a fracture, which ultimately will not jeopardize their long-term future or general health.

This is where there is a problem with the program, and this results in blatant unfairness for people who only want to get better as quickly as possible. No one wants to be ill. No one wants to go through such a challenging situation. It is unthinkable that anyone would want to be ill, to be diagnosed with cancer. I keep coming back to cancer, but the situation and the state of mind is the same for any long-term chronic illness. Cancer is a prime example because it affects almost everyone. It is a real tragedy.

This difficult reality means that a person who receives such news already has to deal with the shock, which can take many weeks to internalize. There are immense emotional consequences. It is not difficult to imagine the range of terrible emotions that overwhelm an individual when they receive that kind of diagnosis. This is when the full scope of the problem comes into play as does the compassionate approach long recommended by the Bloc Québécois.

This is not the first time that our party has called for better access to EI benefits for constituents dealing with a serious illness. The Bloc has taken action at least three times in the recent past by introducing bills to overhaul the act and to enhance benefits.

Members may recall Paul Crête fighting tirelessly for this for years and former Bloc Québécois MPs Jean-François Fortin and Robert Carrier picking up where he left off. Right from the beginning of this important debate, the Bloc was equally open to other

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parties, calling for a non-partisan approach to this crucial issue that would seek only to correct a terrible injustice.

For example, we supported a similar bill sponsored by Denis Coderre when he was in the House. We can all agree that a lot of water has flowed under the bridge since then and that this is not a new cause for the Bloc.

Unfortunately, we have always come up against unwillingness on the part of both Liberal and Conservative governments to consider fixing this serious problem. Worse still, recent governments have been influenced by financial considerations, citing budget cuts to justify the unjustifiable. Just imagine the cold heartlessness of that approach when a person's health or very life is at stake. It is abominable, despicable even.

I could also highlight another disappointing aspect of the current program by describing in detail the accessibility of caregiver benefits. There is a huge contradiction in compassionate leave. It is easy to imagine the insecurity and distress that a diagnosis of cancer or severe illness causes to the person's family. That is precisely why the caregiver benefits are an integral part of the benefit program.

The reality is quite different. Comparatively speaking, the benefits for caregivers are currently more advantageous than the framework established for someone who is seriously ill. A caregiver providing end-of-life care can technically receive benefits for longer than the current 15 weeks that patients with cancer or any other serious illness are allowed. How very ironic.

All avenues must be explored, and I would humbly submit that we consider the astronomical surpluses in the employment insurance fund. Everything leads us to believe that a fair balance is within reach. We just need everyone's goodwill in order to achieve it.

I firmly believe that there is a strong spirit of collaboration in this House that the Prime Minister cares deeply about. He has a golden opportunity right in front of him.

For the sake of the sick, we must do the right thing. We must demonstrate compassion and fairness. The House must unanimously pass the motion sponsored by the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

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• (1720)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, where I disagree with the Bloc members is they do not seem to recognize that prior to this government there was absolutely nothing happening. No changes had taken place to the benefit and the many things we have been talking about today. Since then, we have seen different reforms that have advanced workers in many ways with respect to employment insurance. On this issue, we are seeing an enhancement from 15 weeks to half a year. That has happened through consultations and working with the different stakeholders. It is a significant change.

Does my friend across the way not agree that maybe the Bloc would have been better off to present a motion to have the issue go to a committee where we could look at all of the different aspects of EI? That way we could look at turning other ideas into reality. If we are to be judged by the last four years, we have been very progressive at making some positive changes for Canada's workers and others.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Enough time has passed. More than seven bills have been introduced in the past. That is completely unacceptable. Why pass this off to a committee? Several avenues have already been explored. We have repeated many times today why we want to pick up the pace and why 26 weeks is wholly inadequate. We want to increase the number of weeks to 50. This needs to be done as quickly as possible.

Too many people are suffering. We need to take action.

[English]

**Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP):** Madam Speaker, it was good to hear a couple of names of people who have worked so hard on this issue mentioned in this chamber, for example, Mr. Crête. I worked with him for years. He was very solid on the industry committee with respect to so many consumer issues, as well as this issue. I would like to give a special shout-out to one person who was not mentioned and that is Yvon Godin, the former member for Acadie—Bathurst. He definitely tabled the most bills in this chamber to improve employment insurance and spoke to it often.

What I think we see differently from the government is that this is not the government's money. It is the workers' and employers' money in a relationship to provide good, stable employment.

By moving it in this direction, in many respects, I believe this is going to be of benefit to employers, because they can get more stability for replacement employees during the process as well as have workers come back to work in a better state of mind, because their life and family are taken care of at home. I do not think that should be underestimated.

We should make sure we understand that this decision is not just about an individual person. It is about our overall economy. We

would have more productivity and would be better off as a nation because we would have better rules relating to caring for loved ones, especially with an aging society. This is a perfect time for it. We do not need to study it anymore. Cancer does not wait. Illnesses do not wait. These are things we should be doing right away.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I certainly agree with a lot of what he said about the problem we are speaking out about today. A healthy society can help the economy flourish. This can always help employees and employers.

The government holds the purse strings, even though the fund belongs to workers, as we have heard. We know that the workers' fund is currently worth more than \$4 billion. This money could be used to lower the cost of the new bill. The money is there, and the fund belongs to workers. We must address this inequity and injustice.

We need to show compassion.

• (1725)

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion. The employment insurance program is an important part of Canada's social security net. With every paycheque, Canadian workers have spent years paying into the employment insurance program. Whether it is due to job loss, parental leave or sickness, Canadians who have contributed to this program should have confidence that the program benefits are available to them when they need them.

As legislators we owe it to Canadians to ensure that the EI program is not only fair, flexible and supportive, but that it is also a viable program in the long term. The motion before us today calls special attention to the employment insurance sickness benefits. The current structure of this program provides up to 15 weeks of sickness benefits to eligible employees who are unable to work for medical reasons.

I have no doubt in my mind that every member in this chamber understands the value of this benefit. We have all dealt with it personally, or experienced it through a loved one, or at least known someone who was unable to work because of a serious illness or a medical condition.

We can surely find agreement that when someone is faced with serious illness, the person's focus and energy is better spent on recovery and not worrying about making ends meet. As we have heard in this place, the current 15-week benefit threshold was established in 1971 and almost 50 years later there is certainly merit in reviewing the program.

In the previous Parliament and now again in this Parliament, I have had the privilege of being a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, better known as the HUMA committee. This committee has the latitude to review the EI sickness benefits program.

In the previous Parliament, in its "Supporting Families After the Loss of a Child" report, the HUMA committee recommended that the government gather data specific to employment insurance sickness benefits used to support bereavement and high-risk pregnancy.

Also, in its "Taking Action: Improving the Lives of Canadians Living with Episodic Disabilities" report, the HUMA committee made specific recommendations to improve the EI program's ability to meet the needs of Canadians living with episodic disabilities and their families. Allowing workers to claim benefits in smaller units, such as hours or days, instead of weeks was just one option that was put forward in this report.

This recommendation shows that there is room to modernize and improve the flexibility of the EI sickness benefit to better support Canadians living with an episodic disability. These two studies, as well as other work done by the HUMA committee, demonstrated the merit of a full review of the EI sickness benefit program.

In fact, in the previous Parliament, on multiple occasions, one of my NDP colleagues moved a motion to that effect. That motion specifically called on the HUMA committee to review the employment insurance sickness benefits as it relates to current program outcomes, the impacts of the current structure and its accessibility. The motion had my support and that of my Conservative colleagues, but it was very unfortunate that on every single occasion the motion was moved, the Liberal members of the committee who had the majority shut down the debate.

Understanding the success and the failures of any program is vital in shaping a better program. We do not have a comprehensive study to lean on today in considering this motion, but maybe we would have if in the previous Parliament my NDP colleague's motion had not been shut down time and time again.

• (1730)

That is why I would strongly support the HUMA committee undertaking a comprehensive review of this program. Equipped with a full review of the EI sickness benefit program, we could help ensure that we make the necessary changes to the program so that the program delivered is in the interests of all Canadians.

Today's motion suggests that a new maximum sickness benefit be set to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget, but there are many considerations to be made in changing this program that are not addressed in this motion. I would note the other proposals that have been made to modernize this program from previous committee re-

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ports. It is important that we consider the increased cost to employer and employee premiums.

Despite the sunny portrait that is often painted by the current Liberal government, constituents in my riding are faced with a hard reality. We do not even have to look past the two main economic drivers in my region to understand that reality. Our energy sector is being crushed by the Liberal government, and our farmers and agricultural producers are constantly finding themselves on the losing end of the government's failed policies and failed leadership. Lay-offs and unemployment are a real possibility for many of my constituents.

It would be wholly irresponsible to not fully evaluate and understand the impact of increased premiums. We also have to consider that not all Canadians are eligible for EI program benefits. In fact, one-fifth of working Canadians do not qualify for the EI program. They would not benefit from this motion that is proposed today.

This, in turn, raises the question of whether the EI program is the best support system to help Canadians dealing with serious illness. Again, as a member of the HUMA committee, I do hope that we can have the opportunity to review this program, an opportunity to hear from the experts and those who are or who work with those directly affected by this program, so that we can ensure that the EI program continues to be there when Canadians need it, that we are not undermining the fiscal viability of that program, that changes to the program do not have other unintended economic impacts, and, of course, that in reforming the program, we are making the program more fair, flexible and supportive.

I appreciate that today's motion highlights these important issues. It gives us an opportunity to evaluate the EI program in the House, but I do hope we have the opportunity for a more thorough evaluation of it, so that any modernizations to the program are quality modernizations and that we ensure that the EI program works effectively for Canada and all Canadians.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, when the government allowed for an increase in the CPP benefit, the Conservatives called it a tax. We looked at it as a way to support workers in their retirement, but Conservatives called it a tax.

Now we are looking at allowing for an increase from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. That means there will be an increase in terms of the EI benefits, quite likely.

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I am wondering if the member would say that same principle would apply. Does the Conservative Party look at any sort of an increase to EI premiums as being a tax on business?

• (1735)

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Madam Speaker, before I answer that, we need to back up to the last Parliament. I mentioned two studies. I came to this place only in 2017, in a by-election. I am not even referencing the work that was done before that.

The committee members on HUMA have done a lot of work. They heard from witnesses that there needed to be further studies with recommendations. The “Taking Action: Improving the Lives of Canadians Living with Episodic Disabilities” report suggested claim benefits of smaller units, hours or days instead of just weeks.

Before I can even make a comment on what is being proposed by the government today, we need to back up and do a thorough study on this before we make suggestions.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to see you here again.

I thank my colleague for her speech and for her concern about the need to reform the Employment Insurance Act. I agree with her.

There are some aspects of employment insurance that need to be examined in more detail and that may require more attention. Some things have been discussed and have been established for a long time. A number of parties here have been calling for them urgently. That is what we are talking about today.

Right now, many people are suffering financially because they have a serious illness. EI is slow and we are dragging our feet here in the House about a change that we could make quickly and easily without negatively affecting the public purse. I think that we need to consider the fact that this is urgent.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks, we want to make sure that these changes, if there are changes to the program, do not have unintended economic impacts.

I think that we should have this sent to the HUMA committee to study it and hear from real people who are dealing with this on the ground. The House could then make recommendations or change what needs to be changed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question.

We know that, in life, going into space is complicated, beating cancer is complicated and conducting scientific research is complicated. However, improving employment insurance is not complicated.

Why can we not take action right away to make EI more accessible and to give sick people the weeks of benefits they need? It seems to me that that is just common sense.

[English]

**Mrs. Rosemarie Falk:** Madam Speaker, we want to make sure that there are no unintended economic impacts by drastically tripling it, going from 15 weeks to 50 weeks, or the 20-some weeks that the government is suggesting.

I think that the committee should be able to look at this. We should be able to hear from people on the ground and take into account what they have to say.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster for her excellent speech. I sensed a great deal of emotion in her presentation, which is to her credit.

Today we are debating an opposition motion that reads as follows:

That the House call on the government to increase the special Employment Insurance sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks in the upcoming budget in order to support people with serious illnesses, such as cancer.

The aim of this motion is interesting, for I do believe it is important to take care of Canadians who have a serious illness. However, why does it call for 50 weeks? I do not know, and I cannot answer that question.

On February 5, I made a statement in the House reminding members of the need to review the special EI sickness benefits, and gave the example of Émilie Sansfaçon, a constituent of mine who lives in Saint-Augustin. This morning I saw her father sitting in the gallery, facing the Bloc Québécois. He came to listen to what the House of Commons was saying on this matter. Ms. Sansfaçon received two cancer diagnoses in the span of a single year. In a heartfelt plea, she called on all political parties to review the current maximum benefit period of 15 weeks.

During the election campaign, I met with her father, Mr. Sansfaçon, to get his side of the story. I obviously promised to take concrete action to improve things for these Canadians who are diagnosed with a serious illness that forces them to be away from work.

The current employment insurance sickness benefit program was established in 1971. That is nearly 50 years ago. Maybe that is where the 50 weeks the Bloc Québécois is asking for came from: since it has been 50 years, the Bloc is asking for 50 weeks. If it had been 70 years, would they have asked for 70 weeks? I do not know, but I wonder.

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Obviously, the legislation needs to change. Ms. Sansfaçon has been very courageous considering she has to deal with this serious illness. As I said in the House on February 5, this young woman, and all Canadians with a serious illness, should have the privilege of focusing on their well-being and the care they need instead of the financial concerns that crop up once the 15 weeks of benefits come to an end.

What is absurd about the 15 weeks of sickness benefits is that chemotherapy treatments last at least six months. That was the case for Ms. Sansfaçon after she was diagnosed with cancer the first time. When her benefits ran out, she had to remortgage her house and she asked her family for financial assistance after exhausting her line of credit.

I don't claim to be a doctor, but according to the medical guidance, a patient should convalesce for three months after having chemotherapy to return to full health. Ms. Sansfaçon had to return to work less than a week after the end of her treatments because she had no other choice. She could no longer cope financially. Even worse, five months later she learned that the cancer had returned and that it was stage four and inoperable, having metastasized to the lungs. She can no longer live without chemotherapy and her days are numbered.

As we all know, this is unfortunately not the only young woman who has or will have to deal with this illness, or I would say this cursed illness.

I will cite the statistics published by the Canadian Cancer Society. According to the 2016 data that was recently published, cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada. It is responsible for 30% of all deaths, compared to 19% caused by heart disease. It is expected that one in two Canadians, or 45% of men and 43% of women, will develop cancer in their lifetimes. One in four Canadians, or 26% of men and 23% of women, is expected to die of cancer.

• (1740)

Thanks to advances in medicine and increasingly effective treatments, it is now possible to cure roughly 60% of cancers. With continuing medical research, this number will undoubtedly increase and treatments will take less and less time.

Right now, the majority of cancers require extended treatments that take more than 15 weeks—not to mention other serious illnesses and medical conditions that require long periods of treatment and recovery. It is appalling how the Liberal government keeps flushing taxpayer money down the drain. It is handing out gifts to Mastercard and Loblaws and buying pipelines. Well, it is not a matter of money anymore. The government needs to take concrete action.

I wonder what happened to the government's compassion. The negative health impacts of stress have been proven. I think it is cruel to create more stress for Canadians who have been or will be diagnosed with a serious illness requiring more than 15 weeks of treatment or recovery. Getting the bad news is stressful, the treatment itself is stressful, and there is financial stress on top of that. In 2020, I think Canada can be there to help these people.

The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities should

take an in-depth look at EI sickness benefits to make sure they meet the needs of Canadians.

Canada and the U.S. have the two least generous systems, with 15 weeks. Let us compare with other countries. Germany, for example, another G7 country, provides 72 weeks of benefits with the possibility of extending for up to 3 years. France has up to 360 days over a non-recurring 3-year period. Italy offers 50% of daily benefits for the first 17 days and 66% thereafter; there is then a 3-day waiting period for a total of 180 eligible days. Japan offers benefits matching two-thirds of standard daily wages for up to 18 months. The United Kingdom does not rely solely on employment insurance. They have another system and two different types of benefits: one based on employer and employee contributions, and another based on revenue and resources. There is no time limit for the payment of revenue-based support benefits.

Here is what I am getting at: Why does the motion mention 50 weeks? I mentioned a few countries, but there are many more examples out there. Other members talked about different systems in other jurisdictions. Why did the Bloc pick 50 weeks?

This is a matter that must be acted on responsibly. We have to take the necessary steps to get the right answers and treat Canadians well. There has to be a will, there has to be an intent and it has to be a priority. The government simply has to be genuinely compassionate and specifically want to help people.

I see my time is running out, so I will skip right to the conclusion. I have questions for my Bloc Québécois colleagues.

What data did they use to come up with 50 weeks, when the Canadian Cancer Society only asked for 26 weeks? Surely the folks at the Canadian Cancer Society deal with seriously ill people on a more regular basis than members of the Bloc. I put more faith in the Canadian Cancer Society.

What solution does the Bloc Québécois have for people who do not qualify for employment insurance? They are Canadians too, and they are also entitled to assistance.

I am perfectly willing to work with the government to find the best system and determine the right number of weeks to support the thousands of Canadians who have been diagnosed with cancer, like Émilie Sansfaçon, who lives in my riding of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

• (1745)

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

In answer to his questions, I would say that this is a matter of fairness. We have already shown that the 50 weeks would give people who are suffering from a serious illness the same rights as workers who lose their jobs. We based our proposal on the findings of a study on this subject with the goal of being fair to everyone.

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With regard to compassion for this cause, I would like to remind my colleague that, when the Liberal opposition introduced a bill in this regard, the Conservatives opposed it because it would cost too much.

Once again, I think that we have demonstrated today that there was an employment insurance surplus that could be used to cover these 50 weeks.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Shefford.

Fairness is important. However, the Bloc Québécois is saying that the government must grant 50 weeks so that sick people and workers get the same benefits. I would therefore like to inform the House and those watching on ParLVU that workers get a maximum of 45 weeks depending on what region they live in. Where is this 50 weeks coming from?

If we look at history, we have to go back as far as 1971. There have been Liberal and Conservative governments. There has never been a Bloc Québécois government so we cannot know what their intentions were. The two parties that have been in power since then moved with the times. Now it is 2020. We cannot change the past, but the people in our Quebec caucus can change the future and really take care of Canadians who need help.

• (1750)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I had this question before with the previous Conservative speaker and I am very much interested in what the Conservative Party's position is on this issue.

For a long time we have been advocating for a review of the EI sickness benefits. We worked with associations like the Canadian Cancer Society, as well as other health groups and stakeholders, and we are now suggesting that we need an increase from 15 weeks to half a year. Does the Conservative Party support that initiative? It would be interesting to know that.

The previous Conservative speaker seemed to imply that it did not and would rather see it go to committee for study. Could the member provide some clarification on the issue?

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg North.

Increasing the benefit period from 15 weeks to 26 is a step in the right direction. To pick up on the Bloc Québécois's analogy about 26 weeks being like doors and windows, I would say that we need to keep fixing up the rest of the house.

I think fixing up the rest of the house is a great idea, but we need a plan. We need to study the situation, maximize our options and find a solution that will really help Canadians and Quebeckers so we can make sure they are treated properly and have the right number of weeks. We need to think about it and study it.

That said, I would recommend that the government study this in committee and fast-track the process so we can get recommendations by the time the session ends on June 23, 2020.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** We have time for a brief question. The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ):** I am a little confused by what you just said. I thought you supported your constituents' motion—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Order. Members must address their remarks to the Chair, not directly to a member.

**Mrs. Julie Vignola:** Madam Speaker, thank you for the reminder.

I was saying that I am somewhat troubled. On the one hand, I get the impression that my colleague supports the Bloc motion that his own constituents support, but on the other hand, he is making comparisons with Europe, talking about the number of weeks and days in relation to a certain number of years.

We are saying that 50 weeks is the maximum, just as there is a maximum for seasonal workers. That is where there seems to be a disconnect. I would like him to explain this inconsistency.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Madam Speaker, I want to defend myself against this accusation of inconsistency from the hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

I will explain to the hon. member, who is new to the House, that we are currently having a debate. I have not yet indicated how I will vote. The vote will be held tomorrow after question period. What I am saying is that we have to take care of these people. My slogan is not "50 years, 50 weeks".

Let us give this some thought and take this initiative seriously.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

I add my voice to those of my colleagues to emphasize the importance of this motion regarding special EI benefits. I do so in all seriousness. I am not convinced that the member who spoke before me was being very serious.

The first example, which we have been speaking about at length, is cancer. According to Canadian Cancer Society statistics from 2019, breast cancer survival rates have increased by 48% since 1986. However, it is the second most frequently diagnosed type of cancer. Nearly half of all Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime. My mother died of cancer over 20 years ago. At the time, one in 10 people would be diagnosed with cancer. Now it is one in two. Lastly, also according to the Canadian Cancer Society, nearly one in four people will die of cancer.

There are many inconsistencies in the EI system, since it has been butchered in the past. We have tinkered with the system. Why not keep tinkering with it to help people who need it because they are ill?

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I would like to point out another inconsistency and injustice with respect to the sickness benefit versus the compassionate care benefit. In the socio-demographic context of an aging population, the role of caregivers, more than 60% of whom are women, is key when discussing care for the sick and elderly. It was only right to create the compassionate care benefit. It has a maximum benefit of 26 weeks. It must be said that it is unusual that an individual suffering from a serious illness cannot receive the same number of weeks of benefits.

I will now talk about a situation that is not entirely hypothetical. A caregiver taking care of a seriously ill person suggests that they spend a week down south to escape the cold winter weather and storms. To feel better and take a refreshing break, these people decide to go on a trip. The caregiver can leave the country without losing their compassionate care benefits, but the person who is ill would lose that week of benefits. That week of benefits would not be paid.

I believe that we all have a responsibility to give sick people a chance to heal. Illness does not discriminate. Illness is everywhere, and it does not only strike people who have wage loss insurance or critical illness insurance. A worker who is seriously ill must be able to focus on getting to remission and, if possible, making a full recovery.

People grappling with illness face all kinds of difficult situations. For example, they have to rearrange their daily routines in their personal and professional lives, they see an inevitable drop in income and they have to cover the costs associated with hospital visits.

Let us try to imagine what thousands of patients are going through. I invite my colleagues to take a moment to consider what 15 weeks looks like in real life.

In week one, the patient is diagnosed with stage II colorectal cancer, or perhaps with what is initially considered an inoperable pancreatic cancer. The doctor encourages the patient to seek treatment and comes up with a clinical picture. The patient and their loved ones are left in shock.

The following week, the patient gets their schedule for the first three-week cycle of chemotherapy. Their loved ones are responsive, taking turns keeping the children on schedule. The administrative aspects of the patient's work absence are taken care of. The patient's spouse takes compassionate leave and provides support. Together, they are earning \$803 a week before taxes. They have two kids who are old enough to understand what is going on.

In week four, a check-up shows promising results.

In week five, the patient starts a new cycle of chemo. The next few weeks are a time of increased weakness, lethargy, hair loss, chronic fatigue and worried looks. The anxiety and dark thoughts are overwhelming.

• (1755)

In week nine, the second cycle is complete. The results are promising, however, and the medical follow-up changes. The tumour is now operable. The patient then has to prepare by eating well, getting as much rest as possible and keeping their spirits up.

In week 11, it is finally time to operate. The doctor is confident. The patient is exhausted but full of hope. There are some minor post-operative complications, but nothing too serious.

In week 12, the patient goes home. That is when their family's financial situation really hits them. In the struggle to stay alive, they had not allowed themselves to pay much attention to financial matters. Then comes the inevitable: in two weeks, the benefits will stop.

The patient's spouse might be able to stay home for a few more weeks, but with the patient's health improving, will the compassionate care benefits get cut? Can the household continue to function with a taxable income of \$573 per week? What if the patient were a single parent?

The next form that the patient would need to fill out would be a welfare application, as my colleague alluded to earlier. That is what the 15-week period leads to.

Is it not enough that patients have to deal with follow-up appointments, future treatments and their many side effects, anxiety, sadness, children and loved ones? Must we also add to their struggles by denying them 50 weeks of sickness benefits? Must we really wait until June 2020 to consider this in committee? Is it not time to act? We can do it now. The vote is tomorrow.

I remind the House that it has been 12 years since the \$57 million surplus was taken from the employment insurance fund by the federal government and transferred to general revenue. It has to end. That money was paid by workers and employers.

I will exercise some restraint and not utter the word that springs to mind when the \$57 million taken by the government are mentioned.

Thanks to breakthroughs in medical research, people with serious illnesses have a glimmer of hope. Tales of victory and survival are no longer as rare as they once were. We all have survivors in our personal and professional circles. There are even some right here in this House. Going back to a normal life also means going back to work and to a daily routine.

As my party's critic for the environment, I must talk about the links between the environment and health. It is imperative to once again underscore in this House how important it is to look at this issue in terms of environmental issues. If we take a frank and honest look at the situation, given that we have workers dealing with serious illnesses, it has to be part of the discussion. Everybody's health, and workers' health specifically in this case, will be bound up more and more closely with environmental issues in the coming years.

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I will give a bit more information on that subject. We talked about research this afternoon. Let us see what the results are.

According to the Canadian Medical Association, air pollution causes 21,000 premature deaths each year. Those were people who were already sick.

Last year, the scientific journal *Epidemiology* published conclusive research from McGill University's Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Occupational Health. The data are significant. Nanoparticles from fuels and volatile pollutants increase the risk of brain cancer by 10%. Rising rates of thyroid cancers over the last 30 years show links between health, pollution and the environment.

Lastly, *The Lancet*, a scientific journal that is renowned as a leading authority, publishes reports that are now in their fourth edition.

Given all these results, how can anyone justify maintaining the same 15-week period we have had since 1996?

I will conclude by saying that human decency is knocking on the government's door today.

• (1800)

Many people have rallied to fight cancer and other serious illnesses and were unable to access EI benefits that fit their needs because of their professional circumstances. More than 500,000 people have signed Ms. Dubé's petition, which members of this House received in 2016. Many families are joining together to offer support, hope and love to those who fall victim to an insidious disease that they did not choose. On behalf of all these people, we ask the government to open the door and support our motion.

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, as we have been moving forward over the last number of years with changes and making our EI system that much better, ministries within the government have been working with different stakeholders. I referenced some of those earlier today, particularly in the health care area. The idea of 26 weeks or half a year was widely accepted. Increasing it from 15 weeks to 26 weeks or half a year would be a positive thing.

Toward the end of her speech, the member talked about the importance of data, about the information that is there. Now that the Bloc understands that the government is moving forward, that we are going to look at increasing sick benefits to half a year, does that party recognize that some of the information that is being talked about today should go to committee where we could look at not only increasing sick benefits, but the wider picture that really needs to be addressed?

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. I expected a different one.

We can act now. Why wait? We have the data, and I can provide more. What are we waiting for? Right now, sick people get only 15

weeks of benefits. Whether it is a broken bone or cancer, they get 15 weeks, period. Something is obviously not right with this picture.

I will admit that the federal government made progress on EI during the last Parliament. I also recognize that EI was butchered in the past. In 2011, 2012 and 2013, the government did everything in its power to limit access to employment insurance. The previous government made progress, but much more needs to be done. If we start reviewing everything, we will still be here in 10 years. We know how these things go. I will not be here in 10 years, but others will be.

Tomorrow, we can vote for the motion and provide immediate relief to those who are suffering. I feel like that is what an MP's role should be.

**Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague from Repentigny for her speech.

I would like to ask her a question. Earlier, we saw that some of our colleagues, including the members for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier and Winnipeg North, seem to think a 50-week benefit period is too much and that a 26-week benefit period would suffice. The Bloc Québécois members believe that people who are ill should receive benefits for the entire duration of their illness, up to a maximum of 50 weeks.

If our colleagues from Winnipeg North and Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier are giving up their constituents' benefits, could that money be used in other ridings so that people can receive benefits for a longer period?

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord, who always has some very practical ideas.

What needs to be highlighted is that members asked why we did not call for 60 or 70 weeks and whether we would be adding 20 weeks if it were 20 years from now. We need to be serious. A worker who loses their job is entitled to 50 weeks of benefits, whereas a worker who becomes ill is entitled to 15 weeks. That is the baseline amount, and that is what we are condemning. It is time for change. Since 1996, benefits have been capped at 15 weeks.

Yes, some things have improved. However, with everything that is happening in terms of pollution and climate change, some things are getting worse. As I stated in my speech, my mother died more than 20 years ago. At the time, one in 10 people got cancer. Today, it is one in two. In my opinion, what people eat, drink and breathe must have something to do with it.

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ):** Madam Speaker, to begin with, I would like to reassure the people of my riding. They are not just concerned about employment insurance sickness benefits. They are also concerned about the infamous spring gap that many of them will have to deal with in March. I want to reassure my constituents that I will listen to them and will continue to work hard so that the special EI needs of people in the regions are heard. I will not give up. That is for sure.

In my riding, as in many other ridings in Quebec, employment insurance is key to worker retention, as I was explaining to our colleagues. We cannot claim to be calling for such action without promising the workers in question that they will benefit from EI measures that are fair and adapted to both a temporary lack of work and certain health realities.

Obviously, the Bloc Québécois wants to have more autonomy over employment insurance so that we can better adapt it to the reality in Quebec, both its urban centres and its regions. For example, we would like to establish a seasonal worker status. What is more, we would like to implement an insurance process that would give workers who are seriously ill access to income protection insurance that is flexible, appropriate and fair and that would allow them to extend the benefit period based on their health and their doctor's evaluation. Of course, we are not at that point, because we do not have sovereignty over employment insurance, but that is one of our objectives.

We all know that no one wants to be seriously ill. I am choosing my words carefully here, but these situations are determined by fate, just like job losses due to a lack of work. Our request is very simple. We want people who are seriously ill to have comparable insurance to people who lose their jobs because of a lack of work. The cause is the same in both cases, namely fate, or a situation that is completely out of their control.

That term should be added to our considerations so that we can avoid all kinds of comments, analyses, studies and consultations that will just further delay the process for people who need help now, who need help tomorrow.

Let us think about that for a moment. How is it possible that a worker who voluntarily leaves their job to take care of a loved one with a serious illness will receive better EI benefits than the person who is actually ill? It is almost embarrassing.

Émilie Sansfaçon can currently only receive 15 weeks of EI sickness benefits for her serious illness, or only 26 weeks going forward. Her sister and her spouse are entitled to the same benefits, although they are not the ones who are sick. It is fundamentally illogical.

Today, I am calling on the House to apply logic. It is not easy to look Émilie in the eye and tell her that, under the law, she has only 15 weeks to recover, or 26 weeks at most, as the other side of the House is proposing. Émilie is fighting for her life, for her young children, and is struggling with difficult treatments all while fighting for what we are fighting for here today, when she should be dedicating all of her time to recovering. She has taken up this cause

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because she knows that she is not alone and that there will be others.

While we are debating this issue in the House, Émilie is looking at her calendar to determine when the easiest time will be between her chemotherapy treatments so she can organize another fundraiser to raise enough money to get her through the next month. This is what she is doing while we talk here and while some members push for more studies. Émilie is looking for a time in her calendar when she will not be too nauseated or too exhausted to organize a fundraiser so her friends can help her pay her bills.

I challenge any member of the House to look her in the eye and tell her that we did nothing or that we did only part of what we should have done.

• (1810)

That is not the issue. Today, we can work together to show the people of Quebec and Canada that, when people are sick and lacking funds, we can come to a consensus that will serve the voters who elected us.

Who here can prove that 15 weeks at 50% of a person's salary is enough to cover their needs and the needs of their children, if applicable, for the duration of a treatment if that involves 26 biweekly chemotherapy treatments, as in Émilie's case?

Math is not my strong suit, but, if my calculations are correct, that adds up to 52 weeks. For those who have suggested that 50 weeks is a random number, that is a concrete example of why it is realistic. It will take Émilie 52 weeks to get well. Would anyone in the House like to try showing me mathematically how Émilie can manage financially with 15 weeks or 26 weeks? If anyone can prove that to me, I urge them to rise now, and I will give them the floor.

We are elected legislators. We have the right and the duty to consider and implement fair and equitable laws without letting sentimentality or compassion impede our judgment. However, I sincerely believe that no one is indifferent when it comes to employment insurance for people who have a serious illness, such as cancer in particular. I have not seen anyone who is indifferent. We all know that we cannot put aside the fundamentally human aspect of this subject. So be it.

For once, let us add a little compassion to this exercise. Let us draw on our better selves and vote in favour of the Bloc Québécois motion that calls for fairness and justice for workers who meet all the insurability criteria and who are perfectly entitled to those benefits.

Let us not forget that the people who are currently sick and their employers paid into the employment insurance fund. It is their money. They participated in the collective contribution exercise so that anyone in need can get the appropriate employment insurance sickness benefits, that is to say, a minimum of 50 weeks of benefits.

*Business of Supply*

Since taxpayers are the ones who contribute to the employment insurance fund, it is self-sustaining, particularly in a situation of almost full employment. This will have no real financial impact on the public purse.

Given that this request has been raised repeatedly in the past, that the Employment Insurance Act requires several adjustments adapted to today's realities, and that it has not changed in 40 years, I am appealing to the deep conscience of every member of the House to help Émilie Sansfaçon and Marie-Hélène Dubé, as well as every Michel, Yvon, Stéphane, Olivier, Julie, Violette, Fernand, Gérald, Pierrette, my uncle, my aunt, and my neighbour weather the storm of illness and hope for the peace of mind that will aid in their recovery.

All of this because we in the House had the wonderful idea of setting our differences aside and voting in favour of a motion that will enable them to live every moment, good or bad, in serenity, fairness and justice.

• (1815)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, Liberals have shown a great deal of compassion. Not only have we shown compassion, we have actually delivered on the issue. We hear a lot about health care. We have record amounts of money, hundreds of millions of additional dollars, invested in health care in every region of our country. We have seen tens of millions invested specifically into cancer and what we can do to minimize that disease.

On the issue of employment insurance with respect to sickness, the member makes reference to years. For the first time, we have a government that is now looking at increasing it from 15 weeks to half a year. That is significant.

Would the member agree that the initiatives that are being talked about and taken are good for Canadians, no matter where they live in the country?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments.

I agree with my colleague that concrete efforts have been made. These remarkable efforts have indeed helped change the situation for certain workers. I said "certain workers" because those changes do not help all workers. It is on a case-by-case basis. It can be said that some things have been done, and I am very pleased.

However, I want to reiterate something I said for my colleague's benefit. I suggest that he try getting 26 chemotherapy treatments, one treatment every two weeks, and see whether 50% of his salary is enough for a family with two children to live on for 26 weeks.

I would like to hear his thoughts on that.

• (1820)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, one of the areas I have tried to highlight is the importance of having factual information during this debate. The Bloc referenced the issue of seasonal workers and said that seasonal workers get 50 weeks of EI. That is not the case, and that is not the only issue in terms of factual information.

When I talk about that, I like to think it reinforces the need for us not to just say yes to the half-year but that maybe there is room for us to grow, and one of the ways we can do that is by talking about the facts in committee and looking at the data. Many Bloc members talked about the importance of the data. Would the member not agree that we should be looking at the issue in a standing committee also?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens:** Madam Speaker, many matters can be referred to committees, but they are not as urgent.

Seasonal workers were mentioned earlier. I have known seasonal work very well for the past 30 years. I can assure my colleague that there are eligibility criteria for employment insurance. When a seasonal or full-time worker meets the criteria for their region and unemployment rate, they are entitled to a full 50 weeks of benefits. Seasonal worker or not, if they have worked a certain number of hours over a certain period of time, they are entitled to 50 weeks of benefits. I promise you that is true.

Committees can look at the details. In my speech, I mentioned the spring gap and commended the steps that were undertaken with the pilot project. It had a positive impact in my region, and the gap was starting to close a little.

Another very interesting project is on the horizon. It encourages workers to specialize in their area of expertise or to explore a different field. Employers pay them and get reimbursed by the government.

Those are projects that you brought forward. We applaud them, and we thank you for them. Nevertheless, many aspects of employment insurance can be improved. What we want to do today, as a matter of the utmost urgency, is to enable sick people to buy food and clothing and keep a decent roof over their heads. We are not asking for charity. This is taxpayers' money. In fact, we are all quite happy to—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I am sorry to interrupt the member, but her time is up. I tried to give her a bit more time so that she could finish her sentence.

I would also remind her that she must address her comments through the Chair and not directly to other members.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs.

*Business of Supply*

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and speak to the motion today before the House. I will be sharing my time with the member for Alfred-Pellan and I certainly want to acknowledge the member opposite who brought forward this motion for debate. It is a very important motion. I would also like to acknowledge all of the members in this House who rose today to participate in debate.

I first want to say that unemployment insurance benefits, or employment insurance, as we call it these days, is a critical program to workers all across Canada. Anyone who represents a rural riding in the north realizes how very critical that program is, not just for seasonal workers but for all people who need income during times of work loss.

This particular issue is one that hits at the heart and the home of many parliamentarians. All of us at some point in our careers have had to deal with families and family members going through sicknesses and illnesses who needed to take time off and take leave from their jobs to be able to care for themselves or someone they love.

We also know that the employment insurance program in Canada is a last resort for many. We know that, and we have recognized it as a government. In the time we have been in office in this chamber as the Government of Canada, our party has introduced and made fundamental changes to the employment insurance program to be able to protect workers and their families. We know how important it is, and therefore we have been able to reflect upon their requests and their needs and what is in their best interests.

We also know that many times workers cannot help the fact that they lose their jobs, get sick or have others around them who need their care. Therefore, having that support program is critical to them and the people they love.

In the 2018 budget, we were able to ensure that not only did we have an EI program there for Canadians when they needed it, but we also extended the period that people could work while on a claim, which helped so many families in Canada. It allowed maternity and sick benefits so that mothers who were dealing with an illness or injury would have greater flexibility and could pace their return to work in a way that was better suited to them. The EI benefit program allowed them to do that.

We also introduced a new five-week employment insurance, a shared parental benefit, and I know many families in my riding who have used that benefit, along with families in ridings represented by others here. It gave both parents the opportunity to share some of that parental leave when they most needed to be with their young children.

We also know these proposed new benefits, which did not exist before, are going to provide for greater flexibility, especially to the moms, and allow them to have that ability to choose when they return to work and to be able to adapt to a schedule that met their family's needs.

In 2017, we also introduced a new EI caregiving benefit. That benefit was well debated, not only in the House but also among our caucus and among Canadians. At the time, there was no benefit for

those who had aging parents or family members who needed care, and they could not take leave to provide it. We made way for the 15 weeks, which allowed them temporary leave from their work to support a family member who was critically ill or injured.

That program is working. We have had many conversations with Canadians about how we can provide more improvements in that program and be more accommodating to them. That is why we continue to consult: It is so that we can improve the programs and benefits we provide.

We have also seen many parents of critically ill children who have been able to collect up to 35 weeks of benefits at a time when they needed it most in their lives. That program has been extended to very many Canadian families at a time when they were in dire straits and in a situation no family would want to be in.

• (1825)

I know that our government also took many steps to improve the EI program as it related to seasonal workers. I hear my colleague talking about the black hole in the EI program. Those of us who represent seasonal industries and workers in seasonal industries know all too well what that means. We also know that there are ways to bridge that gap, and we can do it under certain reforms of this program. We announced a pilot project last year in certain regions of Canada. We have been testing how those benefits can best work, but we need to continue to provide those reliable supports for seasonal workers. In order to do that, we will continue to work with them and discuss with them ways we can improve the program. We will continue to collect the data we need to ensure that we are putting the right programs in place.

I know that many health advocates out there, including the Canadian Cancer Society, have called for longer terms for EI sickness and EI benefits in order to better support those individuals and families who have longer recovery periods from illness. I am a cancer survivor. I went through surgery. I went through six months of chemotherapy. I went through radiation treatment. I was in a position where I did not have to turn to EI benefits, and I was very fortunate. That was because I had a job that allowed me to transition through that period in my life. However, it was also in that period in my life that I met many families that were having tremendous difficulty navigating through a serious illness, having to take leave from their jobs and the financial pressure that went along with it. It was during that time that I started to advocate for changes in the EI program. I am proud to say that today our government will move from 15 to 26 weeks to allow for extended benefits to families that need it.

*Business of Supply*

I think what we have here today is a recognition, both by the Bloc and by our government, of that need existing out there, and a recognition that families are looking to us for that support, that compassion and that endorsement at that particular time in their life. I think where we disagree is on the number of weeks that should be provided, whether it should be 26 weeks, 15 weeks, 20 weeks or 50 weeks, whatever the case may be. However, if we look at the analysis that was done by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, we are falling in line with their recommendation to extend benefits to 26 weeks for Canadian families.

One of the saddest situations I ran into at that particular time, and a situation that I continue to run into in my riding, is families with sick children. In my case, in the north where I live, these children have to be flown out for treatment, to go to hospitals and to have tests done. If they are diagnosed with a serious illness or a disease that requires several weeks of treatment, the parents are required to take leave from work and to live away from home, so financial stress comes into the equation, along with the stress of caring for their children.

That is why we have recognized that situation. We have recognized it, and it is the reason we are allowing for the 26-week benefit period. It is so that families that are in that situation right now, going through those difficult times in their life, are able to have the support they need. We may disagree on whether it should be 26 weeks or longer or less, but one thing is certain: The data that we have been given indicate that where we are today, at 15 weeks, is not meeting the needs of those families. As a government, we have recognized that. We have been very compassionate in the work that we have done. Our hearts break for those families.

We know that we need to step up and do more, and that is why we are stepping up to do more. I firmly believe that by taking these extra steps today, we will help many Canadian families to be able to take leave from their jobs and get EI benefits for up to 26 weeks while they go through treatment and care for sickness and illness. I also believe that as a government, we have a responsibility to continue to listen to Canadians, continue to review the programs and policies we have, listen to our colleagues in the House and the debates that they have, and hopefully at some point continue to make those programs better for all Canadians.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very interesting speech. Once again, I am grateful for the gains made by unemployed workers, whether they are seasonal or full-time workers. I have a great deal of sympathy for this woman and the ordeal she went through, but I am puzzled that she is telling me that an organization said 26 weeks was enough.

What is the financial impact of a change from 26 weeks to 50 weeks compared to the economic benefits when these people return to work? The benefits will be spent and will come back in the form of consumption taxes. These people do not simply put EI in the bank. They spend that money and consume.

I would like to know what the difference between 26 and 50 weeks is worth, compared to the difference it can make in the lives

of people who are sick. This \$400 million or \$500 million is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$57 billion we have already seen.

• (1835)

[*English*]

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Madam Speaker, what we need to be clear about is that no analysis has been done in terms of what the captured clientele is or the number of Canadians we help, or the cost of providing the 50 weeks being quoted. I have not seen any data that reflect that.

What I have seen is what is reflected in the 26 weeks, what it will cost the government to provide that service and how many Canadians will be able to avail themselves of it, based on previous data and numbers. We feel that we need to make the move to 26 weeks of EI benefits for individuals who are sick and need to collect EI. Fifteen weeks is not enough.

We know that increasing it to 26 weeks will provide benefits to many Canadians who are dealing with health care needs in hospitals and at home and will allow them to have financial security to a certain degree while they recover.

The analysis of whether that is going to be enough, or whether we need to extend it further, is something I have not had access to. If the hon. member has the analysis, maybe she should provide it to all of us in the House of Commons.

**Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, there is another consideration I would like the hon. member to think about. We are asking for benefits to be paid out of the EI fund. I am wondering if there are circumstances when that is really not the appropriate source of funding to provide these benefits.

For instance, take somebody injured in a car crash. Through the auto insurance system in each province, there is a requirement for the insurance company to provide those kinds of benefits for the lifetime of the person, in many cases.

I am currently sponsoring a petition from people who have been injured as a result of taking a vaccine, and there is no compensation system at all for them. Would my colleague agree that some source of funding other than the EI system, and that attaches the loss directly to whatever has caused the loss, is a more appropriate way of funding some of these benefits?

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Madam Speaker, I know my colleague from Fleetwood—Port Kells has been a very strong advocate for the particular issue he raises today, that many of the patients who have become disabled do not have the benefits they feel they need in order to have financial security in their lives. His petition is proposing to look at alternative sources.

*Business of Supply*

As a government and as Canadians, we have always accepted the responsibility of looking after each other and caring for each other in any way we possibly can within our means. I would suggest that looking for new and innovative ways to meet those target goals, and to be able to provide that care for many Canadians, is a direction in which we need to look.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, today I am rising to speak to an issue that is important to me, one that affects many Canadians and is a principal part of Canada's social safety net. I am talking about employment insurance and the special benefits for workers who have to take leave for specific events, such as an illness, a pregnancy, caring for a newborn, helping a seriously ill or injured individual, or providing end-of-life care to a family member.

Founded on compassion and fairness, this system reflects an important part of the Canadian identity, which is steeped in sharing and helping one another. The principles governing this system tie in perfectly with the values of our government.

Many Canadians across the country struggle with illness. For some, the illness lasts a week or two, but for others, it lasts several weeks and, in some cases, for months or even years.

In many cases, the sick person has to take time off work to undergo suitable treatment. In some cases, it goes even further, and the person ends up unable to work. This leads to a marked decline in income or even the loss of that income.

To remedy this situation, the employment insurance program guarantees the payment of a maximum of 15 weeks of sickness benefits to people who are unable to work.

We certainly recognize that although EI sickness benefits protect a large number of Canadians, some recipients exhaust their benefits before returning to work. I went through this myself exactly seven years ago, so I understand very well how difficult and distressing this situation can be. That is precisely why I am very proud of our government's commitment to making changes to this program.

When we are ill or injured, the last thing we want to worry about is how we will put food on the table if we cannot go to work.

Rest assured that our government is determined to improve the EI program to make it more flexible, more inclusive and easier to access. In fact, we supported Motion No. 201 concerning employment insurance sickness benefits. The motion called on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to study this issue.

As part of this study, the committee examined the possibility of increasing the maximum number of weeks of employment insurance sickness benefits in order to support people suffering from long-term illnesses.

Our government went further than this motion called for and proposed increasing EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 26 weeks to better support workers who need more time to recover.

This commitment is consistent with our hard work over the past four years to modernize the employment insurance system and take concrete steps to improve it for Canadians.

The Government of Canada has long recognized that Canadians who cannot work because of illness, injury or other family responsibilities face certain challenges.

• (1840)

In budget 2017, the Government of Canada announced support for parents and caregivers by providing benefits that would be more flexible, more inclusive, easier to access and more responsive to their unique family and work circumstances. These changes to maternity, parental and caregiver benefits came into effect on December 3, 2017. We are proud that these changes are helping Canadians, but there is always room for improvement.

In budget 2018, our government announced that the provisions of the working while on claim pilot project would be extended to EI maternity and sickness benefits. This measure was implemented to ensure that Canadians who want to return to work after an illness or the birth of a child can do so without jeopardizing their EI benefits. These changes came into effect in August 2018.

Our government recognizes that there is still work to be done to protect the most vulnerable Canadians. Health problems are stressful enough without the added burden of unnecessary financial hardship.

It is our responsibility as a government to ensure that Canadians receive the support they need when they are recovering from an illness or injury. We owe it to Canadians who have to take time off work for illness, injury or quarantine reasons to extend the EI sickness benefit.

Let me be clear. The government is determined to improve the EI system. We want to adapt it to better reflect Canadians' reality. In fact, our government has made changes to give Canadians the support they need when they are sick, injured or quarantined.

I would also like to note that there are other measures besides EI to help Canadians grappling with a chronic or long-term illness. They include disability benefits under the Canada pension plan, the benefits offered by private insurance and paid by the employer, as well as the help provided by the provinces and territories.

*Business of Supply*

We care about Canadians' well-being. We will continue to work hard to support those who are suffering from a long-term illness or injury, as well as their family.

• (1845)

[English]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, throughout the day we have had a very interesting debate. It was interesting to hear the perspective of the Conservatives, which seemed to be more staying the course at 15 weeks, but encouraging that it be studied. The Bloc and the NDP seemed to be saying yes to the 50 weeks.

It is important for us to recognize that for many years there was absolutely no change. For the first time, we are seeing a significant commitment to make the change from 15 weeks to half a year. I believe that demonstrates a great deal of goodwill. We have stakeholders who have been asking for 26 weeks, including the Canadian Cancer Society.

I wonder if my colleague could provide his thoughts on how important it is that, after many years, we finally have a government that is advancing. This is not the first time we have made changes to the EI program. Virtually from year two, we have seen some significant changes since we became government back in 2015.

• (1850)

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

He is quite right. Our government is keeping the promise it made to Canadian workers and is committed to expanding EI sickness benefits by increasing them from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. This commitment builds on our hard work over the past four years. During that time, we modernized employment insurance and took concrete steps to improve this program for Canadians.

I will talk about some of the changes that we have made since 2015. We reduced the waiting period from two weeks to one. We introduced a new benefit for caregivers. We made the working while on claim provisions permanent and expanded them to include people receiving maternity and sickness benefits. We created new EI provisions for workers in seasonal industries, and so forth. Yes, much has been done. There is certainly much more to be done. We believe in realistic, achievable measures.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I think he sees the glass half full as opposed to half empty right now. People are suffering. They do not have access to the employment insurance they need. The NDP does not understand why the government refuses to grant 50 weeks of EI sickness benefits, when those additional weeks would fill a desperate need.

People like Marie-Hélène Dubé have been fighting for this for years. She got more than 600,000 signatures from Quebecers who support this measure. It would not cost the system much, and it is

not even the government's money. This money belongs to the workers.

One thing that has not changed since the Liberals came to power is the access rate to the existing system. One hundred per cent of workers contribute to employment insurance and less than 40% of unemployed workers have access to EI benefits. Whether the Conservatives or Liberals are in power, nothing changes.

What can my colleague do and what will he do to ensure that all unemployed workers have access to the EI system?

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

It is not a matter of seeing the glass half empty or half full. I had my own experience with cancer, and it is not easy. I must say that our government believes in realistic, achievable measures. Our positions are based on consultations and on feedback from stakeholders and experts in the field.

Health advocates, including the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the MS Society of Canada have said that an extended sickness benefit is needed to allow for better recovery. They are calling for sickness benefits to be extended from 15 weeks to 26 weeks. We have listened to them.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Before giving the floor to the next speaker, he should know that I will have to interrupt him. I will let him know when his time is up.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Madam Speaker, can you tell me how much time I have?

• (1855)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** The hon. member has just four or five minutes.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Madam Speaker, it seems I will have to do away with part of my speech and perhaps a question from my colleague from Winnipeg North. I will be as brief as possible.

The Bloc Québécois has always fought to improve employment insurance programs, and is still fighting to obtain better living conditions for workers in Quebec who actively contribute to the development of our society.

It is in that context that the Bloc Québécois is calling for an improvement to the special employment insurance benefits for serious illnesses. This would help people who are coping with the vagaries of life to take care of themselves and recuperate in dignity.

Generally, the special employment insurance sickness benefits are adequate. However, in the case of a serious illness like cancer, depression or a stroke, 15 weeks of benefits are woefully inadequate to ensure a full physical and psychological recovery. When we think about it, it is absurd to expect to be fully healed in 15 weeks or even 26 weeks.

On top of being sick and temporarily unable to work, these individuals lose a lot. In addition to dealing with their inability to work and provide for their families, some people even lose their house, their car and other things because they have not yet recovered after the 15 weeks of special sickness benefits and they do not have access to any other financial assistance. Their life of hard work collapses.

These material losses add huge amounts of stress to people who are already seriously ill. This stress also affects the spouse, children and other family members. Remember that the very principle of EI is insurance paid for by workers to be able to deal with the vagaries of life. It is inconceivable that these benefits should be limited to 15 or 26 weeks as the Liberal Party is proposing. I would remind the House that it is a ceiling, not a goal to reach the maximum number of weeks.

What am I supposed to tell seriously ill people who reach out to me and ask me to help them? How can I explain to them that there are huge surpluses in the fund, but they still have to fight to make ends meet? They risk losing everything, while billions of dollars that come straight from their contributions and those of their fellow citizens remain in the coffers. What am I supposed to tell them when I know very well that the EI program could easily meet their needs? It is unacceptable and it is not humane.

I am feeling a little anxious now because I am running out of time. I cannot imagine how someone must feel when they have received 14 weeks of benefits but know they still need several treatments.

It is enormously stressful to go back to work knowing that you are incapable of performing all the tasks or living up to all the responsibilities of the job. It is mentally unsustainable—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** The interpreters are having a hard time interpreting the member's speech. Therefore, I would ask him to speak more slowly.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Madam Speaker, the stress and inconveniences also affect the employer and the work teams. When an employee does not perform as expected, that inevitably has a significant impact on the business that can even compromise the very future of the firm or at least its productivity. Sometimes the employer will end up terminating the employee who has not fully recovered. That is never a pleasant situation.

By sticking with 15 weeks of special employment insurance sickness benefits, the government is forcing a physician, employer or citizen to not play by the established rules. They will do so out of compassion and common sense.

I will also take this opportunity to add that we should consider a similar change in family caregiver benefits. These should also increase to 50 weeks when required by the situation.

### *Business of Supply*

The entire employment insurance program must be overhauled to reduce the regulatory and administrative burden. I would remind members that the EI fund belongs to the workers and not to the Government of Canada. When we are sick, we should spend our time and effort on taking care of ourselves, not fighting to get something that belongs to us.

My conclusion is very simple. We must amend the Employment Insurance Act to increase the maximum sickness benefit from 15 weeks to 50 weeks. Why not take this opportunity to also reduce the regulatory and administrative burdens? The goal is to adapt the employment insurance program to the current reality of workers in Canada and Quebec.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I remind the member that, when he is speaking, the interpreters must be able to communicate what he is saying to the other members.

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire:** Allow me to apologize, Madam Speaker.

[English]

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Pursuant to order made earlier today, all questions necessary to dispose of the opposition motion are deemed put and the recorded division deemed requested and deferred until Wednesday, February 19, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

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**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 7:13 p.m.

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** Is it agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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## EMERGENCY DEBATE

• (1900)

[*English*]

### RELATIONS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** The House will now proceed to the consideration of a motion to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter requiring urgent consideration, namely relations with indigenous peoples.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP)** moved:

That this House do now adjourn.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Madam Speaker, to begin I will note that I will be splitting my time with the member for Winnipeg Centre.

*Dini ze', ts'akē ze, skize*, we stand here today at a historic moment when trains across this country are at a standstill, critical infrastructure is being blocked, Canadians are so concerned about what is going on and indigenous people across this country are wondering what the Prime Minister means when he says the word “reconciliation” and when he says there is no relationship more important than the one with indigenous people.

The riding I represent, Skeena—Bulkley Valley, has been living this issue for years now. It is a difficult one for many people and for no people more so than the Wet'suwet'en.

I asked Sue Alfred if I could share her story and she gave me her permission. Sue carries the hereditary Wet'suwet'en name Wil'at. She is 80 years old and she lives in the community of Witset just west of Smithers. Peter Michell and Annie Tiljoe were her grandparents.

In 1914, her mother was one year old and one of seven children. Her grandparents lived in a place called Misty Falls, near the community of Houston, where they had a homestead. They were living on land the Wet'suwet'en had occupied for millennia, and one day in 1914 the RCMP came to her property with the Indian agent and told her grandparents that they had to move along.

They packed their things and walked dozens of miles to an area near Smithers called Glentanna. They tried to establish a home there. What happened? The same people showed up. The RCMP and the Indian agent came and again told them that they had to move along, and so they did. They moved to another place on the Telkwa High Road near the community of Witset and made their home there.

Sue tells me she remembers her grandmother crying as she told her this story of displacement. We can understand why the police action we have seen in recent days and weeks on Wet'suwet'en territory is so troubling to so many people who call that place home. This is why further police action threatens to undermine any chance of real reconciliation.

In the northwest we have been having the difficult conversations around reconciliation, resource development and respect for indigenous rights for years. As communities, we have started to face the difficult colonial history that has held back our relationship with indigenous people. We have begun to work on how to work together to be better stewards of the lands and waters and create a future for our children.

In my hometown of Smithers we sat down with the Wet'suwet'en chiefs and elders and they told us their stories. We worked with them, the municipal government and the hereditary government, to tell the difficult stories about our community's past. It is one of the first steps in moving forward together.

Across the region I represent courageous indigenous people have been working for years to gain recognition and respect on their own lands. Some, like the Nisga'a people, succeeded in achieving British Columbia's first modern treaty, a treaty that set out a path for self-government and was signed in 1998.

At the same time, it was the hereditary leaders of the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en who went to court to establish and affirm their rights, to have them affirmed by the court, in the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa court case. They fought for 20 years against the Crown, which for all that time maintained a policy of denial. It denied them their rights and denied them their stories.

They fought it all the way to the Supreme Court where on appeal their rights were affirmed and the judge said that their stories did matter and that they did have rights on that land. The Supreme Court ruled that their title to the land in northwest British Columbia that they have occupied for thousands of years remains unextinguished.

We have landed at a place where the only way out of this crisis is through dialogue, understanding, humility and true nation-to-nation talks. I am very pleased to see that those talks are starting. No matter how late in the game they are coming, they are of the utmost importance. I want to commend the Minister of Indigenous Services for the respect and dignity he has brought over recent days to those conversations.

• (1905)

We also need to ask ourselves whether we could have foreseen this. The Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs are the same group that fought that Delgamuukw court case all the way to the Supreme Court. They fought against the government policy of denial and established a precedent for indigenous groups across the country.

The court recognized their standing and it set a precedent. In that ruling the judge directed the federal government that it had “a moral, if not legal, duty to enter into and conduct those negotiations in good faith” on the question of their indigenous title.

In over 20 years since that historic ruling, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to step up and begin the difficult work of upholding, acknowledging and affirming Wet'suwet'en title.

There has been so much said in recent days about what percentage of people support what, and my fear is this only serves to further deepen the divides that have been created.

The assertions made today by the leader of the official opposition suggesting that the Coastal GasLink project has majority support by one group or another group very much fall into this category. The reality is that the hereditary chiefs represent a legitimate decision-making body for indigenous people outside of reserves. The court has said so.

I was at the balhats, the feast in Witsset, where the chiefs ratified their non-consent for this pipeline. This came after they had recommended and suggested alternate routes, which were rejected by the company.

Throughout all of this, where was the federal government? Where was the Prime Minister and his commitment to reconciliation?

The reality is that we talk about changing our relationship with indigenous people, yet we see a reluctance to change anything about the status quo and the way we do business. As the blockades have shown, that is just not going to fly.

We have landed in a predicament that cannot be fixed by police action. If it could have, it would have been fixed in January 2019 when the police arrested and removed 14 people from the Morice West Forest Service Road, or it would have been fixed last month when they did the same thing again.

The images of RCMP tactical teams pointing rifles at unarmed Wet'suwet'en and Gitksan people, the images of indigenous people being dragged over the very land their ancestors once walked, and the vicious racist social media commentary we have seen online in recent days and weeks have sparked a solidarity movement the likes of which our country has never seen.

We find ourselves where we are today with people across the country blocking the infrastructure that Canadians need in their daily lives for the services they rely on and the products their lifestyle relies on. We can discount the voices of the people blockading as those of fringe radicals or anarchists. We can choose to discount those voices, or we can listen closely to what indigenous people on those blockades are saying.

If we listen closely we can hear there is too much of a gap between what the government says about indigenous people and its actions. Do we actually grasp the gravity of a situation in which young indigenous people are telling us that reconciliation is dead? I am not sure we do.

As I said before, this issue is a very difficult one for northwest B.C. communities. There are indeed indigenous groups in the riding I represent that support this project and that stand to benefit from it. I spoke today with Crystal Smith, the chief councillor of the Haisla Nation. She told me about the educational and employment oppor-

tunities that people in her community are already experiencing. These voices are important too. We cannot ignore these voices.

Ultimately, the only way out of this is through nation-to-nation talks, dialogue and humility. The problem is that the government keeps talking about doing things differently without being willing to change the status quo one iota.

Sue Alfred's late husband was Wah Tah K'eght, Henry Alfred, who was the last living plaintiff from the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa court case. Her daughter is Dolores Alfred, who teaches the Wet'suwet'en language and culture in Smithers, and her grandson is Rob Alfred, who opposes the pipeline.

● (1910)

The story of her family, the story of displacement and of being denied a voice and fundamental rights, is the story of so many indigenous people. It is time to write a new story, and that starts with the Prime Minister sitting down with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and hearing their stories.

*[Member spoke in Wet'suwet'en and provided the following text:]*

*Awatsa. Misiyh.*

*[Member provided the following translation:]*

That is all. Thank you.

*[English]*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister has been talking a great deal about this particular issue, as have a number of ministers and members of Parliament on both sides of the House. In particular, I know many of my colleagues are very sensitive to this issue. I reflect on the Prime Minister's speech from earlier today when he talked about the importance of having patience.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide his thoughts on the idea that we need to be patient and do what we can to work through this in a co-operative fashion.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I think indigenous people in our country, in particular, have been exceptionally patient with us for over 150 years.

The issue right now is that we need concerted action on the part of the Prime Minister. We need him to show up. We needed him to show up weeks ago, look these people in the eyes and sit down to have honest talks about what went wrong and how we get things back to a place that we can be proud of.

**Hon. Tim Uppal (Edmonton Mill Woods, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I listened to the member's comments closely and what I am not hearing is concern for the workers or small businesses of this country. I am also not hearing concern for the first nations communities that support this project and the jobs that it will bring to their communities, and that also oppose this illegal activity. That is exactly what this is. It is illegal activity. These are illegal blockades.

*S. O. 52*

Does the member not feel strongly that a few people should not be able to hold this country's economy hostage with this illegal activity?

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I live in northwest B.C. and call that place home, and I can say that it is more than a few people who are concerned about the divisions and the conflict that have been created.

For eight years I served as the mayor of Smithers and, having worked in local government, I can assure the member that employment, economic development, and the vitality and prosperity of our communities are of utmost importance and a priority for me. We get there by working together, and we get there in the spirit of respect.

There is a lot of uncertainty right now, and none of that uncertainty contributes in a good way toward the kind of benefits that the member for Edmonton Mill Woods is talking about. We need to get to a better place.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for his speech.

As a member of Parliament from the regions, I think it is important to have my finger on the pulse of what is going on back home. What does the member feel? What is he hearing? What solutions is he proposing?

If he were prime minister, what tangible action would he take?

[*English*]

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Speaker, I believe the question is what would I do if I were the Prime Minister in this situation.

I believe I would try to understand the gravity of this situation for our entire country, for the process of reconciliation and for the hopes the young people have for the future, and I would show up. The most important part of leadership is showing up and having the humility to sit down and talk about the difficult questions.

That should have been done a long time ago. We could have seen this coming a decade ago, and now we are here, and finally the talks are happening. I have some amount of hope that we can get to a good place.

In answer to my colleague's question, showing up and sitting down with respect and humility is of utmost importance.

● (1915)

**Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate the words of our leader from earlier today. He expressed how inspired we all are by the young people across this country who are rising and the people from all walks of life who are standing in support of human rights and climate justice.

I also want to acknowledge the uncertainty of the times we are facing across the country. People are worried about getting to work. VIA and CN workers are worried about their jobs. People are worried about getting the supplies and products they need to keep themselves safe. Our thoughts are with those workers.

My thoughts are also with those who are standing on the front lines of the blockade, where I, myself, as an indigenous person, have had to go to fight for my own basic human rights in this country. I understand the reasons for this. These people are defending what they know to be right. They are standing up, saying clearly that they support human rights for all people. They are hoping that this time, maybe this time, things might actually change.

It is a terrible crisis we are facing, but it is a repetitive crisis. Even though the Prime Minister callously indicated that it is a crisis of infrastructure disruptions, it is not. It is a human rights crisis that is rooted in the wrongful dispossession of lands from indigenous people. It is a crisis being faced by people right across the country.

Canadians are now looking for leadership from all of us, and they are looking for leadership from the Prime Minister. So far what we have seen from the Prime Minister and the government is a huge gap between what has been promised and what has been delivered.

This crisis did not start overnight. It is rooted in the wrongful dispossession of lands from indigenous peoples and the human rights violations and violent colonialism that have become so normalized that indigenous people are not afforded the minimum human rights standard that any person needs, indigenous or not, to live a life of joy. This minimum human rights standard is contained in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights laws and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, declarations and laws Canada has agreed to follow but often fails to do so in practice. It is a continuation.

These human rights violations have impacted my own family and nation. Residential schools, the sixties scoop and the dispossession of our lands have left a lasting impact on our community that continues to impact us even today. Residential schools disrupted our families. They were about the forced incarceration of children for no other reason than their ancestry, an ancestry of great leaders who taught the values of respect, love, courage, humility, truth, wisdom and kindness, the seven sacred laws that guided a beautiful way of life.

The Prime Minister promised to do things differently. He made commitments to working toward a path to support reconciliation. Once again indigenous people throughout this country are left disappointed. Once again they have been afforded nothing but broken promises that have resulted in many indigenous people throughout this country being homeless on their own lands.

● (1920)

There have been generations of promising one thing but doing another. Instead of learning lessons from the past, the Prime Minister has doubled down. He promised to be different. He promised to make change. He promised to take the genuine steps toward reconciliation. He has a list of things he has done, but let us look at what he and his government have done.

He broke those promises. They have ignored the courts, ignored this place and ignored their own promises. They have continued to drag first nations kids to court who are fighting for their right to have equal access to programs and services and to have the same human rights as other children who live on the lands that we now call Canada. They have broken their commitment to close the funding gap for kids living on reserve to go to school, and they have underfunded the programs set up to help women reclaim their status and those seeking compensation for day schools. Despite promise after promise, they have dragged their feet on meeting their obligations to ensure that clean drinking water is available in indigenous people's communities across the country. These are basic human rights.

The Prime Minister has done all of this while undermining and laughing at indigenous people, including Young Water and Land Protector from Grassy Narrows, who attended a fundraising event and raised the issue of clean drinking water. This is not a joke. We are not a joke.

I have fasted on those blockade lines at Grassy Narrows, the beautiful lands that have been impacted by development. Once again Grassy Narrows is being denied the human right to a healthy environment, and the government is taking its sweet time in providing a treatment centre for those suffering from mercury poisoning.

In the House, weeks ago, when the NDP called on the Prime Minister to accept an invitation from the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, the Prime Minister laughed and said that it was not his problem and that it was "entirely under provincial jurisdiction." I can say one thing. I am glad that the Prime Minister is not calling on the police to be sent in. We have seen the consequences of that before. However, how, just a couple of weeks ago, could he have been so blind to the reality on the ground, ignoring the voices of indigenous people, of young people across this country? Just a couple of weeks ago, how could he have been so blind? It says so much about why and how we got to where we are right now.

There is a fundamental misunderstanding, willful or not, about the facts of the situation we are currently faced with. Most Canadians have learned a history that ignores the real history of the violent colonialism upon which this place was built that continues under our very own watch today. The concept of the rule of law has been used in this country to steal children away from their families. We cannot pick and choose to only use the rule of law when it suits our economic interests. We must enforce the rule of law to ensure that all people in this country can be afforded human rights, including the rights that indigenous people have to their aboriginal rights and title.

We have a path forward that was provided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. However, it is one thing to enact it; we must also respect it. We must respect minimum human rights standards and use the rule of law not to punish but to ensure a good quality of life for all peoples in this place we now call Canada.

● (1925)

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Lead-**

*S. O. 52*

**er of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I have been a parliamentarian now for about 30 years, both at the provincial and national levels, and never before have I seen a government as committed as this government is to the issue of reconciliation and building a special relationship between first nations and the federal government to move forward on reconciliation. Many calls for action have been acted upon by the government.

What we really need is a higher sense of co-operation, as opposed to trying to lay blame. Blame could be applied to all political entities in this chamber. No political party can say it is completely pure on this issue. We could talk about the provincial government in B.C., for example. There is all sorts of blame—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** We are in questions and comments and not the debate itself, so I would ask the member to pose his question so I can ask for the answer.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux:** Madam Speaker, would the member not agree that all political parties and entities need to step up to the plate and do what they can?

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Madam Speaker, what I do agree with is that human rights are not a partisan issue. Human rights are human rights. Every day I have to sit in the House and listen to debates on my fundamental indigenous human rights and the fundamental indigenous human rights of indigenous people across this country. I do not know any other group in this country that has to be satisfied with incremental justice for basic, minimum human rights in this country.

I find it shocking that the hon. member across the way feels that indigenous people should be grateful, when they continue to not have their minimum human rights standards met. The fact that the current government is on its ninth non-compliance order to immediately stop taking first nations kids to court is not an example of reconciliation.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, there is a challenge in the debate we are having tonight. When my colleagues and I stand, we believe we are standing up for the Wet'suwet'en people and the decision that was made by their elected council and a number of the hereditary chiefs. I was at a resource forum in Prince George and I heard speaker after speaker talk about the opportunities they saw, including elders who said they were originally against this project but are now for it. What is happening is dividing their community.

How can my colleague stand up for what I understand to be a minority view when the community has spoken for this project?

*S. O. 52*

**Ms. Leah Gazan:** Madam Speaker, I think the member is talking about the notion of free, prior and informed consent, something the Conservatives have fought violently against. That is the right to say yes, no or yes with conditions. This means that it is absolutely a nation's right to say yes, but it is also a nation's right to say no and, in the case of Coastal GasLink, yes with conditions.

We need to respect the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples. This has been affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. We cannot just support human rights and basic rights when they support our economic interests and vision and then just brush them aside when they do not. Unfortunately, in this country there has been a history of that kind of violent, colonial, human rights-violating behaviour.

We are now at a point of crisis and people across the country are saying no more because consecutive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to deal with long-standing land issues with indigenous people. The Mohawks of Kanesatake have been waiting at the table for 300 years. Where is the Liberal government? Where were the four previous Conservative governments?

● (1930)

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I want to share with this House something very personal, that I have not shared with anyone other than close friends and family, about an incident that occurred 30 years ago.

Thirty years ago, at the age of 16 turning 17, I decided to enrol in the Canadian Armed Forces. Along with my other brothers and sisters in arms who decided to sign on that dotted line of unlimited liability, I was prepared to lay my life down for the country that I love. I did the infantry basic training and did okay, and that summer I was deployed to Valcartier, along with another group of people in my platoon, to work and dedicate that summer to serving in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Why I did so was multifold. I wanted people to be proud of me. I wanted to serve my country. I wanted to learn some discipline that is not natural to me; it comes with difficulty and I still have not gotten there, but my effort and my heart was in it. I wanted to learn discipline and do things that I could not do outside the classroom.

That summer was a difficult summer for Canada. There were in my platoon four Mohawk brothers in arms. As everyone knows, 30 years ago the Oka crisis exploded. There was one night in Valcartier as we were all out, that word came down that the Royal 22e Régiment would deploy and put under siege their community. The next morning, they were no longer there. They were asked to make a difficult choice, choosing between the country that they would lay down their life for and their families. For them, the choice was clear.

It was a privilege for me not to have to make that choice myself. I have not thought about that day much, for a long time. However, we all know or should know what happened at Oka. We should know that no individuals should have to choose between their families, their nation and the country that they would readily lay their lives down for. We vowed that this would never happen again, and it should not happen again.

When we called on indigenous people in our hardest times, they served us. They defended us. They form statistically the highest percentage of people who serve in our armed forces. We should never forget that this relationship, for many communities, is based on alliance and loyalty.

I know that the recent events in B.C. and in various places across the country are deeply concerning to all Canadians. It is a very difficult situation for everyone, for those people who are non-indigenous but especially if they are indigenous. All of Canada is hurting and we are all hoping and working for a peaceful resolution. This is a challenging situation that is evolving by the hour, and the safety of all involved is of primary importance. We all want to get the same conclusion. There are some disagreements, some deep ones, as to the steps. We all want peace, we want to get rail traffic going again across this country and we want prosperity for all peoples of Canada.

There is time for all parties to engage in open and respectful dialogue to ensure this situation is resolved peacefully. To that end, I want to acknowledge the leaders of the NDP, the Bloc Québécois and the Green Party for their support and partnership in seeking a peaceful resolution. This work is not easy and it will require all of us working together in the immediate future and in the long term. We cannot move forward without honest and respectful dialogue, and that is why I am happy to take the opportunity to share my thoughts this evening and to take questions from members of this House.

● (1935)

Seeking an honest, open and respectful dialogue is essential for renewing the relationship and building a strong future for indigenous peoples and Canadians alike. The untold story that should be told today is that despite years of tarnished relationships, we all want to see peace and our relationship renewed, and to have a relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

It is in this spirit of peace and co-operation that I went this past Saturday and gathered with members of the Mohawk nation along the rail tracks in Tyendinaga to discuss peace and friendship with a nation that has not felt part of this country. We pursued an open dialogue and made concerted efforts to move toward a peaceful resolution.

Modest but important progress was made through this dialogue. Parts of this conversation were very difficult, very painful and very personal. Upsetting stories were shared about this country's troubling treatment of indigenous peoples. There was an immense amount of suspicion toward my presence; fear that it was a ruse and that the police would move in. It is not every day that people are surrounded by police, and the reactions are normal. They are a peaceful people, and they reiterated it time and time again. We shared laughs, and as tradition dictates, we had a meal before the discussion. We listened to one another with openness and with a shared goal of finding a path forward.

I made a commitment to share our conversation with the Prime Minister and my colleagues, and I did so that night. Yesterday we had a more extensive conversation at a meeting of the incident response group, which was convened by the Prime Minister in response to the urgent and considerable need to further open the dialogue and continue the dialogue we started in Tyendinaga on Saturday morning.

My colleague, the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, also remains in communication with the Province of B.C. and hereditary leadership, with the hopes of meeting in person soon. She also had a very productive conversation with the leadership to open up that path to de-escalation. It will not be an easy one. There are many demands, many historical grievances, but there is a clear sense that there is a protocol to be observed and a pathway toward de-escalation.

We are a country built on the values of peace, order and good government. We hear it all the time. We need to make sure we remain focused on those ideals. One of the steps necessary to achieve peaceful progress in an unreconciled country is to continue that open dialogue at the very highest levels of government based on a nation-to-nation and government-to-government relationship, and that is exactly what has guided and underlined our actions over the past few days.

Unfortunately, in the case of indigenous peoples, we have too often discarded the first pillar, which is peace, for the sake of order and good government. I am someone who spent a long time in private practice. I have two law degrees and am accredited to practise in two jurisdictions. Let me say that the rule of law is very dear to me. I have spent my life and career upholding it.

I hear from the indigenous communities I serve, to which I have a fiduciary obligation that goes back before Canada to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, to uphold the honour of the Crown. Those people say too me too often that rule of law has been invoked to perpetrate historical injustices. We need only look at the examples of Louis Riel, Big Bear and Poundmaker to have some of the more poignant examples, as well as those perpetrated on a daily basis.

People have said to lock them up. Guess what, that has been tried. The level of incarceration is six times higher for the indigenous population of Canada, and in some provinces, much worse. These are very serious issues that demand our attention and have demanded it for hundreds of years, and there is no place in this discussion for rhetoric and vitriol.

*S. O. 52*

The question I find myself asking time and time again as I look at my children is whether we are going to do things the way we have always done them, which has brought us to this point in our relationship, or whether we are going to take a new approach that prioritizes open dialogue built on respect, one that engages us in a true government-to-government relationship. The conversations we started on Saturday, and those my colleagues have offered to have across the country at the highest level, will help us find a more collaborative and therefore constructive way forward.

● (1940)

It is only through meaningful engagement with those who have felt ignored and disrespected for too long that we can find a way forward that builds peace and prosperity for all.

For almost 500 years, indigenous peoples have faced discrimination in every aspect of their lives. The Crown, at times, has prevented a true equal partnership from developing with indigenous peoples imposing, instead, a relationship based on colonial, paternalistic ways of thinking and doing.

As I mentioned in introduction, many of our relationships were based on military alliances to ensure our own sovereignty. Let me say, they stepped up when we needed them. A little over a year ago, this whole House rose to celebrate Levi Oakes and the untold story of the last Mohawk code talker. Sadly, a few months later after this lifting up that was long overdue, he passed away. He was born in Snye, Akwesasne, part of Quebec. He served in the U.S. armed forces.

A story that has not been told is why he did not serve Canada. He did not serve Canada because his brother was beaten up by a policeman, and he vowed never to serve in our forces. We need to think about that, when we think about the people who serve us best. Those who came back from having served overseas, arm in arm, brothers in arms, sisters in arms were not treated that way. They were discriminated against. They could not get their pensions or medical benefits. The list is long and it is painful.

Here we are today. It has been mentioned by members of the opposition and it needs to keep being mentioned that we face a historic challenge, an injustice that we keep perpetrating towards the most important things in our life, children, in this case, for indigenous peoples, their children. There is a broken child and family system where indigenous children up to the age of 14 make up 52% of kids in foster care and care, even though they represent 7.7% of all Canadian children. There are shocking rates of suicide among indigenous youth causing untold pain and hurt that will plague families and communities for generations to come. There are untenable housing conditions, where water that is unsafe to drink or even bathe in comes out of the taps.

*S. O. 52*

In Lac Seul where we lifted a boil water advisory for the first time in 17 years, the kids in the room had never had clean water from their system. One of the elders I spoke to giggled with a sense of humour that we see in, and is almost unique to, indigenous communities. She said to me that now it would not itch after she took her bath.

There are communities where overcrowding and mould are far too common. There are communities that do not have reliable access to roads or health centres or even schools. That approach has left a legacy of devastation, pain and suffering, and it is unacceptable and untenable.

For hundreds of years indigenous peoples have been calling on the Canadian government to recognize and affirm their jurisdiction over their affairs, to have control and agency over their land, housing, education, governance systems, and child and family services. We have undeniable proof that self-determination is a better path to take. For example, look at the Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia. In 1997, the governments of Canada and Nova Scotia signed a historic agreement with nine Mi'kmaq communities, restoring their control over their education system. The result is that now more than 90% of Mi'kmaq students graduate. It is higher than the average in most provinces.

That is what comes when Canada steps out of the way and accepts the necessity of self-governance and self-determination. This is what has to happen in every sector. This is what communities are asking for now, and have been asking for far too long. It is what is at stake when we speak about self-determination. Self-governing indigenous peoples have better socio-economic outcomes because they know best what to do with their resources. More children finish high school. Fewer people are unemployed. Health outcomes are better. Self-determination improves the well-being and prosperity of indigenous communities, and that is something all Canadians should strive to support.

When we formed government, we took a different approach founded on partnership and co-development, built from a place of listening to indigenous leaders, elders, youth and community, working with members, and working to support the attainment of their goals based on their priorities.

● (1945)

It is important to highlight this while the events gripping the nation are on the front page of the newspapers. The progress, while slow, has been determined, forceful and backed up with historic amounts. Since 2016 we have invested \$21 billion into the priorities of indigenous partners, and together we have made some progress. Sixty-nine schools were built or renovated. Some 265 water and wastewater infrastructure projects were completed and 88 long-term drinking water advisories were lifted. We are contributing toward the establishment of a wellness centre in Nunavut in partnership with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. We are supporting the national Inuit suicide prevention strategy and ensuring that Inuit children have access to the health, social and educational supports they need. We are working with the Métis nation to advance shared priorities such as health, post-secondary education and economic development.

However, we still have a long way to go to close the unacceptable socio-economic gaps that still exist between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Our government is committed to working in partnership on improving the lives of first nations children, and our track record of the past four years shows this. We have almost doubled funding to first nations child and family services agencies, from close to \$677 million in 2016 to \$1.2 billion in 2018-19. That funding is based on actual needs and with an emphasis on prevention.

There have been 508,000 requests for Jordan's principle approved, which ensures first nations children have the health, education and social supports they need, when and where they need them. I was in Whitefish River First Nation about three days ago, and I saw the work that Jordan's principle does for children who need it, and we are striving to ensure they get substantive equality.

We are providing predictable funding to education that is provincially comparable. We know this is essential to strengthen first nations education and improve outcomes, because indigenous peoples must have control over first nations education systems. We know when that is done indigenous graduation rates are the same, if not better, than non-indigenous graduation rates. We have launched a new funding formula for kindergarten to grade 12 education that has resulted in regional funding increases of almost 40%. The number of first nations schools offering elementary full-day kindergarten, for example, has increased by over 50%.

*[Translation]*

We have a tough road ahead of us. As I mentioned, this road will be demanding on all of us. We will have to work together very hard and listen even when the truth is hard to hear. We will have to continue discussions even when we do not agree. We will have to keep working together, looking for creative ways to move forward and finding new paths towards healing and true understanding.

We have all seen what happens when we do not work together and engage in dialogue. We end up with mistrust and confusion over who should speak on behalf of rights holders on issues like consent, as well as the rights and titles of indigenous peoples. This confusion can lead to conflict, as we are seeing now, and prevents us from moving forward together.

I realize that the challenges we face are many, but I know that the difficult road ahead of us is worthwhile. It is worthwhile for the youth in the next generation and for those who will follow. It is worthwhile for all those who will grow up knowing that together, the Crown and indigenous peoples are working hard to create a future, to improve their quality of life and to heal. We will not fail another generation of indigenous children.

• (1950)

[*English*]

I have spoken about a lot of the difficulties, a lot of the pain and a lot of the successes that are progressive, yet slow, that we have done as a government. We have a lot more to do, and we cannot discount mistakes, but we do it in good faith and in good partnership with indigenous communities.

I ask everyone in this House as they contemplate the next few days to look at their children or those that are young and are dear to them and ask themselves what they will tell them when this conflict resolves. We cannot repeat the errors of the past, and there are many to base ourselves on.

[*Member spoke in Mohawk and provided the following text:*]

*Eh káti' niohtónhak ne onkwa'nikòn.ra. Tho niowén.nake.*

[*Member provided the following translation:*]

Therefore, let our minds be that way. Those are the words.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his words and for his service to our country in uniform. There is nothing braver than serving our country in uniform, and I thank him for that.

The comments and question I have are linked to what the minister was talking about in his speech. He referenced the issues that first nations communities are having in their jurisdictions, and I think we all need to continue to hear about those issues. One way to improve the conditions in these first nations communities is with economic opportunities and prosperity. That is one way which Coastal GasLink was going to do for the 20 first nations communities that signed on to this project. It was going to provide their members jobs, opportunity and hope, which is a good thing and what we want.

The minister talked a lot about the group that is against the project, but what he did not mention was the 85% plus who voted in favour of the project, such as the elected chief, the elected council and the hereditary chiefs who all supported this project.

Given that a number of these protesters have no connection to the community at all, and some do not even live in this country but have joined this fight for what they think is the end to oil and gas development in our country, when is the minister going to have these illegal blockades removed and get our economy back on track?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Speaker, too often in this country we have taken the approach that we would pick whatever indigenous view suits our thoughts and our process. That is not self-determina-

tion. That is not respect. We need to understand the decisions that are made by communities and not take a simplistic view as to what is or what is not, or presume the outcome in an indigenous community.

There is no question that the Coastal GasLink project was widely consulted. A process was undertaken by Coastal GasLink and respected, but we cannot then turn around and presume that there is no complexity in community, that there is no complexity in decision-making, that there is not a challenge towards elected leadership and community, or that there is not a tension between hereditary and elected leadership. That is not the same for every community, and I think we need to open our minds to what the differences are.

The challenge we face today is that before us we have a number of people who are fighting for their rights, and they are looking for a peaceful solution. We need to work with those people and start to listen to them in a way that we have not listened before, and that is what I am asking.

There is no question that communities want economic development. I met last week with people from the Treaty 8 first nations, and they have great projects that they are working on. They want economic development; there is absolutely no question about it. However, we cannot simply say that because that particular point of view suits our political end we are going to take that indigenous community and serve our purpose. We need to respect decisions when they are good and we need to respect decisions when they are bad. Moreover, we need to sit down and listen, and come to a cooperative model of how we move together as a country.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I have great respect for the minister and the work he has shown in this place towards raising the awareness of all of us on indigenous rights, language and culture.

I have been encouraged in the last couple of days with the direction in which the government is moving on this issue. The minister talked about the impact of having the RCMP involved in these actions, which can cause real trauma among indigenous groups who have dealt with the RCMP before. I am happy that they have pledged to move ahead with a peaceful solution.

I wonder if the minister could respond to the NDP's comments that for the last weeks we have been asking the Prime Minister to get involved. This is a federal issue, but the Prime Minister stated here two weeks ago that it was not. I am wondering if he can now say that the Prime Minister will put that behind him, and go and talk to the hereditary chiefs and get a peaceful solution to this very important issue.

• (1955)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member opposite and his party for their support during this difficult time. This is a situation that is evolving hour by hour. Two hours ago, I had the chance to brief the Prime Minister, the Minister of Public Safety and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations on the status of discussions.

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There are some positive paths. Out of respect for the Wet'suwet'en leadership, I am loath to discuss the challenges and the path that we are undertaking, but clearly we see there is a path forward. We see there is modest and positive progress in the right direction, and we would all like to get to a peaceful resolution.

I think there is a presumption that the Prime Minister can sweep in and fix everything. That is not the case. He has a confident cabinet that he trusts and has trust in those indigenous communities. The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations is available and had discussions earlier on today with precisely that leadership.

Out of respect for those discussions and the urgency of the ongoing situation that is evolving hour by hour, I will not discuss those steps. Canadians should know that we are seizing the situation at the very highest level of government to work toward a peaceful resolution.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Indigenous Services for his compassionate speech.

Honestly, it is good to feel this compassion, which I felt was quite sincere, here in the House, particularly after the day we have had today.

I would just like to know how he felt yesterday as he approached the first nations blockade. What was he thinking? Does he recognize the legitimacy of the claims of the first nations involved in this crisis?

*Meegwetch.*

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

Like that of the NDP, I appreciate his party's support during these very difficult circumstances.

Clearly, I was nervous. A lot of people told me not to go, not to listen and to leave it to the officials, but when you begin a process of trust with a group where trust is absent, it is very difficult to make that approach. People feel vulnerable. That said, I had the trust of some people I knew in the community.

The untold story in this whole situation is that this was only possible with the help of many of the women in the community. They facilitated these conversations. There was mistrust and they did not want me to come. They thought it was a ruse. I did not understand it at all, but as I talked with them throughout the day, I could see that they had every reason to be suspicious. There is quite a history to consider. They had felt cheated and tricked by the police, and they saw history repeating itself.

It is hard to build trust behind a blockade, so we absolutely needed to go there and start talking. I described the progress as "modest" overall, but we built some trust.

I have confidence. What we tried to find is a path to de-escalation. I remain confident and hopeful that this will happen.

[*English*]

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I would like to suggest that the government has been asleep at the switch for the last number of months. This is a crisis that has been brewing. The Prime Minister was saying that it is up to the provincial government to deal with it, that it is up to whoever to deal with it. He went off to Africa. I am certainly not aware of any action taken by the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations until it reached a crisis point.

Is it their perspective that it is the government's job to finally wake up when there is a crisis or should they be looking for the red flags that have been there for ever and ever and they completely ignored?

● (2000)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Speaker, I think we all heard the Leader of the Opposition's speech today. It was shameful.

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Yeah, it's listening to other views, isn't it?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I listened to it and I found it shameful, so yes, I did listen to the other view. I found it retrograde. I found it—

**Mr. Dan Albas:** Simplistic is what you called it.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Yes, it was simplistic. Madam Speaker, I think the member opposite should speak. I think he is qualifying his own leader in a better way than I can.

The reality is that every—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** Can we hear each other speak, please? Thank you.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Madam Speaker, every time we hear members opposite cry for law and order, it triggers a number of communities and it triggers bad memories.

I am loath to understand the perspective of the Leader of the Opposition from the comfort of his residence in Stornoway, when there are people on the line whose lives are at risk and he should appreciate that. In fact, the next time I go down there, I would welcome him to come with me.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and address the House on this important emergency debate this evening. The situation surrounding the Wet'suwet'en blockades has spiralled out of control.

The Liberal government has demonstrated, through its inaction on this issue and its refusal to meet with the Wet'suwet'en people on the opening days of this crisis, that the pursuit of the UN Security Council seat is more important than the safety of Canadians. Its procrastination has caused this crisis to inflame and spread across Canada.

Just today, a group of radicals went to the house of B.C. Premier Horgan with the intent of placing him under citizen's arrest. The premier of a province in this great country is having radicals approach his house. That is absolutely wrong.

These small groups of protesters continue their illegal blockades at railway and border crossings around the country. As I have said before, many of these protesters have no connection to this country. They have their agenda and they want to enforce it, even if the people they pretend to advocate for do not want it.

Wet'suwet'en people have highlighted in the media how many of these protesters are not from the region or the community or, as I said, even our country. Siding with a small group of activists because they happen to align with one's views, and insisting that the RCMP enforce these views against the will of the majority of the Wet'suwet'en people, contradicts the spirit of reconciliation.

Hereditary chief Helen Michelle of Skin Tyee First Nation of the Wet'suwet'en has stated that "A lot of the protesters are not even Wet'suwet'en". She said that the Wet'suwet'en talked to the elders and kept bringing them back, and they walked the territory where the Coastal GasLink is going. She added, "Our people said go ahead" to Coastal GasLink.

Hereditary Chief Theresa Tait-Day of Wet'suwet'en Nation said, "In the case of #CoastalGasLink, 85% of our people said yes they want this project."

Chief Larry Nooski, of the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation, said:

#CoastalGasLink represents a once in a generation economic development opportunity.... We negotiated hard to guarantee that Nadleh people, including youth, have the opportunity to benefit directly and indirectly from the project, while at the same time, ensuring that the land and the water is protected....

The vast majority of members of the Wet'suwet'en people support the Coastal GasLink project. Every single band council on the Coastal GasLink route supports this project. Even the majority of hereditary chiefs support this project. The vast majority of first nations community members themselves support this project because of the massive benefits to their nation. A minority imposing its will on the majority is causing this problem.

The democratically elected leadership of the Wet'suwet'en, who not only represent the people of the community but also the hereditary leaders, have signed off on this project. Why? It is because it is good for their community. It provides economic benefits, it will lift people out of poverty and it will provide the next generation of Wet'suwet'en with the resources to not only improve their own lives, but to build a strong, independent nation within Canada.

Before I continue, I would like to mention that I am splitting my time with my friend from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

A B.C. judge issued an injunction saying protesters could not block Coastal GasLink from accessing the work site. Under Canada's Constitution, the duty to consult with impacted indigenous communities is clear and it has been upheld by numerous court decisions. One may not always agree with the decision, but one must respect it. That is the rule of law.

Canadian veterans, both non-indigenous and indigenous, fought for the rule of law, not tyranny. In fact, 200 indigenous Canadians died for Canada in military service, and they did not even have the right to vote. It is shameful that it was not until 1960 that they won that right. The rule of law, and freedoms of expression and peaceful protest are hard-fought rights.

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Many indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians peacefully protested for those rights, with some even taking their seats in this very place. Indigenous peoples have fought too long and too hard in this country to ensure that their views are heard. We need to honour that. It is not to diminish the spirit of those peaceful activists by allowing a small group of radicals to derail the reconciliation process.

• (2005)

While we might not always agree on the policy, we must always agree to sit down and talk. The Prime Minister failed to do that, and we are now faced with the crisis before us. While the rule of law must be upheld, there must be a fair and transparent engagement process for any proposed natural resource projects in Canada.

The National Energy Board concluded that the project is fully within the jurisdiction of the B.C. government, through which the proponents received approval to proceed after undergoing extensive regulatory and environmental reviews.

The fact remains that consultations were conducted, and the majority of the Wet'suwet'en people support the project and believe it will benefit their community.

While we appreciate the right of individuals to protest peacefully, we urge all groups to do so in a safe and responsible manner. The transport minister confirmed that railway crossings have been tampered with, specifically the lights that indicate a train is coming.

I am from a rural riding. Many children in countless rural communities across the country cross railway crossings to and from school every day. Putting the lives of these children at risk is unacceptable.

The actions of these people are criminal, and Canadians expect the police to put an end to that. It has been 13 days. Just this weekend the government decided to sit down and meet with first nations leaders to open dialogue on this crisis, a crisis that could have been diverted if the government's talk on reconciliation was not just rhetoric.

While this country was being held hostage by anti-energy activists, the Prime Minister felt his time was better spent hugging the Iranian foreign affairs minister, whose country admitted to shooting down Flight 752, killing 63 Canadians. He felt his time was better spent schmoozing with dictators and human rights violators to woo them to get a vote for a frankly useless seat at the UN, rather than safeguarding Canadians and protecting the economy of Canada.

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Our veterans fought for our right to protest. It is enshrined in the highest law of our land. Everybody in this country, whether they live here or are from another country, has the right to freedom of speech and the freedom to protest, regardless of how much we agree or disagree.

What they do not have the right to do is shut down our railways and ports. They do not have the right to block honest Canadians from getting to and from work. They do not have the right to block small businesses and farmers from getting their goods to market. They do not have the right to put the lives of Canadians at risk.

Let me be clear. Legitimate concerns are being expressed by people at these protests and by indigenous people. They need to be heard. There needs to be dialogue, and there needs to be reconciliation.

My role as shadow minister for Crown-indigenous relations is to work with my colleagues across the way and indigenous leaders from communities around the country to effect real and positive change.

However, we cannot allow a small group of radical protesters, who have no real vested interest in reconciliation and who the Prime Minister has placed on the same tier as the countless men and women in first nations communities who have fought in good faith to right the wrongs of Canadian history, to do a disservice to the spirit of reconciliation.

Therefore, we have requested the Prime Minister do a number of things, including come up with a plan forward. We are still waiting for that. We heard words from the Prime Minister that were just words. There is still no plan. The situation has continued over a long period of time. The government acts surprised that we have come to this point, yet burying its head in the sand is exactly how we got to this point.

We heard from the minister, who basically blamed anyone who had a differing opinion from him. That is not part of working together.

I welcome questions from my colleagues across the way. Hopefully, we will find a peaceful solution to the situation.

● (2010)

**Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I think both sides of the House agree on a number of things related to this issue. We both have the long-term interests of the Wet'suwet'en people in mind. We also all agree on the importance of the rule of law. We all think it is important to get the railroad and road blockades to come to an end.

Where we differ between our side of the House and the member's side of the House seems to be whether it is worth giving a peaceful approach a chance. Is that not a rock song, *Give Peace a Chance*?

It would seem to me the time has not yet come to move too forcefully when we have not yet given peace a chance. Does the member agree that it makes some sense to take that approach before being more aggressive?

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Madam Speaker, my friend across the way and I now serve on the indigenous affairs committee and I look forward to working with him in that capacity.

Yes, we on this side do agree that peace has a chance. I would also argue that the company representing this pipeline had talked about and consulted on this project for over five years. These conversations have gone on for quite some time. Eighty-five per cent of people within the Wet'suwet'en community support this project. The majority of hereditary chiefs support this project. The duly elected chief and council support this project. They see a path forward.

What Conservatives have pointed out many times, and which I did in my speech, is that there are activists who have an agenda that is totally separate from that of those first nations communities. These people want the end of oil and gas development in Canada. They want to shut down that vibrant economy of our country and are trying to glom on to this very important issue that five hereditary chiefs have with what is going on with this pipeline.

We are seeing these activists trying to hijack the agenda, but they do not have the best interests of first nations communities in their sights.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Madam Speaker, if I have it correct, the member said he believes the vast majority of Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs support this project. Since it seems he has quite a bit of understanding about the Wet'suwet'en hereditary governance system, I wonder if he could enlighten the House as to how the hereditary chiefs make their decisions about activities on their lands.

Second, he said that 85% of Wet'suwet'en people support the project. I would ask him where that statistic comes from. I have heard that before, but I have yet to trace where that particular number comes from or what it is based on. If he could enlighten the House, it would be much appreciated.

● (2015)

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Yes, Madam Speaker, my friend across the way is correct. First nations communities do have their own way of working through different problems and I encourage them to continue to do so.

What we are seeing is blockades being put up, in some cases, by people who have no connection to these first nations communities. That is the issue. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce said today that it could be up to four days before supplies start flowing properly again. Businesses are trying to export goods and are being told their deadlines cannot be met.

CP Rail, CN Rail and VIA Rail are laying off people. Border crossings are being blocked. This is real. The government has let this process bubble and continue to evolve into the situation it is now. It is only because it has hit this crisis mode that the government has finally decided it should actually pay attention.

As I mentioned in my speech, the Prime Minister was in no hurry to get back from his UN Security Council trip to Africa to deal with the problems affecting Canadians. This is how we have gotten to this situation.

Yes, I think it is high time the government stops with its words and takes action.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Madam Speaker, we are here this evening to take part in an emergency debate.

Today, we all saw the response from the Prime Minister. It was the weakest response we have ever heard in Canada's modern history to a crisis like the one we are currently in.

The Liberals and the other opposition parties are currently talking about what may have led to this situation, but the thing that matters more to the Conservatives is the critical infrastructure, the railway and the blockade.

We can understand what pushed people, activists or certain first nations groups to do what they are doing, but as the saying goes, the end does not justify the means.

The Prime Minister forgot two key elements in his speech this morning. First, he forgot to clearly condemn the illegal actions of the radical activists. Then, he failed to present a plan of action to finally end the blockade and get our economy back on track. His statement is a full abdication of his responsibility and shows a flagrant lack of leadership.

We have to decide what Canada represents. Are we still a country that says yes to major national projects or must we kowtow to activists who are trying to put the breaks on development? Are Canadian laws really laws? Are there two classes of citizens, those who must abide by the law without protesting, and the rest? As my leader asked, will we let our economy be taken hostage by a small group that rejects the legal system that has been in place in our country for more than 150 years?

The Prime Minister claims that he is sensitive, more than any other prime minister before him, to the concerns of the first nations. However, that cannot live up to the truth.

I have a few examples of comments made by first nations members. Today, the House wants to debate Canada's indigenous problem of the past 150 years when the main issue is dismantling the blockade as quickly as possible. The economy is at risk. We can understand that there are indigenous peoples in Canada who have differences that they want to resolve and that they are looking for solutions. We all agree on that. However, the first thing that must be done is to tell people that a few dozen individuals have completely shut down Canada's rail network. That is a critical piece of infrastructure.

When it comes to critical infrastructure, billions are being spent on national defence, and hundreds of millions are being spent on public safety to protect Canadian infrastructure. This includes cyber-attacks, coastal defence and aerospace. We can put in whatever we want. Right now, a few dozen individuals, including many activists who are not indigenous, by the way, are on the tracks in Canada and are blocking Canada's entire railway system. Do we think that this makes sense? Do we think that we should be spending the entire evening until midnight talking about indigenous issues?

*S. O. 52*

Could we talk about it tomorrow once we get the tracks cleared and the railway system up and running again? That is what is important. I do not understand how the coalition of the Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the Liberals could talk about indigenous issues in the broadest sense, while nothing is moving. We cannot wrap our heads around it. One day I would like to have a discussion with people from the other parties and have someone explain to businesses and the entire country how we can do this.

Let us go back to what indigenous people have already said about the current problem.

Chief Larry Nooski said that Coastal GasLink presents the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation with an unparalleled economic growth opportunity. They negotiated hard to ensure that the Nadleh people, including their young people, can benefit directly or indirectly from this project, while ensuring that the land and water will also be protected.

● (2020)

Hereditary chief Helen Michelle of Skin Tyee First Nation of the Wet'suwet'en has stated that most of the protesters were not even Wet'suwet'en. She added that her people gave Coastal GasLink the go-ahead, that they talked and talked to the elders, and brought them back to walk the territory where the Coastal GasLink is going. They are going to give it the go-ahead.

Hereditary chief Theresa Tait-Day of the Wet'suwet'en nation said that 85% of her people said yes to Coastal GasLink.

There is a very sensitive issue in Quebec, and I hope my Bloc friends are listening. Bill 21 is a very sensitive topic that most Quebecers are unanimously in favour of. Some Quebecers are against Bill 21. If those who oppose it decided to block the Louis-Hippolyte-Lafontaine bridge-tunnel and the Pierre-Laporte bridge in Quebec City because they are against Bill 21, would they be there for long? Would my Bloc colleagues be okay with them staying there and exercising their right to protest? No, they would have to leave before any discussion could happen. The same principle applies.

Is any particular cause more important than another? So important that it can be allowed to block the national economy?

If 85% of the community supports the project, that means 15% of the community does not. Should all our rail lines be blocked because 15% of the population does not agree? That makes no sense.

We must ask ourselves whether Canada can turn a blind eye to these illegal acts. We understand that they want to talk, but we need to intervene, particularly since everyone knows that the first nations in the region agreed to the project.

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In Ontario, Tyendinaga Mohawk police chief Jason Brant reminded protesters that their actions were illegal and that they should leave the premises peacefully. He read a letter to protesters asking them to go home and to tell the Ontario Provincial Police that they intended to do just that. The police peacefully reminded people that they were committing an offence. The police officers did their job. They told the protesters that they could not stay there. We wanted peaceful measures and that is what happened. The police have not been aggressive. They said that they had received a letter from the court and that the protesters had to leave. They were not mean about it. It is when people fail to listen to police instructions that the problems begin.

With regard to public safety, rail systems were tampered with and the Minister of Transport is aware of that. When the blockades come down, the rail systems will have to be checked because it is dangerous for the trains. It is urgent that we put an end to the protests and get the rail system back up and running as quickly as possible.

The economic impact is huge, especially for passengers. Yes, passengers can take the bus or other forms of transportation. However, this also has an impact on the supply of products like propane and chlorine and on infrastructure.

It is not just about money. Some people will say that money is not important, since it grows on trees. That is what the Prime Minister thinks. However, businesses do not survive on the government's money; they survive on their own money. If they suffer losses, no one will compensate them, but let us not talk about that.

The municipalities need chlorine for water treatment. If there are chlorine shortages, this will become a public health issue. There are many problems like this.

Yes, negotiations related to indigenous issues are important. We have indigenous affairs spokespersons to take care of that. However, what urgently matters today is clearing the rail line to get our economy back on track. Then we can begin the necessary discussions.

• (2025)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, we will have to agree to disagree. We have a lot riding on this.

The issue is not as simple as some might try to portray. I thought the Prime Minister was right on earlier today when he addressed the issue in a ministerial statement and appealed for people to be patient as we tried to work this thing through.

The consequences of taking an action prematurely can be very significant. It could hurt many of the individuals on all sides. The idea of coming up with a peaceful resolution is in the best interests of everyone. As I say, at times we just need to disagree.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks.

First of all, the Prime Minister's speech this morning said nothing. Thirteen days in, I can understand that he would be looking for a solution. However, as I said at the beginning of my speech, the end does not justify the means. Everyone is walking on eggshells and nobody wants to get their hands dirty because they are afraid of reprisals if there is an intervention. Nobody wants to relive the Oka crisis. Nobody wants a repeat of another crisis.

In light of the situation and the impact of this blockage on the Canadian economy, we cannot afford to let ourselves be threatened. We cannot live under threat. Nobody wants to threaten people and nobody wants to be threatened. It does not work that way. If the government decides to say nothing and just hope, how long will it last? It is fine if the conflict is resolved tomorrow or in 48 hours at most, but we need some kind of ultimatum to tell these people that their actions are illegal, that they are not working, and that the government will talk to them if they get out within 48 hours. There are ways of doing that, but I do not think sunshine and lollipops will get us very far.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have a lot to say about my colleague's speech.

I would like to start by saying that we completely agree with him on some things. The government is making things up as it goes along. It let the situation get worse and has shown some pathetic crisis management. I think we can all agree on that.

I wish I could have spoken earlier, but I did not have the opportunity to do so. Perhaps I can ask you the question. One of your colleagues said earlier that the protesters had a secret agenda to destroy the economy. It was some kind of conspiracy theory. That member's only solution was to go in and chase them out with bats. The member did nevertheless acknowledge that some kind of dialogue was necessary.

How can you establish a dialogue with people that you are chasing out with bats? How can you then expect to do something constructive and be able to talk? I find it hard—

• (2030)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès):** I remind hon. members that they must address the Chair, and I would ask them to refrain from using certain sacred words that may not be in this context.

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

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, I do not know which of my colleagues made that comment.

We obviously do not want to see force being used. However, we must be firm and clear, and we must have objectives. We must ask them to leave and promise to listen to them. We cannot simply wait it out.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, during my colleague's speech, I received a message on my Facebook page that reads as follows: "Hey Luc, because of the crisis with the rail blockades, our livestock will soon be going hungry. Anything you can do to shake things up and move things along would be appreciated, because the viability of our businesses is on the line. Thank you."

That is the reality. In our ridings across Canada, people are going to suffer because of this crisis. I think that it is time for the government to take responsibility and act. That is the message that my colleague has been trying to get across for a while now.

Does my colleague agree that it is time to move things along?

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus:** Madam Speaker, this needs to be resolved, just like any other conflict. We saw other conflicts before the holidays, particularly with Canadian National. That caused problems and there was talk of passing back-to-work legislation. When there is a labour dispute at Canada Post, we talk about back-to-work legislation.

In the situation we are discussing today, no one seems to have a solution. All we are asking for is a stronger tone.

Getting back to the Bloc Québécois's question, I want to say that there are non-indigenous individuals in the groups currently manning the blockades. Some of these individuals are even activists from the United States. We cannot allow the situation to deteriorate further.

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

I am not proud of this, but in some ways, the people of La Prairie were the pioneers of the sad situation we are currently experiencing. As of last Monday, over 3,000 people in my part of the country were denied access to public transportation because of a blockade set up by about a dozen individuals in Kahnawake. We are not sure of the exact number. We were therefore the first to suffer the consequences of the crisis and my riding was truly a microcosm of what is currently happening across Quebec.

Since I am somewhat responsible for the well-being of my constituents, I tried to improve the situation and even solve the problem. One can always hope. I asked the question this morning and the discussion was going in that direction this afternoon: I looked for the government member responsible for taking care of the situation. I looked for the person responsible for resolving the crisis, but that was no easy feat.

I told myself that there must be a conflict since the band chief indicated that it was not the band council that told the protesters to set up the blockade but that he would not get the peacekeepers to intervene to prevent them from doing so.

That is when I understood that this was a communication problem, unless it was simply a problem between various indigenous

*S. O. 52*

people on the reserve. Then I thought it was a problem related to the management of relations with indigenous peoples, and since we have two ministers looking after the issue, I would have a good chance of getting one of them to help me.

I first tried to call the office of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations. I never heard back. It felt a little like calling a hospital, where no one answers. I left messages, but I never heard back.

Then, I thought I should try the second minister, and so I called the Minister of Indigenous Services. I was sure he would answer, but I was wrong. Later that day, after writing to him, we received an email informing us that it was the Minister of Transport who was looking after this file. That is when I started to worry.

We reached out to the Minister of Transport who told us that CN had obtained an injunction against the protesters blocking its rail lines. Then, all communication stopped.

First of all, CP serves my riding; not CN. That information was not helpful. Second of all, not long after, I heard the minister on TV saying that it was not the federal government's problem, that it was a provincial problem and that it was up to them to maintain order.

I was very worried. When I see my Conservative colleagues shaking their fists and acting like G.I. Joe, I get worried. Why? I get worried because someone acted like G.I. Joe in my riding back in 1990 and it did not go well. Thirty years later we are still seeing the consequences. Scars have remained.

As a result, when I saw this situation taking place last week, I thought that we would have to negotiate; find someone who will negotiate. I see you looking at me, Madam Speaker, wondering who was the lucky elected official or leader who helped me.

That is a good question, because neither of the two ministers helped me. I thought one of them might even be an urban legend. Surely she did not exist, since I never saw her anywhere and she never responded to me.

I am a nice guy who likes good relations. The ministers responsible for indigenous affairs can see that the first problem to arise in Quebec was in Kahnawake. As a member of Parliament, I was expecting one of the ministers to ask in which riding this was taking place. It was all taking place in La Prairie. Perhaps I should give them a call, tell them not to panic, that we are there, and so on.

● (2035)

That is what I hoped for, but it is not at all what happened. The opposite happened. I turned to the Minister of Transport. I was disappointed. This crisis management is a string of disappointments.

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I find it problematic to see the Prime Minister in Africa trying to get seats on the Security Council when security in his own country is not going well. It is also problematic when the Deputy Prime Minister is nowhere to be found.

Six days later, my constituents were forced to take a bus. I called the company Exo, which is really helping my constituents by providing them with bus transportation. The people at Exo told me that they were emergency measures. In other words, the service was limited, it would not last and we would no longer have the nice buses. Drivers from Abitibi and Trois-Rivières who came to help out would stop coming. The situation was dire.

Today, I realize that we have lost eight or nine days. The people in my riding are feeling the effects of eight days of this government's inaction. Nothing has happened. It has not even taken a step in the right direction.

These people are suffering the consequences of the Prime Minister's inaction, empty words and lip service. In 2015, he was talking about reconciliation with the first nations people. Today, I heard him announce that there would be a ministerial statement. I thought we were going to learn something. No such luck. He read the text he read during the 2015 election. What kind of progress was achieved between 2015 and 2019? The answer to that is obvious to Dalida fans: "words, words, words". He did not make any progress. Nothing happened. This crisis was wholly concocted. Later, in 10, 15, 20 or 30 years, when crisis management is being taught, the Liberal government's masterpiece from last week will likely be held up as an example. It will be said that this was the most epic failure of crisis management. People will wonder if this is possible. Indeed, it is.

The crisis reared its head in 2010. In 2010, some people had erected cabins in retaliation for approval of Coastal GasLink. In 2019, the first arrests were made. In December, the RCMP decided to send in Chuck Norris-style snipers. They sent in snipers. That may seem funny, but it is not funny to my constituents who are waiting for the bus. They came up with this idea. This government thought it would be a good idea to send in snipers. It is unbelievable. We cannot remain silent on that.

This crisis unfolded following the repeated and constant inaction of this government. In today's ministerial statement, it was more of the same lip service. Was there a hint of potential management? No. All we have is a statement that was made on Friday by the Minister of Transport, who told us the situation was serious and there were many consequences to the crisis. Okay, but what are they doing? Who is going to manage this crisis? Who is going to take care of it? We are still waiting.

The Bloc Québécois has been saying all week that we need a crisis committee and a mediator and that we should have been back in the House yesterday to fast-track progress toward the outcome everyone wants, which is a resolution. That is what everyone here wants.

This government needs to wake up and deal with the situation. People in my riding are waiting, and they are starting to get fed up.

• (2040)

**Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his very passionate speech. My riding is next to his, and my constituents could not take the train from Candiac to Montreal either. I am grateful for their patience as this situation unfolds.

I remember having protesters outside my office a few months ago, and I took the opportunity to chat with them. One way an MP can be a collaborative parliamentarian is by relaying people's messages to the government.

I have a question for my colleague. The people of Kahnawake are his constituents. Has he taken the opportunity to go talk to them?

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her question.

Yes, last week, I contacted the office of Joseph Norton, the grand chief of the Kahnawake band council, but we were unable to meet because of scheduling difficulties. I am still waiting for his call.

Since they know a little bit about how this works, these people often prefer to talk to the minister or the Prime Minister. I am sure the member will agree with me. I tried anyway, and I hope he will call me back.

[English]

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Speaker for allowing this important debate to take place tonight.

I want to thank my colleague for sharing his experience in his community and what it looks like when a militarized situation is brought toward a conflict that deserves a peaceful solution.

We know that when we have conflict in our communities, whether it be in Canada or around the world, militarization has not usually brought people solutions. We have to bring down the temperature. To do that, a legitimate call to action would be for the RCMP to leave right now.

The call to action is that the Prime Minister go there, sit at the table and meaningfully negotiate. That means coming to the table with a commitment to negotiate.

The member has seen first-hand what this has done in his community, the pain and suffering. I am sure this experience is triggering to a lot of people in his community. We should learn from that.

Chief Woos, the hereditary chief of the Wet'suwet'en, was just on the news. He said, "We're not going to talk with a gun pointed at our heads."

It is pretty clear that we cannot move forward unless the RCMP leaves and the government is ready to meaningfully negotiate in a peaceful way. The pathway forward has to be one where we are all at the table, without the RCMP being present, so the community can come forward with a peaceful proposal and we can walk forward together. However, it has to be led by the Wet'suwet'en. They are calling on the Prime Minister to be at the table. Does he support that call to action?

• (2045)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

From what I heard, it seems that Mr. Norton is setting down “his conditions” to resolve the situation in British Columbia. One of those conditions, which is also one of the proposed solutions, is to have the RCMP withdraw. Obviously there is a connection between the two, and the member was right to mention it.

This is a situation where we need to sit down and negotiate. We need to work together to find solutions, but I repeat that someone needs to take charge. In negotiations, the parties need to pull in a single direction to move forward the right way and that means someone needs to take charge.

Unfortunately, this government and the Prime Minister are not taking the initiative. At some point, they will have to take charge because my constituents are waiting for someone to resolve the situation.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Madam Speaker, today we are talking about the rail blockades, but what we are really talking about is a screw-up.

We are talking about a Liberal screw-up that is not only a Liberal screw-up, but also a Canadian screw-up. Right now, the government just does not want to get involved. I will get to the rail blockade situation in a bit.

For example, the government has taken a hands-off approach to letting rail companies regulate themselves. They pretty much get to decide which rules work for them. That leads to consequences such as accidents and explosions. Quebeckers remember the Lac-Mégantic tragedy like it happened yesterday, and I do not think they will forget it anytime soon.

The government has also taken a hands-off approach to rail traffic control centres. In 2012, which was not that long ago, there were five rail traffic control centres in Canada. Soon there will be just two: one for Canadian National, or CN, and one for Canadian Pacific, or CP. What happens if there is an accident? Nobody knows. Rail traffic will be shut down across the country. Nobody will be able to do anything about it, and we will end up in the same situation we are in now thanks to that hands-off policy.

The government also takes a hands-off approach to the Indian Act, a law rooted in colonialism and paternalism that Canada forced on indigenous peoples in 1876. This act essentially treated indigenous peoples like children who were then told what was good for them. This created a bitter and tense atmosphere. The act was

implemented in 1867. This is 2020. There are quite a few years between 1876 and 2020. How can it have taken so long to consider the possibility that the act does not reflect reality?

The government has not made this clear. We have heard some complaints from the government. It half-heartedly says that it was not perfect. We know what the problem is. The problem is that damn Indian Act. This piece of legislation is catastrophic for indigenous peoples, and they have never accepted it.

In the long term, the current crisis is the result of the Indian Act. In the short term, the other problem is the Liberal government. This is why I am talking about the Canadian government as a whole and about the Liberal government. There is the long term and the short term.

Rail blockades have quietly popped up all over Canada. After the first few blockades, the government buried its head in the sand. They would not answer their phones and no one knew what was going on. They acted like nothing was wrong, like everything was fine. It boggles the mind.

There were news stories about the situation, including images of people blockading rail lines. On the government side, there was no response, no spokesperson, no sign, no light. That got people's attention. Rather than taking action, meeting with people or taking any initiative right away, the government let things go. Days passed and the blockades did not go away; rather, they multiplied. Suddenly, there was not just one blockade, there were two, three, four or five. I do not know how many there are, for I am not counting. In a situation like this, one can no longer continue to say there is no problem and simply look the other way, because the blockades are everywhere. Both CN and VIA Rail decided to halt all trains, but that has caused problems.

My colleague, the member for La Prairie, was just saying that he tried to contact the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and the Minister of Indigenous Services, but that they could not be reached. He did not hear from them. It was difficult to understand.

Also, the Deputy Prime Minister was nowhere to be found. There was no response or leadership from her. We do not know where she was during this crisis.

As for the Prime Minister, he was abroad. He was trying to win a seat on the UN Security Council, which is not a bad thing in and of itself. The problem is that when the house is on fire, they must deal with the problems instead of looking for gratification elsewhere. In my opinion, the government's management of the situation has been disastrous thus far.

The Minister of Transport was missing in action. We did not see him and we did not know where he was. The first time we saw him was at the meeting with the provincial first ministers. As there were cameras at the meeting, we were unable to say anything. What we finally learned was that the minister washed his hands of the situation and that the provinces were to find a solution.

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• (2050)

Initially there was a blockade in British Columbia, but now they are everywhere. The entire rail system is blocked. This is not a matter of telling one little province to deal with its problems. Everyone is suffering. I think the government is totally out of touch with its management.

It is disappointing because it took just about a week before the government started to say that there may be a problem. What happened during that week? Nothing happened. There were blockades, people protested, goods stopped being shipped. The government did nothing. It let the situation fester. Obviously, when a situation is allowed to fester, everything around it gets soiled and the situation gets worse. The wound turns gangrenous and becomes harder to deal with. Obviously this has been mismanaged, and the other side needs to change course.

Faced with everyone's anger, the government finally had to consider that there might be a problem and it might have to start giving it some thought. Over the weekend, a few pitiful ministers attended meetings here and there, their heads hanging low. They felt they had no choice but to go talk to them, but they should have done that a week earlier. It is rather disappointing. In fact, it is quite disappointing because the result was actually not bad. One blockade was lifted, but elsewhere nothing moved and the blockades are still there.

Members will understand our disappointment. The government should have grabbed the bull by the horns and gone to see these people from the start. It should have taken these people into consideration, as they are protesting for good reason. They are not happy that a pipeline is being shoved down their throats. In Quebec, we would not be happy either if energy east were shoved down our throats. I think there would be major protests if that happened.

Plus, these people are not happy with how they are being treated under the Indian Act. They have every reason to complain. We need to listen to them and pay attention to the problem they are dealing with. We cannot ignore them and look the other way when there is a problem, and we cannot leave businesses in the lurch. There is no comparison.

Here is the situation: CN sent 450 people home. They cannot work because the rail line is not operational. This might be just the beginning. That number could climb to 1,000, 2,000 or 6,000 people, because a lot of people work there. If people cannot work, CN is not going to pay them to sit at their desks and twiddle their thumbs. Things have to move.

Right now, CN is not moving. Soon, grocery stores will realize they cannot stock their shelves and will have to truck goods in. They will have to raise their prices because it is going to cost them 25% more.

Farmers, schools and hospitals are not getting propane, and people are very worried that we could soon end up with a propane shortage. Cities could run out of chlorine and be unable to treat their water. Drinking water is an important issue. If this continues, the port of Montreal will no longer be able to receive ships. That seems to have been the implication today. The port would be blocked.

I think about the businesses in my riding that are being hit hard. ArcelorMittal employs nearly 2,000 people back home. The company tells us that it will have to slow production at some point. The metals are no longer coming in, and the company cannot produce stock. Danone, which employs hundreds of people in my riding and supplies all of the yogurt in this country, is saying the same thing. The yogurt will not be good anymore, and they do not know what to do.

Today, faced with all these problems, we have a Prime Minister who said he would make a ministerial statement in the House of Commons, but who did not say anything. He simply repeated the same things, namely that there was a problem and that they are going to try to have a dialogue. There is no solution, no action plan. It is rather discouraging.

The Bloc Québécois proposed some solutions. We proposed creating a war room from the start. The government did not do that. It waited. Then we proposed a mediator. The government did nothing. It waited. We proposed recalling the House yesterday. The government did not want to. We are also proposing, at the very least, that work on the Coastal GasLink pipeline be suspended. That might be good for dialogue.

We would like the government to listen to our suggestions and put them into action. At the end of the day, it could also study the Indian Act properly and make it consistent with the requirements and needs of the first nations.

• (2055)

[*English*]

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is really interesting when we do the contrast. If we were to take the Conservative approach on this issue, I really and truly believe it would be damaging in the long run, and in the short run, for Canadians in all regions of the country.

It is really encouraging to hear that the Bloc and the New Democrats have a much better understanding of the situation. Earlier today, in a ministerial statement, we heard the Prime Minister talk about the importance of having patience on the issue.

The member spent a lot of time talking about Ottawa. Would he not agree that as a part of the bigger picture, we need to include provincial governments and stakeholders and when we talk about indigenous people, it is really important to look at the bigger picture before we jump to any quick resolution?

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Chair, I took note of what the hon. member across the way said when he asked us to be patient. When we expected the government to take action for nearly a week before it finally admitted there was a problem, our patience wore thin. It has been nearly two weeks since the trains stopped running, and businesses are starting to lay off staff. Our patience is wearing even thinner. I think our patience has reached its limit.

We want the government to suspend the pipeline project and start talking because it needs to show good faith to initiate the dialogue. I am sure that will work.

[English]

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Madam Speaker, in my riding there has been a long-standing court case with the Ahousaht over their right to catch and sell fish. These indigenous communities on the west coast of Vancouver Island that are Nuuchah-nulth have been fighting to prove and establish their inherent right, which we know they already have, in the courts of this country. They won in the Supreme Court of Canada in 2009, and the Harper government appealed it. They won again, and then the current government appealed it.

The Liberal government and the Harper government spent \$19 million just on government lawyers in fighting these indigenous people who live in a remote community. Many of them live on Flores Island and want the right to catch and sell the fish that are swimming right by their village. This is a community with 70% unemployment and much suicide. The cost of not taking action is killing people. This is what reconciliation looks like in this country. That is why people are rising across this country.

I hope the Prime Minister is listening to me somewhere. If he is listening, he needs to take this seriously. Reconciliation means meaningful negotiations. The judge in that court case said that the government was not even willing to negotiate and knowingly came empty-handed. It should be ashamed of itself.

I hope that this member will join me in calling on the government to get to the table with meaningful reconciliation.

• (2100)

[Translation]

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Chair, I want to come back to a few things my colleague said. Generally speaking, I agree with him.

He said that first nations must go to court to assert their rights, and I think that is terrible. The Indian Act has existed since 1876, and that act does not respect who they are. We in the Bloc Québécois are not big fans of the Supreme Court. We believe that going to court is never the best solution. The best solution is for those in power to listen to and meet the needs of first nations. That is where we should begin, rather than threatening legal action, suing one another and communicating through the courts. That is not how problems get solved.

**Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC):** Madam Chair, the member criticized my speech. He also blamed the government, and rightfully so. He described how criti-

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cal the situation is, and we agree with him on that. At the end of his speech, however, he said that all he wanted was for the pipeline project to be cancelled.

How can the Bloc Québécois tell the Government of British Columbia to cancel a pipeline project that is supported by 20 band councils and agreed on by everyone, including the province?

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Madam Chair, the Bloc Québécois leader was a little more precise when he said that British Columbia might consider the idea of temporarily suspending work. I think that would be a good place to start in order to open the dialogue.

[English]

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is an honour to stand here this evening on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

First I want to thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for calling for this important debate this evening.

[Translation]

It is important for us to be able to discuss the issues and possible solutions here in this place no matter what our party lines are.

[English]

Canadians are upset. As the Prime Minister expressed so eloquently this morning, Canadians expect us to work together to get through this together. Young people have tearfully expressed to me how upsetting it has been for them to see the images and hear from their friends of being arrested for standing for what they believe in. This happened a year ago and then again earlier this month.

As we heard in the heartfelt words of the Minister of Indigenous Services, we believe we have learned from the crisis at Oka, but also Ipperwash, Caledonia and Gustafsen Lake. Last year, we said that we never wanted to see again the images of police having to use force in an indigenous community in order to keep the peace.

Canada is counting on us to work together to create the space for respectful dialogue with the Wet'suwet'en peoples. We all want this dispute resolved in a peaceful manner. We want the Wet'suwet'en peoples to come together and resolve their differences of opinion.

[Translation]

We want absolute clarity and a shared understanding of the Wet'suwet'en laws.

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[English]

We are inspired by the courageous Wet'suwet'en people who took the recognition of their rights to the Supreme Court of Canada in the Delgamuukw case in 1997. Since 2018, we have been able and proud to invest in their research on specific claim negotiations, negotiation preparedness, nation rebuilding and the recognition of rights tables, as well as their contributions to the B.C. Treaty Commission processes.

Two years ago, I was proud to sign an agreement with hereditary chiefs of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en on asserting their rights on child and family services. Since then, our government has passed Bill C-92 so that all first nations would be able to pass their own child well-being laws and no longer be subject to section 88 of the Indian Act, which gave provinces laws of general application for things other than where Canada was explicit about the rights of first nations on health and education.

Across Canada, over half of the Indian Act bands are now sitting down at tables to work on their priorities as they assert their jurisdiction. From education to fisheries to child and family services to policing or to their own court systems, we have made important strides forward in the hard work of, as Lee Crowchild describes it, deconstructing the effects of colonization.

In British Columbia, we have been inspired by the work of the B.C. Summit, as they have been able to articulate and sign with us and the B.C. government a new policy that will once and for all eliminate the concepts of extinguishment, cede and surrender for future treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements.

We have together agreed that no longer would loans be necessary for first nations to fund their negotiations with Canada. We are also forgiving outstanding past loans, and in some cases paying back nations that had already repaid those loans.

We have worked with the already self-governing nations on a collaborative fiscal arrangement that will provide stable, predictable funding that will properly fund the running of their governments.

• (2105)

[Translation]

This new funding arrangement will provide them with much more money than they would have received under the Indian Act.

[English]

The conditions are right to move the relationship with first nations, Inuit and Métis to one based on the affirmation of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership as written in the mandate letters of all ministers of this government.

It has been so exciting to watch the creativity and innovation presented by the Ktunaxa and Sto:lo nations in their negotiations of modern treaties.

We were inspired to see the hereditary chiefs and the elected chief and council of the Heiltsuk nation work together to be able to sign an agreement with Canada on their path to self-government. Many nations have been successful when elected and hereditary

chiefs have worked together, and I look forward to having these conversations with the Wet'suwet'en nation.

It is now time to build on the historic Delgamuukw decision. It is time to show that issues of rights and title can be solved in meaningful dialogue.

[Translation]

My job is to ensure that Canada finds out-of-court solutions and to fast-track negotiations and agreements that make real change possible.

[English]

After the Tsilhqot'in decision, we have been inspired by the hard work of the Tsilhqot'in national government to build its capacity as a government, to write its constitution and its laws, and establish its government.

I look forward to hopefully finding out-of-court processes to determine title, as we hope for Haida Gwaii. There are many parts of Canada where title is very difficult to determine. Many nations have occupied the land for varying generations. I will never forget that feeling on the Tsilhqot'in title land at the signing with the Prime Minister, looking around, the land surrounded by mountains, where the Tsilhqot'in people have lived for millennia. It seemed obvious that anyone who stood there would understand why they had won their case at the Supreme Court of Canada.

We are at a critical time in Canada. We need to deal effectively with the uncertainty. Canadians want to see indigenous rights honoured, and they are impatient for meaningful progress.

Canadians are counting on us to implement a set of rules and processes in which section 35 of our Constitution can be honourably implemented. We are often reminded that inherent rights did not start with section 35: They are indeed inherent rights, as well as treaty rights.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is an important first step in getting there. We need to properly explain, as have many of the academics and so many of the courts, that free, prior and informed consent is not scary. Consent is not a veto. Bill C-69 means that indigenous peoples and indigenous knowledge will be mandatory at the very beginning of a proposal for any major project.

Section 19 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has really been described as a process for land use planning in which the rights of indigenous people are respected.

As we have learned from the experience in Nunavut, where the land claims have been settled, good projects receive a green light, bad projects a red light, and mediocre projects are sent back to the drawing board to improve their environmental stewardship or cultural protection or employment for the Inuit beneficiaries. Nunavummiut accept the decisions of this process wherein the federal, territorial, and Inuit rights holders have taken the decision together.

Canadians acknowledge that there has been a difference of opinion among the Wet'suwet'en peoples. We have heard often in the House that 20 elected chiefs and council agreed to the project in consultation with their people. Women leaders have expressed an opinion that the project can eliminate poverty or provide meaningful work for young men and reduce domestic violence and incarceration. Some have expressed that in an indigenous world view, providing an energy source that will reduce China's reliance on coal is good for Mother Earth.

However, it is only the Wet'suwet'en people that can decide. We are hoping the Wet'suwet'en people will be able to come together to take these decisions together, decisions that are in the best interests of their children and their children for generations to come.

• (2110)

[*Translation*]

We applaud the thousands of young Canadians fighting for climate justice.

[*English*]

We know that those young people need hope, that they want to see a real plan to deal with the climate emergency. We do believe that we have an effective plan in place, from clean tech to renewable energy, public transit, and protection of the land and the water.

We want the young people of Canada and all those who have been warning about climate change for decades to feel heard.

[*Translation*]

They need hope, and they need to feel involved in coming up with real solutions.

[*English*]

Tonight there is an emergency debate because our country is hurting. It is for indigenous peoples and all those who are being affected coast to coast to coast.

Yesterday I met in Victoria with British Columbia minister Scott Fraser, and this afternoon had a call with hereditary chiefs and conveyed that we are ready to meet with the hereditary leadership of Wet'suwet'en at a time and place of their choosing.

Together with the Prime Minister and the premier, we want to support the solutions going forward. We want to address their short- and long-term goals. We want to see the hope and hard work that resulted in the Delgamuukw decision of 1997, to be able to chart a new path with the Wet'suwet'en nation in which there is unity and prosperity and a long-term plan for protecting their law, and as Eugene Arcand says, LAW: land, air, water. We also want to see a thriving Wet'suwet'en nation with its own constitution and laws based on its traditional legal customs and practices.

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We want to thank Premier Horgan for his efforts to resolve this problem and Murray Rankin for the work that he has undertaken since April of last year to work with the elected chiefs and council as well as the hereditary chiefs on their rights and title. We want to thank Nathan Cullen for his efforts to try and de-escalate this situation.

I am very proud to work with the Province of British Columbia, and I think all in this House congratulate it on the passage of Bill 41, where in Canada the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is now legislated.

Our government is invested in and inspired by the work of Val Napoleon and John Borrows at the Indigenous Legal Lodge at the University of Victoria. They will be able to do the research on the laws of many nations so that they can create a governance structure and constitutions in keeping with those laws. It is important to understand the damage done by colonization and residential schools that has led to sometimes different interpretations of traditional legal practices and customs.

[*Translation*]

We think that, one day, Canada will be able to integrate indigenous law into Canada's legislative process, just as it did with common law and droit civil.

[*English*]

We are striving to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action and to increase awareness of our shared history. We all need the indigenous leadership to know that we are serious. We are serious about rebuilding trust and working with respect, as the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Prime Minister have expressed today in such heartfelt ways.

We hope that the Wet'suwet'en will be able to express to those in solidarity with them that it is now time to stand down to create that space for a peaceful dialogue, and to let us get back to work towards a Wet'suwet'en nation with its own laws and governance that can work nation-to-nation with the Crown.

Although I returned to Ottawa for this debate tonight, I am hoping to be able to return to B.C. as soon as possible to continue that work.

• (2115)

**Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC):** Madam Speaker, the minister spoke about some very important issues surrounding this debate, which is that the 20 councils of the Wet'suwet'en nation have approved this pipeline. The majority of people within these first nations communities have approved the pipeline. The majority of hereditary chiefs have approved the pipeline. They have done that because of the prosperity that it can create. It speaks to the very issue of autonomy. It speaks to the very issue of reconciliation.

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Would the minister not agree that this is precisely what this country wants and desires: a path to move on to? Would the minister not also agree that the illegal blockades that are going on in this country and are damaging the economy of this country need to stop, and that the issues of the Wet'suwet'en people need to be acknowledged and moved forward?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, again, it is a matter of us moving forward as a country, understanding that the custodians of the land and the stewardship of the land have been handed down by generations in traditional manners. It is really important, as we have been saying, that the nation will come to these decisions itself, but at the moment there are people who do see the Indian Act as a completely colonial structure that divided people, villagized them and put them away.

We are trying to now be at a time of nation rebuilding, so that nations can take a decision together and we can move forward as a country. It is important that we create that space to have those kinds of conversations and for us not to be judging how a nation takes decisions, knowing that some are very uncomfortable with the kinds of structures that were imposed by the Indian Act.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, the Conservatives talk about the rule of law, yet they fail to recognize that section 35 of our Constitution clearly recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples; they fail to recognize that in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, section 10 recognizes the issue of free, prior and informed consent; and they fail to recognize that with the Delgamuukw case the highest court of this land, the Supreme Court of Canada, also recognizes indigenous peoples and their rights.

If the Liberal government truly is committed to a new nation-to-nation relationship, will it bring these principles that are enshrined in section 35, in UNDRIP and in Delgamuukw to the table and begin the negotiations? To show a gesture of goodwill, will the Liberals be willing to call the RCMP to stand down, take the guns out of the land and allow for negotiations to take place in a peaceful manner?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member and her former colleague, Romeo Saganash, for the very important work that he provided in terms of our providing his Bill C-262 as a baseline as we go forward, as a floor, to be able to legislate the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples here in Canada, as an example for the world.

This is an important time where all of these things come together. It is important that Delgamuukw ascertained the rights of the people whom we have to move on in their search to have clarity on title. Those are conversations that we need to have together.

The member knows, as we have explained in this House many times, the Government of Canada cannot direct the RCMP. Our job is that we can explain, as we are in this House tonight and as your members have done, that the presence of the RCMP has been articulated as a problem for the hereditary chiefs and many of the members of that community. We have articulated that, and we want to work in any way to remove the obstacles, to be able to go forward as a country.

• (2120)

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I want to remind the minister she is to address her questions and comments to the Chair.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Right now, negotiations are not progressing because the hereditary chiefs will not meet with the federal government as long as the RCMP is on site.

When will the Liberal government respond, and how will it remedy the situation?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, that is a very important question.

As I mentioned, it is very important to remember that the government does not have the authority to dictate the processes to the RCMP. It is very important to me to clearly express the problems of the citizens and the hereditary chiefs, and it is very important that we understand that it is not the role of parliamentarians to tell the police how to do their job.

[*English*]

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.):** Madam Speaker, I would like to applaud the government for ensuring that there will be an introduction of UNDRIP legislation to bring the United Nations declaration into Canadian law.

Beyond that necessary first step, will the government commit to changing its laws, policies and operational practices to ensure that indigenous peoples in this country can be self-determining, including self-governing, at their own pace and based on their own priorities? Can the government ensure that it will go beyond the UNDRIP legislation, and actually change laws and policies?

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, the member's leadership in this has been extraordinarily important. As we have seen with the signing of the B.C. policy, it is very clear that Canada has gone beyond what was expected. We were able to articulate with the Government of British Columbia and at the B.C. summit of indigenous leaderships that there is a way forward that can be a model for the rest of the country. All ministers in this House believe we have to go beyond what is the base and make sure that we get the obstacles to self-government and self-determination out of the way.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I would ask the minister to provide further comment on the importance of working with others. She made reference to Nathan Cullen, the provincial government and different stakeholders, and that high sense of co-operation and wanting to make sure we get this right.

**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:** Madam Speaker, I have been overwhelmed today and over this past week by the offers of help coming from all across the nation, all different parties and all different nations. People want to see us get through this in a peaceful way. We know this is the time, as we do not want to see this country in chaos, for us to all really redouble our efforts to figure out how we can do this in a peaceful way and to call upon all of the best ideas to come forward to make that happen.

● (2125)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

I want to acknowledge that the Speaker allowed this emergency debate tonight. It is an issue of critical importance across the country. To be frank, it did not have to be this way. The signs have been there for many months, that we have a challenge in British Columbia, with regard to the Coastal GasLink pipeline. The government ignored it. It is responsible for the crisis that we see today, because the Liberals did not proactively deal with this issue.

What is happening across the country? I think all of us in the House appreciate that demonstrations are a part of our rights as citizens of this country. Although there are times when there are blockades of traffic or whatever, we tolerate it because it is important. There is a line that gets crossed and that is of course when we have blockades of critical infrastructure, which are clearly illegal.

What are the impacts? No one has talked much about the impact of these actions from coast to coast to coast. What is happening because of these illegal blockades? I am not talking about peaceful demonstrations to which every Canadian has a right. I am talking about a blockade of our rail lines and other actions.

There is quickly becoming a shortage of groceries and baby formula in some stores, as the products cannot move across the country. Many homes rely on propane for heat, and propane travels by rail. The lack of propane is not only impacting people's homes, but it is also impacting senior care facilities and farmers.

We have a forestry crisis in British Columbia. The industry is on its knees. Now product is not getting from the forests to the mills and on to the customers. An already hurting industry is being doubly stabbed.

Right now there are 66 large shipping vessels sitting, stalled in the waters of British Columbia. That is at a cost of \$425 million a day, which is not insignificant. Water systems will not have the chlorine they need.

Just today, the Premier of British Columbia's house was blockaded to prevent him from getting to the legislature. Journalists had to scale the walls to get into the B.C. legislature so they could report on the speech from the throne.

Clearly, as the transport minister acknowledged today, we have dangerous acts involving destruction of our rail lines. I understand that signal lights have been vandalized and there has been significant damage to vehicles and bridges. This is not an insignificant issue.

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When I listened to the Prime Minister earlier today, I heard a very peripheral acknowledgement of what was happening out there. It is so serious, and it is something I have never seen in all my time.

Thirty Canadian organizations, from the Chamber of Commerce to the aluminum and mining industries released a joint statement. It stated:

...these illegal blockades inflict serious damage on the economy, leaving countless middle-class jobs at risk, many of them in industries that must get their goods, parts, and ingredients to and from market by rail. In addition to disrupting domestic and global supply chains, the blockades undermine Canada's reputation as a dependable partner in international trade. They also threaten public safety by preventing the distribution of essential products like chlorine for water treatment and propane for heating homes...

● (2130)

I will share my understanding of this project.

There was a very lengthy process for approval. It is an approximately 670-kilometre pipeline that delivers gas from the Dawson Creek area to a facility near Kitimat, B.C. for export. It is seen as something that has an opportunity not only for economic benefit for Canada, but for supporting a decrease in global emissions.

We know 20 elected chiefs have supported the project. I understand a number of hereditary chiefs have also supported it. This process included a number of communities, and the elected councils took the project to referendum for approval. This is not just the elected chiefs saying, yes. In many communities, there was a referendum process.

Clearly, a group of hereditary chiefs are opposed. However, another significant point is that some of those chiefs actually ran for elected council and did not win their seats.

There was a rally in Prince George, and I listened to Wet'suwet'en speaker after speaker talk about the importance of this project to their community, from Crystal Smith to elder Elsie Tiljoe.

It was estimated, through an internal process, by hereditary chief Theresa Tait-Day that 85% of the Wet'suwet'en people in her community supported this project.

Again, clearly there has been trouble brewing for months, but the government has allowed it to grow into a full-blown crisis.

We now have groups like Extinction Rebellion, Climate Justice, among others, who play the key role in the protest. They have been described by many, including some of the Wet'suwet'en people, as outsiders exploiting a division within the first nations community in the hope of creating chaos. For many, I think this is a dress rehearsal for the Trans Mountain pipeline and any future energy project. Their goal is not to deal with the challenging governance issues of first nations communities, but it is to shut down energy infrastructure across the country.

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Current MLA Ellis Ross, formerly a band council member who participated in the benefit agreement negotiation, said, “Originally it was Indian act that oppressed us and we beat it. Now the NGOs and even Native organizations oppress us. In the middle of all this posturing and politics, average aboriginals remain in place with their social issues.”

Wet'suwet'en nation member Vernon Mitchel said, regarding some of the opposition, “They don't even know squat about our territory and meanwhile they're putting on roadblocks...they're hurting my people and my kids.”

To date, the government response has been to ignore and deflect, saying it is British Columbia's problem. Today, the speech by the Prime Minister was particularly disappointing. It was words, but it did not relay an action plan. Today Premier Moe called for a conference call with all the premiers, because he saw a lack of action and a lack of leadership.

In spite of the talk by the Prime Minister with respect to hearing different viewpoints, that different viewpoints are important, clearly there is only one viewpoint that matters, and that is his own perspective. He leaves many important people out of the conversation.

We have a crisis. We have a lack of leadership. The current government has allowed something to fester. It has not paid attention to it and it has grown into a crisis in the country. It lies at the feet of the government.

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I have two questions for the member.

First, I wonder if she could address the consultation process with the hereditary chiefs who are not in favour of the pipeline.

Second, the member very clearly outlined the problem of the blockades, etc., but she did not suggest a solution. Neither did the leader of the official opposition this afternoon. He said that something had to be done quickly, but neither the member nor her leader said exactly what should be done. Maybe the member could suggest what should be done.

• (2135)

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Madam Speaker, I outlined in my speech all the indicators with respect to the elected band councils, the referendum processes, the statements by so many of the members and the survey that indicated 85% support for the project. From what we have heard, and we are not in the community, this project has broad community support.

Certainly things have happened in the House. I do not agree with every piece of legislation that is passed, but I have to respect the will of the House. In terms of elections, we have to respect the will of the people.

Our side is saying that we respect the decision that was made by the communities, by the people.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Madam Speaker, it is a bit much to take when I hear the Conservative members. On the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, former Prime Minister Harper actually said that it was an Indian issue. This

is how the Conservatives treat Indigenous people. On this issue, they have perpetuated the situation which we are in today.

There is no question that the Liberals did not act, and they should have long ago. They have not made good on their promise on the new nation-to-nation relationship. However, the Conservatives have perpetuated this in their tenure as well.

On the question around the rule of law, do Conservative members not recognize section 35 of the Constitution that enshrines the rights of Indigenous people, and also the Supreme Court decision with respect to *Delgamuukw*?

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Madam Speaker, absolutely we respect section 35. However, what is very ironic is the member for Vancouver East sat in the B.C. legislature. She is part of the party that is supporting this pipeline. It is absolutely strange, absolutely ironic to hear the way she is arguing in the House today, knowing the position her party is taking in her province of British Columbia, which supports this project and wants to see it go through. The current premier is of the same mind.

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Madam Speaker, I am curious about where the member has come up with those numbers. I have gone up north and have met with the hereditary chiefs. I have spent some time in the community talking to the people.

Doing a quick search, I found that of the 300 members of the Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation, one of the Wet'suwet'en bands, 70% of the band voted no. The council voted 4:3 in favour of the project. The Witset band, the largest of the Wet'suwet'en group, which has a population of 5,000 members of which 2,000 are in the Witset band, 83% in a survey opposed this project.

Then we talk about the jobs. CGL admits there are only two dozen jobs for Wet'suwet'en people in this project. A lot of numbers are being thrown around. I am curious to know where the Conservatives are getting these numbers.

**Mrs. Cathy McLeod:** Madam Speaker, I have been at a number of forums where we have had presentations on some of the work that has been done. There clearly are some local issues that need to be dealt with and the current government has ignored the signals.

Everything I have read, everything I have seen and heard from the elders and hereditary chiefs show significant support.

We know the Greens, regardless of the project, will not support a project and they will find anything to not support it with respect to the numbers that represent their interests.

• (2140)

**Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to support the Wet'suwet'en people. Over the past weeks, news organizations from coast to coast have mobilized to every blockade and every protest, vying for sound bites and clips to share on the morning news and on their social media. Who has been forgotten in all of this? It seems to me it is the people of Wet'suwet'en nation.

Politicians across Canada and in this House have taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of the people. I do not want to even pretend to speak on behalf of these people, because I think that would be foolish for me to claim to do so. It would lack credibility and integrity. Let me be clear, however. We are at a very important point in our history, and I intend to be on the side of the Wet'suwet'en people tonight, who have the right to self-determination and to control their own destiny.

The elected leadership of all 20 first nations whose territory runs along the pathway of Coastal GasLink, eight hereditary chiefs and over 80% of the people are in favour of getting this pipeline built. I was the mayor of the city of Meadow Lake for eight years and I know just how difficult it is to get 80% support for a project. It is nearly impossible. That is why I appreciate the hard work that the elected chiefs have put in to negotiate an extremely successful deal with Coastal LNG on behalf of their people.

There is over \$1 billion in commitments to indigenous workers and to indigenous-owned firms because of this project. These dollars could be used for important investments in these communities such as housing, mental health, education, recreation and many other things. However, it is not just about the dollars being invested in these communities; it is about the creation of well-paid, sustainable jobs.

I represent a riding that has a population that is over 70% indigenous. During the election campaign and in the months since, I have had many opportunities to talk to people about my vision for northern Saskatchewan, to talk to people about the opportunity to have well-paying, sustainable jobs. It is a very similar theme to what we talk about tonight when we consider this project.

The benefits I have spoken about over and over again are three-fold. First, there is an obvious economic benefit that comes with having a good job and being able to take care of oneself and one's family. Second, there is an innate need in each of us to be fulfilled, to feel valued and to have a sense of self-worth. There is nothing greater than the feeling one experiences after coming home, having put in an honest day's work. Third, the most important benefit that I have been talking about over the last several months is the hope that comes from the opportunity of having a good job.

Youth suicide in northern remote communities is very real, and it is a heartbreaking crisis. I have spoken many times about how the suicide crisis in northern Saskatchewan is due to a lack of hope. When young people can look up to those they respect and admire, such as their parents, their uncles, their brothers and sisters, or maybe their older cousins, and see them succeed by being part of the industry in northern Saskatchewan, they have hope. They have hope for a better future and they no longer have to consider suicide.

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I realize that a good job does not solve every problem, but it sure is a good start and it goes a long way.

The question becomes how we create these jobs. I have spoken consistently about creating partnerships between indigenous communities and private industry. These partnerships create opportunity for people in remote northern communities to fully participate in the economic well-being of Canada as a whole. This project is a perfect example of that model at work.

We simply cannot allow a minority of protesters to stand in the way of the will of the Wet'suwet'en nation. These protesters have taken extraordinary measures to hold Canada hostage, compromising the safety of our rail infrastructure, blocking and intimidating people attempting to go to work and in some cases physically assaulting elected members of a provincial legislature.

These blockades have had real effects on my constituents. I have heard from farmers in my riding that many are being told they will not be able to deliver the grain they have contracted for February and March. Canada's reputation as a stable supplier is at risk. Our farmers are risking losing global customers, and they will find other suppliers.

These are people's livelihoods we are talking about. It is how they feed their families. It is what heats their homes. These blockades have to end. If we allow a small minority to succeed in blocking this project, I am concerned that it will be impossible for future projects to ever see the light of day.

• (2145)

Canada's courts have been very clear. The standard for meeting the fiduciary duties for consultation and accommodation are very high. These thresholds have been met by the Coastal LNG project and they ought to be respected.

My colleague referenced Ellis Ross in her speech a few moments ago, and I want to do the same. Ellis Ross is the B.C. MLA for Skeena and a former councillor and subsequent chief councillor for the Haisla Nation. He served in that role for 14 years and had the following to say recently:

The heated debate over who holds authority over the territory of First Nations — be it hereditary chiefs or elected band leaders — may serve the interests of those seeking to disrupt construction of the Coastal GasLink pipeline, but it does absolutely nothing for the well-being of an average Aboriginal living on reserve.

He went on to further say:

Allowing outsiders to undermine and dismiss years of careful consideration and consultation with elected chiefs who want nothing more than to secure a brighter future for their membership, is quite unacceptable....

I am not naive enough to not realize there are members of the Wet'suwet'en nation who are not in favour of this pipeline. Of note, four of the 12 hereditary chiefs, as well as approximately 15% of the people, would fit in that category.

*S. O. 52*

I will always support the rights of those not in favour to protest peacefully, but as with any major decision, indigenous or non-indigenous, total consensus is often unachievable. That is why authentic relationships must be developed so we can have difficult conversations when the need arises.

Let me share from my own personal experience and journey in this regard. As I said earlier, 70% of my riding is indigenous. We grew up going to school together, playing sports together, and in general, living shoulder to shoulder.

Later in life when I became mayor, I had the privilege of working with and developing strong relationships with four chiefs from Flying Dust First Nation who served with me when I was mayor. We shared the challenges of water supply, policing, development activities, recreation and many other matters. It is my sincere belief that we were able to navigate these challenges because we invested in positive and authentic relationships prior to the issues being put on the table.

I truly appreciate the effort the Minister of Indigenous Services has made recently to have dialogue, but unfortunately, the Prime Minister has left him in the unenviable position of having to deal with this in a reactive manner rather than in the proactive manner it deserved. It is clear that these attempts to have dialogue suddenly in the wake of a crisis are too little and far too late.

The government seems to be focused on blaming the Harper government for all of its failures, but the Liberals have had four and a half years and all we hear is virtue signalling and lip service.

In my riding, during the campaign I consistently heard the terms “empty promises” and “unfulfilled commitments” from my indigenous friends. That has been made abundantly clear over the past few weeks, with the choices the Prime Minister has made to prioritize a seat on the United Nations Security Council instead of dealing with the crisis here in Canada. That is not leadership, and right now leadership is what this country needs.

We are asking for a common sense approach to this crisis, respect the rule of law, open authentic dialogue on reconciliation and to not allow the minority to overrule the majority.

As a former mayor of Meadow Lake, I know how important these development projects are to indigenous communities. It is a real and tangible path to economic freedom, self-government and true reconciliation. That is why I am standing today in solidarity with the elected councillors, hereditary chiefs and the people of the first nation.

The Prime Minister said in the House today that patience may be in short supply. It seems that the commitment to reconciliation is also in short supply. The Prime Minister did say something I agree with, which is that we all have a stake in this, that we need to find a solution and we need to find it very soon. I would only add that we should have started looking for a solution sooner.

Today in the National Post, Derek Burney wrote, “A minority government should not mean that we have no government.” In the spirit of collaboration then, I encourage everyone to take a deep breath, refocus our efforts, shut out the radical minority and take earnest steps toward authentic reconciliation.

• (2150)

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Madam Speaker, I know the member's riding of Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River very well because I have travelled from La Ronge to La Loche to Meadow Lake. I would like to pay tribute to Georgina Jolibois, who was an extraordinary member of Parliament and brought me in a number of times to work with people with disabilities throughout the riding, so I know the riding very well.

The member said at the outset of his speech that he did not expect to speak for the Wet'suwet'en, but then he attempted to do just that and denounced what he calls a minority. He understands, or should understand, that consultation means allowing a process to involve everybody in a community. As we heard very eloquently from the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley at the outset of this emergency debate this evening, a man who represents that riding, he said that within the community itself, there needs to be space so that the community can make its decisions in its own way.

My question for the member is very simple. He seems to be denouncing a process that should take place and should respect everybody. I would ask him to consider that perhaps in saying that, what he is doing is, in a sense, being derogatory toward an entire community. Will he accept—

**The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes):** I am sorry, but I have to interrupt the question so I can allow another one. The member was given a minute and a half and it should have been a minute.

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

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member visiting my riding and noting it with familiarity.

If the member looks back on my comments and my speech, what I said very clearly is that Canada's courts have been very clear about the standard of fiduciary duty for consultation and accommodation, that they are extremely high and this process has gone on for more than five years. I also said that as a mayor, one can never expect to get 100% consensus on a decision and, ultimately, that is the value of a democratic institution. Members in the House more than anyone should appreciate the value of the democratic institution.

I also understand that the hereditary nations and the clan system maybe do not use the same system of democracy as we do, but there has been due course, the bar has been set very high and that bar has been passed over and over on this project.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has called on the Prime Minister to order the RCMP to act and the hon. member mentioned the rule of law in his speech. Is the Leader of the Opposition's call for an illegal order not a direct violation of the rule of law? Will the hon. member stand up, condemn his party's leader and support the rule of law?

**Mr. Gary Vidal:** Madam Speaker, we have heard so many comments today and people referring to the rule of law.

There are farmers in my riding, people who rely on the railway and people who rely on the ports for their livelihoods, to feed their families, to look after their children and maybe aging parents. The number I heard in the media, which I cannot honestly back up with fact, is that there is over \$10 million of lost revenue in the agriculture industry already. I read that for every day the rail system is not running, it is going to take four days to catch up. For the economy of Canada, getting these things running and dealing with the illegal blockades and protesters is paramount at this time.

**Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to address the recent and ongoing protest in relation to the Coastal GasLink pipeline project and Wet'suwet'en first nation. I thank the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for initiating this important emergency debate.

I want to cover a number of different issues in my speech this evening. First is the notion of protest and its importance in our democracy and under our constitution. The notion of lawful protest is critical. It is protected in multiple subsections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly subsections 2(b), 2(c) and 2(d).

What we understand as a protest is critical, as is the manner in which it unfolds. What do I mean by that? We have heard extensive discussions over the last 12 days about protesting in accordance with the law and the rule of law. This is critical and needs to always be respected in this country in order for the protest function to fulfill its important purpose.

I am speaking tonight because it is important that the people watching and participating in this debate understand that there is frustration out there. It is being experienced on many fronts. As the member of Parliament for Parkdale—High Park, I have heard about this frustration in my riding from my constituents, who have raised their voices with me in multiple contexts: via email, on the phone and in person. They have taken different sides on this issue. Some have raised their frustration with reconciliation and the commitment to climate change, asking what is going on in terms of those important precepts. Others have asked about their economic livelihood and the standstill happening in the Canadian economy.

There is frustration being experienced by so many people in this country right now. It is the reason we are here debating this into the wee hours of the evening and why the frustration needs to be validated and understood. People are frustrated and they deserve to be frustrated. It is important for all of us to understand this and work toward the common goal, which is a speedy resolution to this dispute.

The fundamental question is how we get there. We heard a lot about this today, both in tonight's debate and in the ministerial presentations and statements made earlier today.

When we talk about the resolution to this matter, we have a pretty strong juxtaposition presented to us. On the one hand, the notion of dialogue has been undertaken with mutual respect, dialogue that would work toward a meaningful and peaceful resolution. Who suggested that dialogue? We heard the Prime Minister, in his ministerial

statement, talk about the need for dialogue and extending a hand.

Also of importance, we heard from National Chief Perry Bellegarde today, who echoed the need for peaceful, respectful dialogue. We have heard this from some of the leaders of the Mohawk first nation as well, who have echoed the need for moving forward in a manner that facilitates discussion among the parties.

On the other hand, we have a stark contrast that was articulated earlier today by the opposition, which is escalation and potentially the use of force by law enforcement officials, including the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Let me say to you quite clearly, Madam Speaker, and to everyone who is watching at this late hour, that I find that approach very problematic. I am going to underscore several reasons why I believe that is problematic.

The first is that we do not instruct the police in this country on who to arrest or release. That is very important because the police in this country, indeed I would say the police in any functioning democracy, are not the private force of the political party in power. That is so fundamental that it should go without saying. In a democracy, the police work within a broader legislative framework or under the underpinnings of a statutory framework, but in their day-to-day functions, they operate independently.

Why do I say this and what basis do I have for this claim? I am going to point out a few authoritative sources, the first of which is the Supreme Court of Canada. It has outlined that the principle of police independence “underpins the rule of law” and is necessary for the “maintenance of public order and preservation of the peace”.

I am entering into my former vocation as a lawyer here, but I will cite the Campbell and Shirose case, which is a 1999 decision of the Supreme Court, at paragraphs 29 and 33, directly from the Court's judgment, where it is stated:

While for certain purposes the Commissioner of the RCMP reports to the Solicitor General, the Commissioner is not to be considered a servant or agent of the government while engaged in a criminal investigation. The Commissioner is not subject to political direction.

● (2155)

That is from the Supreme Court of Canada.

There are further instances of this being articulated in other judicial fora or commissions of inquiry.

After the APEC summit was held, there was an inquiry into what transpired there. In that APEC inquiry, Justice Hughes stated five principles of police independence. One of the principles he articulated is that when the RCMP is performing law enforcement functions, it is entirely independent of the federal government and answerable only to the law and the courts.

*S. O. 52*

The final instance I want to bring to the attention of the House is the Arar commission. We all know the infamous case of Maher Arar. We also know about Dennis O'Connor's inquiry into the circumstances that led to Maher Arar's rendition and torture in a foreign jurisdiction. At page 458 of the report, Justice O'Connor said:

The outer limits of police independence continue to evolve, but its core meaning is clear: the Government should not direct police investigations and law enforcement decisions in the sense of ordering the police to investigate, arrest or charge—or not to investigate, arrest or charge—any particular person. The rationale for the doctrine is the need to respect the rule of law.

Where are we situated here? We are situated in a context where multiple things are being suggested by multiple people not only in this chamber but around the country. Some would say it is time for politicians to lay down the law, so to speak, and instruct law enforcement officials to make arrests or use force in a given context, particularly with the Wet'suwet'en protesters. Others have said we should be instructing the police to do the opposite and remove themselves from the situation.

My position, and that of this government, is that it is not for the police to be directed to either arrest or withdraw. That is not the operational independence that is sacrosanct to the protection of the rule of law in a functioning democracy. We have to allow police officers to operate independently, as they do to this point. It is very critical.

I also want to emphasize in this debate what has harkened back to me. I am older than I appear and people tend to confuse me for my age, but I remember very clearly the Ipperwash situation in Ontario, my home province, in the mid-1990s, when the premier, then of the Conservative ilk, decided to issue a blunt direction. It is not really worth repeating, but it was something along the lines of, "Get the Indian out of the park." There are a few more choice words in that quotation. That led to an entire inquiry into the role of elected leaders with respect to the supervision, enforcement and instruction of law enforcement officials. The Ipperwash Inquiry found, to the same extent of some of the inquiries I have mentioned, that this role is entirely inappropriate. It is inappropriate because it jeopardizes the foundation upon which this democracy, and indeed any democracy, operates. The police are not a private force under the employ of the political party in power.

I started with two options, dialogue versus direct action and enforcement, and on this side of the House we side with the option of dialogue. How is that dialogue proceeding? I will cite some of the instances members and hopefully those watching have already heard about this evening.

Dialogue has already commenced. We heard able argumentation presented by the Minister of Indigenous Services at the start of tonight's debate about the engagement he has already had with the Mohawk leaders. We have heard from the Minister of Transport, who has met with indigenous Canadians. We know that the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations has already had discussions on the telephone with individuals, including the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation. We know that she is readily available to meet directly and in person with those hereditary chiefs to continue this critical dialogue.

Let us talk about those with whom we are having dialogue, because I think this is also one of the core issues that is germane to

the debate this evening. We believe that all indigenous stakeholders, elected representatives and hereditary chiefs should be involved in this discussion and dialogue.

I am going to give members an anecdote from my somewhat still nascent parliamentary career, which is about five years old.

● (2200)

One of the privileges that I had in the last Parliament was to work on the indigenous language protection act. That was an incredibly difficult file at times but also an incredibly rewarding file. I am very proud to say that all parliamentarians supported the bill, which has now restored the vitality, promotion and protection of indigenous languages that were at various stages of risk in this country. That was a very illustrative exercise for me when I was working as parliamentary secretary on that bill, because I was leading some of the consultations around the country.

What I quickly learned in that situation was that there is a great amount of heterogeneity among indigenous communities, stakeholders, elders, teachers, students, etc., around this country. Whether we are dealing with first nations, Inuit or Métis people, there are a lot of different opinions, and that is as it should be. No one entity or no one group speaks for the entire group. There is as much diversity of opinion among indigenous stakeholders as there is among non-indigenous stakeholders. Again, it is simplistic in its analysis but the illustration was very clear to me.

What I learned with that exercise was that while there are a multiplicity of views out there on any issue that touches indigenous people in this country, what is important when we are dealing with indigenous issues and indigenous stakeholders is that none of those views should be ignored. That is critical when we are trying to give flesh to this idea of reconciliation and what reconciliation means.

It is fundamentally different and qualitatively different. I do not think anyone in this chamber would disagree. When we are trying to pursue an equitable issue with respect to immigrant groups or racialized groups or a religious minority, those are important objectives. When we are dealing with the history and legacy of 400 years of colonialism and racism and the legacy of the residential school system, it is qualitatively different. It is what we call *sui generis* in the legal context. It is qualitatively different because we cannot ignore any of the voices. That is fundamental and it needs to be clear.

I also want to add a further layer to this debate. A lot of the people who come into my office in Parkdale—Hyde Park or speak to me about this, or reach out by email or social media, talk about the indigenous cause being the vanguard of a broader cause, a respect for Mother Earth, a respect for Mother Nature, a respect for the land that is so bountiful. It is caught up with this issue, and rightfully so, about the pressing need for action on climate change.

I take no issue with that. I fundamentally believe that climate action is urgent. I fundamentally believe that when we declare an emergency on climate change in the House, we need to stand by that.

I return to the fact that folks in my riding and folks right around this country have always consistently approached this issue to me in terms of its broader gravity. They would tell me we have an emergency. They would say to me that it is not just an emergency in Canada, but that it is a global emergency. I would readily concur with them. That is absolutely right. We have a global problem so what we need is a global solution. What I say to them in the context of tonight's debate is to think about this project as part of that global problem and global solution.

What do I mean by that? We know and people who are viewing this tonight understand that this project was touted as the single largest private sector investment in Canadian history, \$40 billion deep. Why is that? It is because this project has the ability to provide the cleanest liquefied natural gas facility on earth and to provide green energy to locations around the planet that are in need of greener sources of energy. What I mean by that is ensuring that the phase-out of coal in large Asian nations, particularly India and China, can be accelerated through this liquefied natural gas. What I urge people to consider is that jeopardizing this project will impede the ability of Canada to contribute a global solution to what is indeed a global problem. That is an important factor to consider in this context.

I would venture so far as to put it that this single factor is the reason why we had parties and governments of different political stripes, a provincial NDP government working in close collaboration with a federal Liberal government, working together, and why we had indigenous leaders lining up behind this original project, including all of the elected council representatives for the various first nations groups that are affected with respect to this project.

In total, was there an absolute consensus? Clearly there was not and there is not. That is why we are here today. The voices of the hereditary chiefs have been articulated, indicating that they are speaking out, and they are speaking out on behalf of their people on this very important substantive issue.

• (2205)

Those voices cannot be denied. Those voices are the ones that need to be listened to and the ones that need to be addressed if we are to give reconciliation some meaning. That is the meaningful dialogue and peaceful resolution that we are working toward in this context.

I would reiterate some aspects of what has been transpiring with respect to the RCMP, in the brief time that I have remaining. That law enforcement agency, I am glad to say, has been facilitating a different approach.

In this context, with respect to Wet'suwet'en, the RCMP are attempting to work with what we call a measured approach that is facilitating lawful, peaceful and safe protest in an environment that is safe for protesters and members of the public.

That is a departure from traditional enforcement-focused policing. It is a measured approach that places a premium on open communication and mitigation efforts where the use of arrest becomes just one of the many options that would be available to law enforcement. Indeed, the use of arrest is kept as a last resort.

*S. O. 52*

It also encourages police to undertake proactive engagement. Having a measured approach calls for communication, mitigation and facilitation measures to ensure they maintain peace and to facilitate the resolution of public disorder and the restoration of peace.

It is also critical that the RCMP, which employs a measured approach, respects the lawful exercise of personal rights and freedoms, including the rights of peaceful assembly and association, which I outlined at the outset.

What I am saying in this context is that we have got the fundamental issue of protest. We have to balance that so that it is done in accordance with the rule of law. We have this issue about how we approach the protest: Do we encourage action and enforcement measures, including the use of force by the police at the direction of elected officials, or do we pursue dialogue?

I am very strongly in favour of the dialogue option. The dialogue must engage all parties involved in the conflict, including the hereditary leaders, and that dialogue must consider the impact of climate action that we could take here in Canada that could impact the global climate problem.

Those are the issues that are at stake here. Those are the issues that are fundamental to this debate. I invite questions from the hon. members.

• (2210)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is rather ironic to hear my colleague giving his speech. For the past 20 minutes he has been saying that elected members cannot ask the police and the RCMP to intervene in the conflict we are discussing. That is rather ironic because the government is talking out of both sides of its mouth. On the one hand, the government is saying that the RCMP must not intervene and, on the other, it is saying that the government must not tell the RCMP what to do.

Can the member tell me what he is really thinking?

Must we tell the RCMP not to intervene because there is dialogue or should we let the RCMP do its job, and not tell it to not intervene?

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Madam Speaker, perhaps my speech was not entirely clear. I will try to be clearer.

We must not tell the RCMP what to do or give it instructions. It is up to the RCMP to decide whether to intervene, period. It is the RCMP's decision. That is the foundation of democracy and the rule of law. We can talk with the RCMP's representatives, but we must not influence the RCMP or interfere in its decisions. It is the RCMP's responsibility to protect the rule of law in our democracy.

**Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I had a question all ready for my colleague, but the Conservative member got me thinking about something. From what I understand, the RCMP deployed members on the ground, including snipers, to put an end to the peaceful protests. I do not know what exactly was said to the RCMP. It is not really clear.

*S. O. 52*

I want to come back to what is happening in my riding. The community of Listuguj is protesting on the ground. Obviously, this is having an economic impact. Rotor blades for wind turbines are not getting to our community, work has come to a standstill at the Port-Daniel cement factory and the softwood lumber industry is affected. We are talking about thousands of dollars in losses per day and per week.

I have been hearing good principles and fine words since this morning. We are trying to have a dialogue, but I am not hearing about any practical measures.

What does the government intend to do to resolve this crisis?

● (2215)

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Madam Speaker, I want to point out what we already mentioned in the ministers' statements this afternoon and during this evening's debate.

We need measures that include the ongoing dialogue with the Minister of Indigenous Services, the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

Dialogue will allow us to resolve the situation without violence, which will maintain peace. During the Ipperwash and Oka crises, we lost an officer and a protester. This is what we are trying to avoid with our response to this situation.

[*English*]

**Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP):** Madam Speaker, last week I met with indigenous youth in my riding. They told me that they do not want their children to have to fight for basic human rights the way that they, their parents and their grandparents did.

They have every reason to be concerned, because they see the government fighting indigenous kids in court. They see indigenous communities struggling without access to clean drinking water. They watched the Prime Minister spend the last few weeks denying responsibility for nation-to-nation relationships.

Will the member admit that weeks of denying responsibility were a factor in getting us to where we are now, in an emergency debate? Will the government admit that this was, and continues to be, a failure of leadership?

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Madam Speaker, I thank the member for her questions, and I will take them in reverse order.

The first point is that it is an absolute presence of leadership to convene Parliament and address the chamber as Prime Minister, ensure that the ministers are tasked with commencing that dialogue, and put value into the dialogue that he is spearheading himself.

The second point is with respect to clean water, and I will stand by our government's record. We have a record of having lifted 88 boil-water advisories thus far. We are on track to eliminate all of them by March 2021 by investing well over \$1 billion in the infrastructure required to address the very significant need for clean drinking water.

The third point is with respect to litigation against indigenous children, which is a problematic piece of litigation. The member opposite knows that we have admitted responsibility, that we accept the fact that discrimination has been found.

What we are working on right now is an agreement that will include a more encompassing group, including a pending class action, so that a larger body of people can have justice rendered to them so that inequality can be addressed.

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and to the Minister of Canadian Heritage (Sport), Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I sat in relative awe of a lot of people today listening to a variety of statements and perspectives. Like a lot of things, that is what makes the House great: a lot of different perspectives and opinions.

However, there is a degree to which this issue and the people involved in the project are being co-opted to reinforce multiple political narratives. One thing that is clear is that this issue severely lacks consensus. I have heard tonight conflicting reports of support from locals as disparate as the opinions in the House.

We can certainly all agree, I hope, that a peaceful process and a resolution that results in no violence is in everyone's best interests. However, the language that we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition is anything but peaceful, as he suggested that indigenous people "check their privilege". The Leader of the Opposition doubled down on that statement today when he urged haste and force.

I am grateful that my colleagues on this side are able to learn from history and not repeat the mistakes of the past.

My question for my colleague refers to his prior role as parliamentary secretary and his important work on the Indigenous Languages Act. Could he elaborate on the value of listening, even to a small minority, to reach common ground, sometimes in the absence of consensus?

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Madam Speaker, I learned about the important value of listening. We learn that every day in our function as members of Parliament representing our ridings.

Travelling the country listening to those in first nations, Inuit and Métis communities, I was struck by the fact of how diverse those viewpoints were, and how sometimes ineffective one felt in terms of being able to address them, and address them quickly.

Still, I learned about the value of actually being there, being attentive and listening to those concerns, and lending an ear to people who had been hitherto shunned by consecutive governments for literally centuries in this country.

Is the work ongoing? Absolutely it is. Will it be solved tomorrow? Absolutely it will not. Is this work fundamental and is doing it in a peaceful manner, as articulated by the member, critical? Absolutely it is.

• (2220)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my hon. colleague's point that we should not send in the RCMP.

I find it very funny that my Conservative colleague said that it was ironic to tell the RCMP what it should or should not do.

However, this afternoon, my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord told the media that we must absolutely send in the RCMP. He said this on Radio-Canada. You can find it online. I think the worst thing we could do in this situation would be to respond in warlike fashion and send in the RCMP. That makes absolutely no sense.

My question is for my hon. colleague opposite. The Bloc Québécois made a proposal and I have not heard the government's response. The Bloc Québécois asked that GasLink construction be halted in exchange for having the blockades lifted, which would allow for the dialogue we are seeking.

What does the government think of the Bloc's proposal?

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and I appreciate the position of the Bloc Québécois, who pointed out that the Conservative member does not speak on behalf of all opposition members in the House.

What is important and what was pointed out by the hon. member is that we need to reopen the dialogue as soon as possible. We do not quite agree on how to go about that, but we agree that we need to reopen the dialogue as soon as possible.

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** Madam Speaker, it is my turn to talk about this very important issue. I have so many things to say that I wish I did not have to share my time, but I want to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Lakeland.

This is a major crisis that is currently affecting all Canadians and the indigenous people involved in this conflict, sometimes through no fault of their own and sometimes according to their own will. So many things have been said tonight that I have no choice but to correct some of them.

First, since the beginning of the evening, since the Prime Minister's speech, the party opposite has been serving up a word salad, as our leader said. The Liberal Party is not saying anything.

The Prime Minister encouraged people to be patient. We have already waited 13 days and we will be waiting even longer. We are going to be waiting until the crisis resolves itself. I have already heard the Prime Minister say that about deficits and budgets. It seems budgets balance themselves. Unfortunately, that approach does not work.

The Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations said something tonight that stood out to me. She said the following.

[*English*]

As we heard in the heartfelt words of the Minister of Indigenous Services, we believe we have learned from the crisis at Oka, but also Ipperwash, Caledonia and Gustafsen Lake. Last year, we said that we never wanted to see again the images of police having to use force in an indigenous community in order to keep the peace.

*S. O. 52*

[*Translation*]

This government has learned nothing from past crises, all of which were the result of the government's inaction, of its inability to respond quickly, which only led to the situation deteriorating, and also to various drastic and unfortunate actions. That is just the reality. The government has learned nothing. Now it is attempting to blame its lack of understanding of the crisis and its handling of previous crises on the Conservatives' own lack of understanding, when in fact, it is the other way around.

I would like to talk about a crisis that hit Quebec in 1998. In 1998, 350 pork producers decided to blockade Highway 20. These 350 pork producers were desperate and had made certain demands. I am not talking about the demands made by the Wet'suwet'en. That is not the issue I am concerned with at the moment. What I am interested in is the government's response to that crisis. No matter how legitimate these demands may be, the crisis at hand goes far beyond the demands of this particular indigenous nation. There are people getting involved who are not at all concerned with these demands.

As I was saying, 350 pork producers had blockaded Highway 20 in 1998. The crisis lasted five days. All things considered, that is a long time. For five whole days, Highway 20 was closed to automobile traffic. How was the crisis resolved? The then premier of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard, instructed the Sûreté du Québec to let the people involved know that the blockade would be lifted, that the police would have to get involved. The very next day, the situation was resolved in an orderly and respectful fashion. No major police intervention was needed. The blockade ended. That is the reality. How can such crises be expected to be resolved without setting an expiry date? Members know just how long these kinds of discussions can last.

As long as these discussions last, there will be people who are suffering. No amount of discussions will improve the situation of those who are suffering. We will not be able to improve the situation of those who are bearing the brunt of these blockades.

I would now like to return to the Leader of the Opposition's speech today. He very eloquently expressed everyday Canadians' thoughts on the current situation. The Prime Minister's speech, on the other hand, was akin to a word salad. He had absolutely nothing to offer to resolve the situation. He simply stated that we would have to continue to wait for the crisis to resolve itself. That is an accurate summation of the Prime Minister's speech.

The Prime Minister convened the House and all its members to state that he had an important announcement to make to the nation. In the end, he delivered an utterly wishy-washy speech that was entirely devoid of substance and ultimately accomplished nothing.

S. O. 52

• (2225)

In spite of the Prime Minister's speech tonight and in spite of his invitation for all parties to enter into a dialogue to find a solution, the blockades persist. The situation is the same as it was before the speech and absolutely nothing has been fixed.

It really was nothing more than a word salad designed to appease, one that drove home the point that no one has been doing a thing for 13 days, that no one has stepped in and that no one would be stepping in because, after all, no one really knows what to do. That is essentially what we have heard today from the Prime Minister.

In his speech, the Prime Minister had already suggested that he disagreed with the Conservatives' position. Then, we learned that he had invited all party leaders to a meeting, except the leader of the Conservative Party, which is unbelievable.

Our leader said today that the Prime Minister's statement was a complete abdication of responsibility and of leadership. I am in complete agreement.

Our leader added that, "standing between our country and prosperity is a small group of radical activists, many of whom have little to no connection to first nations communities." He added that these "radical activists...will not rest until our oil and gas industry is entirely shut down." Finally, he said that "they are blockading our ports, railways, borders, roads and highways".

I looked at images of various blockades and I read #shutdowncanada and #nopipeline. That is the reality. What is the connection to the indigenous community's demands? Meanwhile, in my riding, people are suffering, they are going through terrible times and they just cannot cope.

I want to mention a few businesses in the riding of Beauce, which my colleague represents. Propane GRG in Sainte-Marie is running out of stock and is delivering only to essential services. It is the middle of winter, and the company has to ration its customers and deliver only 20% of what it usually delivers. The vice-president of Propane GRG, Patrice Breton, says the business is on life support until an agreement ends the blockades.

The rail blockades set up by indigenous people in Lac-Mégantic are hurting businesses in the Eastern Townships. The Tafisa plant, for example, has been unable to supply its clients since the crisis began. As a result, 350 workers have been taken hostage by this crisis because, for 13 days, the Prime Minister has not done a single thing to even attempt to resolve the crisis. For the time being, Tafisa has been able to dispose of its stock by filling wagons that are parked in a train yard between Lac-Mégantic and Montreal. The harbours are at capacity. In short, the situation is unacceptable. If it persists, the company will have to lay off staff.

I also received a message from a dairy farmer in the Lac-Mégantic region tonight. I would like to read it again. "Hey Luc. Because of the crisis with the indigenous folks and the rail blockades, our livestock will soon be going hungry. Anything you can do to shake things up and move things along would be appreciated, because the viability of our businesses is on the line. The situation is still man-

ageable, but our stocks are dwindling, and by next week, the grain centres will be emptied out."

The health of small farms in my riding and in many other regions of Canada is at stake, but the crisis is also having other repercussions, namely, price fluctuations. Kernel corn prices for producers have risen by \$10 to \$15 per tonne since the crisis started. That is the reality.

We are in the midst of a national crisis, and meanwhile, all we are hearing from the other side of the House is that we need to be patient. They say that no instructions are being given to the RCMP, but the RCMP is being told that discussions are being sought.

There has been no rhyme or reason to the Liberals' management of this crisis. We expect a lot more from a government, and a lot more from a Prime Minister.

• (2230)

We expect a Prime Minister who is trying to resolve a national crisis to not intentionally exclude a leader of the official opposition from official meetings to discuss this crisis.

[English]

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first the member said that the Prime Minister did not have a plan, and then he said that the Prime Minister did have a plan, which was dialogue. If the member does not agree that dialogue is a plan for negotiation and working closely with the parties severely affected in order to come to an agreement, then what is his solution to deal with this? No member over there has specifically outlined a solution. Members have outlined the problem but have not outlined a solution.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister completely ignored the crisis for 13 days. In 13 days, he would have had several opportunities to find a solution and initiate a dialogue. Instead of managing the crisis, he was elsewhere, doing something else. The crisis began with a rail blockade and several others followed. The crisis keeps getting worse. Despite his speech to the nation today, there are still rail blockades this evening.

The Liberals are in power. It is up to them to find a solution. If they want to be in power, then they have to manage the crisis, but manage it correctly. Right now, they are doing nothing.

**Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when it is a question of a blockade that has been paralyzing a major, crucial piece of infrastructure like a rail system in the middle of winter for 13 days, of course there are some extreme concerns, at least for the near future, and it is our duty to address those concerns. Indeed, we have a responsibility to negotiate peacefully and reach a consensus, considering the source of the conflict.

If we begin with the principle that we must negotiate and consider the serious concern raised by my colleague, we must strike a balance between safety and liberty. After 13 days, the government still has yet to reveal a contingency plan.

What do they plan to do in the coming hours and days to ensure the supply of energy and major commodities, like agricultural products and so on?

What is the contingency plan? We are going to have to take a serious look at this issue all together.

• (2235)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague. There is no mention of the contingency plan. The government stated that it must hold discussions with the people who are currently taking illegal action. They are blocking the trains and the flow of supplies to our farms, establishments, aluminum plants and just about everything that can be blocked.

What is happening to the people who are facing serious difficulties? If the farmer who wrote to me does not receive his grain by next week, animals may die. What are they doing about that?

They do not have a plan. The government does not know what to do. It waited 13 days. We have reached the height of the crisis and the government has not even started thinking about what to do for these people. It is making things up as it goes along, it is being amateurish. The government should sincerely reflect on its actions and start doing what it takes to find a real solution. We cannot wait for things to sort themselves out, as the Prime Minister has taught us to do.

[English]

**Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP):** Mr. Speaker, this situation was completely avoidable and predictable. These protests across Canada were completely predictable. There are agreements between first nations across Canada to stand together when one nation is attacked and forced into a project against its will and down the barrel of a gun.

I was in the north. My sister worked for the OPP and she was a front-line officer at Ipperwash at the inquiry and a front-line officer in Caledonia. She would tell us that the last thing to do in these situations is to escalate action because reaction will be escalated and more problems will be caused.

When I went up north, I met with the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs and with the detachment commander in Smithers. I also met with the detachment commander at the community industry safety office and brought a hereditary chief with me. We had a dialogue. One of the things that those detachment commanders told me was that as long as negotiation was going on, there would not be enforcement. It was up to Coastal GasLink, which could have called off the enforcement of this action with dialogue from the government.

I asked the Prime Minister to meet with the hereditary chiefs and open a dialogue. I sent him a letter and talked to him personally and said that this needed to be done, and it was not and here we are.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Mr. Speaker, ending the blockades is fundamental to any negotiation or conflict resolution. If people would withdraw from the railway lines, we could start discussing the real issues.

*S. O. 52*

At present, too many people in our ridings are worried about their supplies and the survival of their businesses. It has become impossible to focus on indigenous matters because these people are currently dealing with other concerns that are much more important in their minds.

I am not denying or minimizing the importance of indigenous issues, but I am saying that the current crisis has created so many other concerns that it is no longer possible to speak solely about the indigenous crisis.

[English]

**The Deputy Speaker:** We have run out of time in that round. I have seen other members stand for questions and comments and they can be sure we will get to them in a different part of the debate.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lakeland.

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I am certainly grateful for this emergency debate tonight, because Canada is facing a crisis of leadership that is threatening the whole economy.

This crisis is not really about whether indigenous communities support Coastal GasLink, because every local first nation does support it. A majority of the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs support it too. One of them, Theresa Tait-Day, said their whole community voted on it and "85% of our people said yes" to this project.

Chief Larry Nooski of the Nadleh Whuten said "Coastal GasLink represents a once in a generation economic development opportunity" for his nation, and that they "negotiated hard...to guarantee that Nadleh people, including youth, have the opportunity to benefit directly and indirectly...while at the same time, ensuring that the land and the water is protected...."

Chris Sankey, a former elected band councillor for the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation, said, "We need jobs. We need to build homes and roads and schools for our kids and care centres for our elders. These projects will help us do that."

This crisis really hangs on the question of whether Canada is a country where the rule of law is respected and upheld, or whether Canada has succumbed to the rule of the mob. It is about whether Canadians will let our entire economy be held hostage by a small group trampling the legal system that has governed our country for more than 150 years.

This morning, the Prime Minister's statement was a complete and sad abdication of responsibility and leadership. The Prime Minister himself has emboldened and encouraged this kind of behaviour by cancelling other big projects based on political and activist considerations, like vetoing northern gateway, imposing Bill C-48 and funding TMX pipeline opponents, instead of on science and facts, and on the best interests of the whole country.

*S. O. 52*

As an MP for an oil and gas riding and for nine indigenous communities, and as a person who happens to be part Ojibwa, I suggest his actions look a lot like those of a centralist, colonialist government imposing its views against the wishes and the priorities of local indigenous governments and the majority of directly impacted indigenous people, such as those in my riding, which are all involved in the oil and gas sector.

Every single person in this country has the right to freedom of speech and the freedom to protest, but they do not have the right to break the law or to hold the Canadian economy hostage. Because the Prime Minister has yet to clearly denounce the actions of these radical activists as illegal, or to provide an action plan that will end the illegal blockades, rail lines continue to be shut down. Bridges, roads and highways are blocked. The commutes, jobs and livelihoods of farmers, small business owners, workers and families across the country, thousands of kilometres away from beautiful British Columbia, are at risk.

Bonnie George, a Wet'suwet'en member who formerly worked for Coastal GasLink, said, "It's disheartening now to see what's happening. Protesters across Canada should ask our people who are out of work what they think. As a Wet'suwet'en matriarch I'm embarrassed...."

Who is really behind it?

Ellis Ross, the B.C. Liberal MLA for Skeena and elected official for the Haisla First Nation for 14 years said:

Professional protesters and well-funded NGOs have merely seized the opportunity to divide our communities for their own gains, and ultimately will leave us penniless when they suddenly leave.... It is therefore truly ignorant for non-Aboriginals to declare that elected Aboriginal leaders are only responsible for "on reserve issues" or are a "construct of the Indian Act meant to annihilate the Indian".

He continued:

I was an elected Aboriginal leader for 14 years and I never intended to annihilate anyone.

My goal was to do everything I could to make sure my kids and grandkids didn't grow up knowing the myriad social issues that accompany poverty. I'm pretty sure all chiefs — elected and non-elected — feel the same way.

However, if the Liberals and the protesters claiming solidarity and shutting down rail lines in eastern Canada do want to talk about the Coastal GasLink pipeline and the LNG Canada plant it will supply, let them take note that all 20 of the local first nations want this pipeline built. When indigenous communities have access to revenues independent of the government they can invest in their own priorities without having to get approval from a civil servant in Ottawa or a big lobby group, or fit their plan into a federally prescribed program application.

Empowering first nations economically provides the tools for indigenous communities to manage their core needs, to invest in their cultures, and to preserve and nurture their heritage and their languages for future generations.

Chief councillor Crystal Smith from Haisla Nation, who supports Coastal GasLink and opposed Bill C-48, said, "Our nation's goal is to be an independent, powerful and prosperous nation. We can't get there without powerful, prosperous, independent people."

There is no stronger example of the patriarchal, patronizing and quite frankly colonial approach of these lawless activists, and of the current Liberals, than their treatment of these first nations who want to develop, provide services, and supply and transport oil and gas.

• (2240)

Another person said that all too often, indigenous people are "only valued as responsible stewards of their land if they choose not to touch it. This is eco-colonialism."

Crystal Smith further said:

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I'm tired of managing poverty. I'm tired of First Nations' communities dealing with issues such as suicide, low unemployment or educational opportunities. If this opportunity is lost, it doesn't come back.

The Liberals' and the activists' anti-resource, anti-business, anti-energy agenda from outside these indigenous communities are sabotaging the best hopes and all the work of all the first nations along the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Hereditary chief Helen Michelle of the Skin Tyee First Nation said, "Our own people said go ahead." She also said, "A lot of the protesters are not even Wet'suwet'en...."

Troy Young, a member of one Wet'suwet'en community, and general manager of Kyah Resources Inc., a company working to clear trees and build roads along Coastal GasLink's proposed pipeline route, said the history of the Wet'suwet'en is one of outsiders telling them how to do things, and if they are successful in stopping Coastal GasLink, "it will be one of the biggest cultural appropriations in British Columbia's history."

MLA Ellis Ross said:

We've always had to cope with outsiders and so-called experts telling us who best represents First Nations, or what we should do within our own territory. Yet none of these people have ever lived on reserve or spent any significant time with the people who actually live there....

Allowing outsiders to undermine and dismiss years of careful consideration and consultation with elected chiefs who want nothing more than to secure a brighter future for their membership, is quite unacceptable.

He said he will continue to speak out against it.

Of course, Coastal GasLink does not just offer opportunity for indigenous communities. It is good for all of Canada, and it will benefit the world. Clean Canadian natural gas will reduce global emissions and deliver the affordable energy the world requires to reduce poverty and to increase the quality of life of the 2.6 billion people without access to electricity or clean cooking fuels.

The International Energy Agency projects the average global energy demand will increase approximately 30% by 2040 as world populations and economies expand, adding the equivalent of another China or India to the current level of global energy consumption. Natural gas is projected to meet one-third of that new demand.

As the fourth-largest natural gas producer with the fifth-largest reserves in the world, Canada can and should help meet that need.

Canadian natural gas is abundant, and it is the most viable fuel for reducing domestic and global emissions. Life-cycle emissions associated with LNG can be 20% lower than diesel, 60% lower than coal, 20% less than gasoline, and, crucially, emit less particulate matter, meaning less smog.

Canada LNG and the associated Coastal GasLink pipeline is the largest private sector commitment to the energy sector in Canadian history. It will give Canada the long-sought opportunity to export clean Canadian gas to foreign markets.

However, over \$100 billion in LNG projects alone have been cancelled since the Liberals came to power, and that is not including other major oil infrastructure they killed. When LNG projects like Pacific Northwest, Grassy Point and Aurora are cancelled, it is devastating to the indigenous communities, local municipalities, service and supply businesses, and all the workers who were counting on them.

The lack of new pipeline access and LNG facilities in Canada is forcing natural gas producers to sell their product at a massive discount, and natural gas prices have even gone negative, meaning that producers have had to pay someone to take their product.

Liberal policies already left Canada out of the loop the first time, and could cause Canada to miss out on the second wave of the huge opportunity of LNG. In fact, the B.C. government had to agree to exempt LNG Canada from the Liberals' job-killing carbon tax hike in order to ensure that it went ahead. This is just another example of how Liberal policies are impeding resource development and driving private sector investments and businesses out of Canada. This is costing Canadian workers and indigenous people their jobs, and undermining their aspirations, work and hopes for self-sufficiency. It is driving increasing poverty rates in rural and remote regions and diminishing Canada's role in the world.

Canadians are looking for action from their government. It has taken almost two weeks for the Prime Minister to get back to Canada and to really say anything about it at all. Today it was just more words and an impotent call for dialogue. It is exactly this "do nothing" approach that has created the crisis we face today.

It is time for the Liberals to tell Canadians how they will lead for all of Canada, restore the rule of law and end these illegal blockades.

● (2245)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments. It is a complicated issue and it is not so black and white.

I appreciate when the member lists off a series of projects and the importance of development, but of course she knows that the government does support the Coastal GasLink project. She also

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knows that it is a provincial project supported by the B.C. NDP. I assume she knows as well that there is a provincial court order, and that the RCMP in this case is provincially contracted.

When we talk about the time between the initial conflict and where we are today, the province is fundamentally the lead in this. Where the federal government can play a role is oversight, in some ways, of the RCMP, and by being at the table and supporting provincial efforts. One way is to escalate conflict and the other way is to de-escalate the situation. When we talk about removing the blockades, that is the ultimate goal.

I wonder what the member's thoughts are, and whether her course of action would be to escalate or to de-escalate. What is the best course of action to remove the blockades?

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Mr. Speaker, the crucial job of the Prime Minister and the Liberal government is to provide leadership. The reality is that the RCMP does report to one of the ministers of the government.

Certainly I recognize the jurisdictional responsibilities of the project and the support, as the member has outlined, but that is quite apart from enforcing the rule of law and from ensuring that the agencies that report to a minister of the government do that and know that the government will have their backs when they do it.

Certainly, on the myriad of other issues that are being raised, which are often historical in nature or are an attempt to achieve reconciliation through these activities, the government should also explain what exactly it has been doing for month after month and for five years on that side on the variety of all of these other issues that people are using their freedom of speech to raise in the course of the illegal blockades.

However, it is absolutely the Prime Minister's job to say that the rule of law will be upheld and that—

● (2250)

**The Deputy Speaker:** Questions and comments, the hon. member for Nunavut.

**Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, when I spoke in the House of Commons in Centre Block in 2017, I talked about how these foreign systems do not work for indigenous peoples. When we are talking about these protests and blockades and people not being able to make it to work and such, may I suggest that is a glimpse of what it is like to live a life like mine, to look like me and have to walk through the world as I do?

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In saying that, indigenous peoples have been backed into a corner, and the federal government has constantly backed indigenous peoples into a corner. Often it is a decision between whether this is a project I am going to support to be able to feed my family or pay rent, or do I say no to it? We constantly see indigenous groups being given one very horrible option.

We have heard numbers, we have heard figures and we have heard contributions to economic development, but I am on the ground and I know it is failing. It is not working for indigenous peoples or groups. We could be talking about climate, jobs and economic development, supporting search and rescue, supporting hunters and fisheries, investing in the arts industry, but instead we are giving indigenous peoples a very difficult position.

If there is such concern around jobs and economic development, why are indigenous peoples not given multiple opportunities instead of one difficult choice?

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs:** Mr. Speaker, I agree with the premise of the member's question and exactly the way that she phrased it. The indigenous communities and people I represent in Lakeland say that it is exactly what oil and gas offers them. There is the mining industry, which employs the highest number of indigenous people of any sector in the country. Oil sands, as a single company, is the highest employer of indigenous people there. Often Alberta gets crapped on in this place, if members do not mind my saying so.

This is one of the things that irks many of us as one of the provinces that has actually been a leader on partnerships with indigenous communities and indigenous people as owners, as partners, as proponents and not just as workers; as service and supply companies; as owners of the resource; as providers for their own communities and all the communities around them. They are in Alberta and they have been doing it for decades. They are in my backyard in Lakeland, which is why I am so passionate about this, and they are all over northern Alberta.

I want to say I greatly admire my colleague's questions too about the challenges of food in the north. On the whole host of issues that my colleague has raised, those all have to be discussed, and all governments and all elected people should engage on all of those issues. Certainly, my grandmother and my great-grandmother would have a similar story about how people look at certain things from their world views.

However, the subject of this emergency debate is ending illegal blockades, which all law-abiding Canadians and, frankly, all—

**The Deputy Speaker:** Resuming debate, the hon. member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

**Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague for Sydney—Victoria.

I will start today by acknowledging that we are standing here on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. It is also a privilege to serve as a member of Parliament for a riding that includes the unceded traditional territory of the Squamish, Lil'Wat and Sechelt nations.

Our government is committed to advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples through a renewed nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship based on recognitions of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. Indeed, this is our most important relationship, and a relationship we have neglected for far too much of our nation's history.

We know that building this important relationship is not a quick fix. We never pretended that the road to reconciliation will be quick or easy, but we vow to begin the journey towards a renewed relationship.

While we work toward this aim, first nations are understandably frustrated by a lack of progress in recognition of their fundamental and constitutional rights. The result is that we are now at a boiling point.

Today, this is particularly true for the Wet'suwet'en, who have spent many decades working to have their rights and title recognized. The Wet'suwet'en have been leaders across this country in advancing reconciliation. This is evident in the landmark Supreme Court of Canada Delgamuukw case where, for the first time, aboriginal title was recognized as an ancestral right protected by our Constitution. In spite of this landmark case in 1997, not enough progress has been made on this critical relationship.

While indigenous peoples have inherent rights and treaty rights that have been affirmed by section 35 of the Constitution, too often they still have to go to court, first to prove that their rights exist, and then to force the government of the day to implement them.

Our government has taken some of the essential and overdue steps required to renew and build upon Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples to ensure that they have control over their destiny. We have made unprecedented investments to repair and upgrade water and wastewater systems in first nations communities. We are investing in families and children. Through the oceans protection plan, indigenous peoples have new opportunities to protect, preserve and restore Canada's oceans.

We have also made fundamental changes in our approach to negotiating modern treaties. This is critical for B.C., where already our province is home to many unsettled land claims, but we have examples of reconciliation being successful in some of our modern treaties, especially up north.

I want to raise two examples from my riding that are poignant examples of how reconciliation can work in practice.

First and foremost, this month we celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This event was a source of immense pride for all Canadians, as we were able to show the world our rich cultural diversity.

This event also allowed us to highlight the incredible history and culture of our indigenous peoples. We did this by partnering with the four host first nations. In this process we allowed first nations to share their languages and to share their culture in celebrations and through new economic partnerships, including through the development of new tourism infrastructure, such as the Squamish Lil'Wat Cultural Centre.

Second, and perhaps because we are speaking about a crisis that was ignited by a natural gas pipeline, I want to mention the Woodfibre LNG project in my riding. This pipeline and export terminal is situated in the middle of Squamish nation lands. The Squamish were concerned that the existing regulatory processes would not adequately engage with and respond to their concerns, so the nation proposed leading their own environmental assessment process and, lo and behold, the company agreed to be bound by this.

This process went ahead and identified additional conditions for the project. The proposal went back to the nation, which put it to a vote, and the nation ended up approving it. The nation subsequently negotiated an impact benefit agreement with this project. This project will now be monitored by the Squamish to ensure compliance with the conditions.

I raise this example because adding first nations voices to the table for resource projects does not mean that these projects will not be approved. Rather, these voices help produce projects that are better for the environment, better for the community and better for Canada.

● (2255)

In fact, this is why we introduced and passed the Impact Assessment Act in the last session. Reforms under the previous Conservative government failed to honour indigenous rights and partnerships, eroded public trust and put our communities at risk. Under the Impact Assessment Act, we create the space for indigenous peoples to run their own environmental assessment process to give first nations a role in the decisions that affect their rights. In addition, early public engagement will ensure reviews happen in partnership with indigenous peoples, communities will have their voices heard and companies know what is required of them, including on issues related to climate change, conservation and environmental protection.

Having meaningful engagement and consultation with indigenous peoples aims to secure their free, prior and informed consent, and this is not optional. Canada has a legal duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate indigenous groups if there could be potential adverse impacts on potential or established aboriginal rights and title. Section 35 of the Constitution makes our fiduciary relationship toward first nations very clear. We cannot continue in the situation we are in today, and it is going to take all of us at all levels of government to find a way forward. What we find ourselves in now is the outcome of reconciliation not making progress and Canadians letting each other down, so we must be utterly com-

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mitted to repair and improve the systems to keep our country functional and capable of providing the services that we all rely on.

The impacts to our transportation systems cannot continue. The transportation sector allows for social linkages. Canadians are feeling the effects of diminished access to family members, community events, education and health services. Railways are a mainstay of rural life in Canada. They offer service, access and connection to more rural and remote places in our country. Rail offers first- and last-mile service, and we cannot fail to connect these Canadians to the services they need.

I know my colleagues share my concern for Canadians in industries right across the country who are facing layoffs and disruptions to their ability to support themselves and their families. Communities rely on the materials transported by those rail lines, not least among them the families in Atlantic Canada, who rely on propane to heat their homes and are facing rations. We move our food staples by rail from fields to homes. Tens of millions of tonnes of food are transported by rail every year. We need to do better for our communities. An economically healthy Canada is able to uplift, empower and constantly strive to do better for all Canadians. The rail transportation losses our country is facing are in the billions every day, and the need for action has never been more urgent.

We have seen the devastating effects of unwarranted force used against our indigenous peoples in Canada. I state in no uncertain terms that force cannot and will not be the resolution to this conflict, nor will our solution be found in endless drawn-out court cases. Together we and our partners need to get out of the courtroom and gather together around the negotiating table. We can find more than resolution; I believe we can find success. We can do better.

We can find processes that work for indigenous peoples, but there is nothing that we can achieve if we do not have a conversation. The divides in this country require dialogue. We need to show that we have a process that will lead us down the path to reconciliation. Where we can show that, we can provide an off-ramp to de-escalate the crisis we are in and get our people, goods and economy rolling again.

Reconciliation happens when we are able to work together. Reconciliation happens in learning, in redress and in dialogue, and I call upon all parties involved to be part of that solution.

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• (2300)

**Mr. Derek Sloan (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Tyendinaga blockade occurs in my riding of Hastings—Lennox and Addington, and I want to give the member across the aisle a sense of how the people in my riding are feeling.

People are upset and angry and want to know why the law does not apply to everyone. If anyone else blocked the railway, they would be arrested, and yet here we stand, 13 days later, and nothing has happened. There is no plan from the government. Massive layoffs are starting and will continue.

Those who want to protest may do so and those who want to petition the courts may do so, but the law must be upheld. If it is not, what will stop this from happening again and again? The law must be consistent, predictable and evenly applied. We are looking at propane shortages out east, supplies for hospitals are at risk and thousands of workers will be laid off. These protests must end.

At the end of the day, the government answers to the decisions of the police. It is day 13, and the police are not enforcing the injunction. What do I say to my constituents who feel the rule of law is selective and not being enforced? When will the police enforce this law?

• (2305)

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising concerns about the impacts of these continued rail closures.

The solution lies in having a meaningful dialogue that will get to the root of the problem. Once we are able to provide a process and move down that process of addressing the root causes of this problem, that will be the most effective and long-term solution to addressing the crisis we have today. It is not at the discretion of the government to direct the police to enforce laws; there is already an injunction in place.

**Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the member talked about meaningful dialogue. He represents a riding on the other side of the north shore, the other side of Burrard Inlet. The indigenous peoples of the north shore, the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh people, have spoken out against the imposition by the government with respect to the Trans Mountain pipeline. I am not talking about the \$17 billion or \$18 billion in public funds the government wants to splurge on this pipeline, I am not talking about the environmental destruction that will come with having tankers going out through the Burrard Inlet and the Salish Sea, I am talking about indigenous peoples in his area, in the north shore, who have spoken out actively against this. I ask the member this: How can we consider the government to be credible in any way on this issue when it is willing to run roughshod over indigenous rights in the case of the Trans Mountain pipeline?

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Mr. Speaker, the Trans Mountain pipeline review process dragged on for many years. The level of indigenous consultation that happened throughout this process is unheard of in this country. The high level of engagement from officials at the most senior levels would be hard to replicate in any other process. This is the type of example we need to show when we want to improve our nation-to-nation relationship, to have high-level buy-in engagement from our leaders. That is precisely what we need to

pursue when we are talking about the Coastal GasLink project. I was encouraged to see our Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations present in B.C. a couple of days ago to meet with the Wet'suwet'en leaders and address the concerns that were raised.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I note parenthetically that the minister was in British Columbia but was not attempting to meet with the Wet'suwet'en because she was not able to leave Victoria. She did meet with her provincial counterpart.

We have referred many times tonight to the Coastal GasLink project as though natural gas reduces greenhouse gases globally. However, this is fracked gas. I know the member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country is concerned about climate. Is he not concerned that fracked gas has the same carbon footprint as coal and worsens the climate situation?

**Mr. Patrick Weiler:** Mr. Speaker, a major focus and really the defining focus for our government is ensuring that we are taking meaningful action to meet our climate commitments. One of the areas the member opposite raised was the contribution of natural gas in this process. One of the major changes our government has made over the last couple of years is investing with companies to pursue the electrification of these processes, to lower the life-cycle carbon emissions of this type of extraction. By doing this, it is able to have lower emissions than LNG and natural gas produced in other locations.

**Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, *msit no'kmaq*, I would like to acknowledge the Algonquin territory on which we meet today. Many of us have acknowledged the traditional territories of indigenous nations on whose land we meet. Some of us go as far as to say we are on unceded land. How many of us give a thought to what that acknowledgement means?

To me, as a Mi'kmaq person, as an indigenous person, it means that we recognize that another group of humans cared for the land, protected the land and maintained it for future generations. We do so out of respect. Maybe we do so out of part of a journey of reconciliation too. While it is an easy thing to say, it is much harder to practise reconciliation.

Growing up Mi'kmaq, we are raised and taught that we are born with responsibilities to our family, to our community and to our nation, but also responsibilities to the ecosystem. We call it *netukulimk* in my language. When I think about that responsibility, I think about what actions I am willing to take to ensure the quality of life for future generations.

I was a protester, or a land protector, as my colleagues have reminded me. I too was out there on the streets, frustrated during the Idle No More era of protests under the Stephen Harper government that saw environmental cuts and indigenous cuts. I was out there with them.

It was only when a new government was elected that I believed that Canada had reached a turning point, where Canada could look to a new relationship with indigenous people. It was with this in mind that I entered politics.

Because of the work that this government has done to advance reconciliation, I believed that a Mi'kmaq advocate would be welcomed into government. I still believe this today. I believe that reconciliation is possible.

I believe that reconciliation is not a destination; it is a journey. Just like any relationship we hope to improve and foster, it is only possible when we listen. It is only possible with respect. It is only possible when we find common ground. We have reached a moment in Canada like we have many times before. This will not be the first time that Canadians have called for police action, even military action, in the face of civil disobedience and protest.

If the civil rights movement in the U.S. has taught us anything, it is that violence, police or the army will not stop a political movement. It will only lead to more political action, escalation and turmoil.

Communication is the only way forward. Good faith negotiation is what the Wet'suwet'en are asking for. I will not go into the comments that my colleague just made about the Wet'suwet'en people in their determination and their fight at the Supreme Court of Canada for recognition of aboriginal title, but they believed it was a victory for them. Many indigenous nations across Canada believed it was a victory.

As many have stated today, section 35 of our Constitution, the supreme law of Canada, recognizes aboriginal and treaty rights. Further to that, section 52 states that the Constitution is the supreme law of Canada, and that any other laws that are inconsistent with them are of no force and effect. Therefore, the rule of law is important, but we must ensure that the rule of law is applied equitably among all peoples.

We have a crisis, but this crisis did not unfold in 12 days. This crisis did not unfold in 12 years. It has been unfolding for more than 150 years.

For more than a decade, I worked for the hereditary chiefs of the Mi'kmaq, as my father did for 30 years before me. They were called the Sante' Mawio'mi. The difference was that they were at the table with elected chiefs while they talked about negotiations moving forward. While it was not always easy, they always found ways to work together.

• (2310)

It is important that both Indian Act governments and traditional governments work together just the same as we in a minority government must attempt to work together.

I ask today for leaders in Canada, leaders of both indigenous and non-indigenous people, to commit to making our relationship work. Political action, not police action, has the ability to decrease tensions. It is the only way. Political discussion and negotiation is what is needed, not inflammatory rhetoric. We need to inspire hope. If nothing else during this speech, I want to make sure to say that

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there is still hope. The politician in me believes that and the protester in me believes that too.

We are still here. We have been debating all night, but more importantly, we have been listening all week. We are still listening. I promise we will not stop listening. Reach out to us and let us get back to negotiating and let our families from coast to coast to coast get back to work.

Like any relationship between families, between partners, when we sit down and talk about the issues rather than taking extreme positions that is when we have the ability to grow. We have a chance for growth in our country. We have the ability to take strides and take actions that have only been dreamt about by indigenous leaders in this country in the past. When we say that we are focused on reconciliation, let us show it in all of our actions.

• (2315)

**Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the member's remarks. I would like to thank him for providing more information about his personal background and his world view.

It is great to hear all the talk about communication, about working together and listening, about wanting to hear a variety of different opinions and about everybody having equal value. I hope we all agree on all of that in principle.

Does the member disagree with the Prime Minister's exclusion of the Leader of the Opposition from the meeting today with all of the other leaders in the House? I am speaking of an opposition leader who received more votes than the Liberal leader in the last election and represents entirely the province of Alberta except for one seat, entirely the province of Saskatchewan and a good chunk of Manitoba. Does everything that the member just said, all of which I agree with in principle, fly in the face of that very act?

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Mr. Speaker, where we have arrived at in this country requires us to talk with respect. When leaders in the opposition can talk respectfully about indigenous issues, I will applaud that. I do not feel that there has been respectful discussion by the Leader of the Opposition. I heard his comments today and I heard his comments when he was presenting in front of the Assembly of First Nations last year. When he was asked by the chiefs if he could differentiate himself from Stephen Harper, he could not. He doubled down and said Stephen Harper was not so bad to indigenous people. He was booed out of the room.

If that member opposite spent a little more time listening to some of the talk by the chiefs and hereditary chiefs, perhaps he would be invited when our Prime Minister sits down and talks about what is best for all Canadians, including indigenous peoples.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

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He spoke about reconciliation. As part of reconciliation, we must take action to prevent crises from getting worse. In December 2019, *The Guardian*, a daily newspaper in London, reported that the RCMP had instructed its officers to use as much violence as they want to dismantle the Wet'suwet'en camps and that snipers would be deployed. Ottawa should have made a decision back then.

In response to this article, Dona Kane, a constituent of mine in Shefford, came to my office in January to share her concerns, in particular about these snipers.

If someone from Shefford and the Bloc, which released a statement in December, could already see that the situation was explosive, why did the government not intervene then?

My constituent had to come to my office, in January, when she saw that the problem was getting worse. Once again, there were acts of violence against the Wet'suwet'en people.

In the spirit of reconciliation, I would like to know whether my colleague thinks it is important to do something and stop this situation from getting worse.

*[English]*

**Mr. Jaime Battiste:** Mr. Speaker, I reject the premise that reconciliation is not formed out of crisis. I feel that reconciliation is something that has been 150 years or more in the making. We can all look at recent events and question the government on our actions, but has any other government in the past 150 years acted differently towards indigenous people?

I grew up in a Mi'kmaq community. I lived this every day for 40 years. This is not something I get to come to a meeting here and just say that this is what is happening. I have lived this and have seen it my whole life, and so it is not something that has just recently transpired.

Can we do better? We can all do better. Our Prime Minister has said that as part of it, but the biggest thing is what this government is trying to do in taking steps towards reconciliation differently from all governments in the past, including Oka and Ipperwash and the other protests that have happened across this country. What we are asking is that we speak respectfully, speak to people, negotiate and have dialogue. This is what reconciliation means. It is having that patience. Indigenous peoples have had patience in Canada for more than 150 years.

Let us put this in perspective. There are three million indigenous people out there and there are fewer than 1,000 protesting. I have spent a lot of time listening to a lot of the comments over the past few weeks. I am kind of rambling here, but I get going because I have lived this. This is not just something that I debate on, but I do believe that our government is taking the steps that will lead towards the necessary path of reconciliation.

• (2320)

**The Deputy Speaker:** I see there are many people standing for questions and comments. I am going to do my best to ask members to keep their interventions to about one minute so that we may get three questions in on a five-minute round. I appreciate that members want to take the time to express their arguments in this case, and we need to give them some latitude to do that as well.

We are going to resume debate with the hon. member for Foothills.

**Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Vancouver Granville.

I have heard many of the interventions this evening through this emergency debate and I want to bring a different perspective to this discussion tonight. I want to put this in context.

About 20 years ago, a previous Liberal government actually arrested farmers and put them in jail for crossing the border and trying to sell their grain in the United States. In perspective, right now we have protesters illegally blockading critical infrastructure across Canada and a Liberal government that is doing nothing to address that situation.

I want to talk about the collateral damage of the inaction that is happening and put that in perspective. Canadian farmers who are trying to sell their own grain are arrested and put in jail by the Liberal government. We have protesters, the court has said this is an illegal blockade and the Liberal government is not doing anything. We can imagine the message this is sending to Canadian agriculture. The blockades are bringing Canada's economy to its knees, and there are very real consequences.

On Friday, a grain producer from my riding came into my office in High River. I have to admit that it is not often I see farmers and ranchers almost in tears, but this 80-some-year-old farmer was extremely frustrated. He has gone through what has been deemed the harvest of hell this fall. He is now finally getting his crops harvested. Throughout January and February, when there was a nice day, some of the farmers in my riding were out in their combines trying to get whatever crop off they possibly could.

I now have this farmer in my office asking what else he can do. He suffered through one of the worst springs and falls in 60 years of farming. He finally harvested his crops, but now he is dealing with a blockade. There are no trains at the terminal where he could sell his commodities and get his product to market.

These are the very real consequences farmers across this country are facing. It is not just in western Canada or in my riding, but in every corner of this country.

Members across the floor are talking about not wanting to rush this through and wanting to have a discussion and open dialogue and saying they will be there for as long as it takes. However, there are business owners, farmers and ranchers across this country who literally cannot wait for this dialogue and the Liberal government to just stand back and hope that this resolves itself. They will be bankrupt before this is resolved if the Prime Minister continues to stand on the sidelines.

This is not just rhetoric. I have heard from many of my colleagues across the floor that this is rhetoric. I would like to mention the stats of what is going on right now. Currently in the port of Prince Rupert, there are 19 ships waiting to be loaded with grain. They are short 400,000 tonnes of grain that is not there to be loaded. In the port of Vancouver, there are 42 vessels waiting to be loaded.

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Just in Prince Rupert alone, it is 400,000 tonnes of grain they are waiting for, which is about 4,000 railcars. Every day of waiting is about a million dollars. If we include both ports, every week the cost directly to grain farmers is between \$40 million and \$50 million. When those ships are not loaded, the demurrage costs are passed directly on to the producers. They cannot pass those costs on to anyone else. They are price takers. They are the end of the line. If we add this up over the four weeks, this has cost Canadian agriculture well over \$200 million to \$300 million, and that is only in grain. I am not talking about cattle, fertilizer, pork or other commodities. That is only in grain. We can understand the implication this is having on our farmers and ranchers.

This is not only on the commodity side. I spoke to a propane dealer today, who said that Quebec and Ontario may have four to five days of propane reserves left and that it is being rationed. I have heard similar stories from Atlantic Canada. This includes farmers who are trying to heat their barns and dry their grain. Every time they turn around, they are getting another punch to the gut. They are throwing up their hands and asking what more can they do and wondering why no one is paying attention to the anxiety, stress and frustration they are feeling.

The ironic part on the propane side is that these same farmers are now hit with a Liberal carbon tax, which is costing them tens of thousands of dollars a month.

● (2325)

We heard from the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, which said that the carbon tax was equal to 12% of one's revenue just disappearing.

The farmers finally got their grain off in the fall. Then they were faced with a CN rail strike, where again the Liberal government did not take any action and decided to stand on the sidelines and wait for it to resolve itself. That is finally now starting to get caught back up. Then in January, farmers were hit with a carbon tax. In February, now they are being hit with illegal blockades across this country and they cannot get their products to market. I hope my colleagues across the floor can see the utter frustration from Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector. Every time they turn around they are getting another punch in the face by the Liberal government.

When we asked the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food if she knew the impact the carbon tax was having on Canadian farmers, her response was that her department was not keeping any data on it and she was hoping to find evidence and data on it. Before one puts in a carbon tax, maybe one should have done an economic impact analysis on the agriculture sector.

For the last two weeks I have heard the Liberals say that they are not going to enforce the court injunction and they just hope it resolves itself peacefully and quickly. I am sorry, but that is just not good enough. I am absolutely not inciting violence or anything along that line, but sooner or later they have to understand there are real economic consequences to this inaction.

I do not know how else I can say this, but Canada's economy is on its knees. Even when this is resolved, whenever that may be, to just assume that Canada's economy is going to pick back up and get

back on track is simply not the case. I spoke to CN last week and it is 200 freight trains behind. That will take not days, not weeks, but months to get caught back up.

The government also has to understand the implications this has on our global relations with some of our most trusted and important trading partners. They look at Canada as a supplier. They are our customers. What will customers do when the ships they have sent from Japan, China, India, Australia, New Zealand and Peru to be loaded in Vancouver or Prince George are turned around empty? They will take those ships to where they know they are going to get a reliable supply. They will go to Brazil, Peru or the United States. These are customers that we will have lost.

This impacts our reputation in the global marketplace. More than 50% of the commodities we produce in agriculture are exported. Almost more than any other country in the world, we are reliant on those export markets. We cannot have this unreliability within the critical infrastructure and the supply chain from coast to coast without there being very clear consequences to what is going on.

I have talked a lot about the farmers on the ground who are being impacted by this, but I also spoke with Chuck Magro, the president and CEO of Nutrien on Friday to see the impact this was having on its business. It is the largest fertilizer company in North America and is based in Calgary. This is Nutrien's busiest time of the year. It is trying to get its supplies not only across Canada to its domestic customers but also to ships to send it around the world. If these blockades are not removed in the very near future, Nutrien will be forced to shut down some of its most important plants across Canada and lay off people. Nutrien is now 125 railcars short and that number continues to grow each and every day.

In conclusion, I want to be crystal clear to my colleagues across the floor that there are very real consequences to this inaction and this grandstanding. Farmers, ranchers, food processors across this country are going to be bankrupt. They are desperate. They need people to stand up and show they are fighting for them, but unfortunately, time and time again the government has shown that it is not.

● (2330)

**Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for outlining the pain that farmers are feeling. I think everyone agrees with that. It is a very difficult situation. We have offered a path forward.

We heard tonight from an erudite lawyer, with a couple of cases, the exact example of how it is a fundamental precept of our democracy that governments do not direct the police in enforcing the law.

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I would like to ask the member what his solution would be. Is he going to go against the Supreme Court and this fundamental precept of our democracy, or does he have another solution for solving this problem that we all want to solve for the farmers?

**Mr. John Barlow:** Mr. Speaker, I do find that question ironic, which I am sure has come up over and over again during this debate.

The Prime Minister had no problem directing the RCMP when it came to the SNC Lavalin investigation. He was pretty clear that Liberals did not want them to investigate this before, during or seemingly after the election. The government cannot be hypocritical here. It cannot have it both ways.

There is a solution. The Prime Minister could talk to his Minister of Public Safety and say that there will be a policy in place that the RCMP and the government will enforce the court injunctions that are in place and remove these illegal blockades.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, first, I want to offer sympathy to the farmers who are being affected by the current situation. I wish this was not happening. I wish that the Liberal government had come to the table with meaningful reconciliation with the Wet'suwet'en people so that we were not in this place. I wish that the government had sat down and had proper dialogue.

I think about my riding. The member talked about the socio-economic impacts of what is happening to the farmers. I think about the Nuu-chah-nulth people who have been in court. The government spent \$19 million on government lawyers fighting them for the right we know they have, the right they won in the Supreme Court of Canada, which the government appealed, not only once but twice. Their hands are up in the air, too.

The member for Sydney—Victoria talked about respect, which they call *iisaak*. They came and operated in this function of our government through our laws, yet they continually face a government that is fighting them in court just so they can catch and sell the fish running by their villages.

This is the problem. When we do not invest in meaningful reconciliation, what is the cost? I know what the cost is to the Nuu-chah-nulth people. It is suicide, unemployment rates and poverty. That is the cost. We have to fix this.

We have to move forward together. We need meaningful reconciliation.

• (2335)

**Mr. John Barlow:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague, but there are suicides, bankruptcies, anxiety and mental health issues within the agricultural community as well.

Why are we putting that aside as not an issue at all in favour of another part of the country, when the vast majority of the Wet'suwet'en community, the elected council, the elected chief, as well as the majority of the hereditary chiefs, all support the Coastal GasLink project?

What is frustrating for me is we are throwing every issue that has been around for 150 years into this. Absolutely, I believe that consultation and reconciliation is a fundamental part of our country,

and it needs to be addressed. However, does it have to happen at the expense of our entire economy? I do not think that is the case.

These negotiations could happen outside of this, and should be happening outside of this.

**Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I agree, I want the blockades to end. I feel action is delayed and unnecessarily so. I feel there is a lot that goes into this very nuanced conversation.

I hear the member about the farmers. I am just curious as to what the member thinks about the National Farmers Union issuing a press release that is in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people. It is the first thing on their website.

**Mr. John Barlow:** Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear with my colleague across the floor. Every, and I mean every, single other agriculture stakeholder that I have spoken with is extremely concerned with what is going on with these rail blockades.

I do not want this to be about one sector of our economy or one people against another. That is not what this is about. This is about everyone in the House understanding the consequences and the real ramifications that are happening right now as a result of these illegal blockades.

The vast majority of Canadians are onside with the majority of the Wet'suwet'en community who support the Coastal GasLink project. I do not see a problem with that.

This is a democracy. The greater good should be at play here, not just a small group of protesters.

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Vancouver Granville, Ind.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to stand to speak in this emergency debate. I would like to thank the member for Foothills for sharing his time with me.

I want to acknowledge the comments of the Prime Minister earlier today, and certainly acknowledge comments or other remarks from individuals in this place, looking to try to find solutions to this important question and consideration. I agree that good faith, partnership and a non-partisan approach have to take place when it comes to indigenous issues and pursuing true reconciliation.

I think about two basic questions that need to be asked. First, why are we in this situation? Second, what should be done?

Why are we in this situation? Why are we seeing blockades and protests and economic disruption?

The answer is pretty straightforward. It is because Canada, through successive governments, including the current government, has not done the basic work of resetting the foundations for relations with indigenous peoples, despite the rhetoric. We all know what needs to be done. We have known for decades, but we are here, yet again, in a moment of crisis, because this hard work has been punted.

The history of Canada saw indigenous peoples divided into smaller administrative groupings, with systems of government imposed upon them. For Indians, this was through the Indian Act and the creation of the band councils system.

The work of decolonization, of reconciliation, requires supporting nations to rebuild, to come back together and revitalize their own systems of government, to self-determine. Until they do, we will never know who truly speaks for the nations, irrespective of the good work and good intentions of the hundreds of Indian Act chiefs and councils and traditional leaders, who, in many cases, are one and the same.

However, we have not done this work. We have maintained the same legislation and policies for decades that keeps first nations under colonial statute, keeps nations divided, renders negotiations long and nearly impossible and does not support first nations nearly enough in doing the rebuilding work they must inevitably do. There are lots of reasons for this: the historical denial of rights to self-government and the denial to one's land and, so too, paternalism. The result of the perpetual inaction are situations like we see in Wet'suwet'en territory.

The Prime Minister did say today that these problems had roots in a long history. That is true. However, let us be honest, and with respect, the Prime Minister has to learn to take responsibility. Canadians over many years have come to learn our true history and the need for fundamental change. He has been speaking for five years about this most important relationship. He stood in the House of Commons over two years ago and pledged to make transformative, legislative and policy reforms, reforms that would be directly relevant to the situation in Wet'suwet'en territory today, that would have supported the internal governance work of the nation, shifted the consultation processes that took place and provided a framework for better relations.

What have we have seen as a result of this speech, and its transformative words? Honestly, almost nothing. The promise of legislation has not come. I know it is hard, but we cannot keep punting the hard work because of political expediency. If we do, we will have another situation like we have today in five years from now or quite likely sooner.

Therefore, here we are. What should be done? In the spirit of good faith and in the spirit of working together, may I be so bold as to offer four suggestions?

One, governments have to lead. They need to lead. Weeks have passed. If the Prime Minister wants to have dialogue to resolve matters peacefully, de-escalate the situation and show real leadership, in my view he should have gotten on a plane, flown to British Columbia, picked the premier up on his way up to Wet'suwet'en territory and met with the leadership of the Wet'suwet'en and some of the broader indigenous leaders in British Columbia.

● (2340)

The Prime Minister could still do this, having regard for and respect for the wishes and preconditions perhaps of the Wet'suwet'en leaders and recognizing some of the challenges that exist in their community. Honestly, there is a practice of leaders not wanting, in my opinion, to be in meetings where the outcomes and structures are not basically predetermined. We have had enough of that. One cannot script dealing with real issues and challenges. Let us just deal with them.

*S. O. 52*

Two, the government should act now on making the fundamental changes that are long overdue. Long ago the government should have tabled comprehensive legislation that implements the minimum standards of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and upholds the recognition and implementation of indigenous rights, a recognition and implementation of rights framework. Such legislation would include supports, without interfering, for indigenous nations to rebuild their governments. It also would include pathways for moving out beyond the Indian Act. Indian Act chiefs have an important role to play in this process. Once truly self-governing, we will know with certainty who speaks for the indigenous title and rights holders. This is important not only for indigenous peoples to have faith in the legitimacy of their own democratic institutions but ultimately the people will choose and vote on their system of good governance. It is now also important for all Canadians to know.

I will be frank. The government uses language like “co-development” and the need to do it “in partnership” with indigenous peoples a lot, but a lot of the time it uses that language simply as an excuse to delay or justify inaction. For decades, at least since the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 25 years ago, we have known the foundational legislative change that is needed. UNDRIP is a decade old. The government is five years old and it has been two years since the Prime Minister announced legislation would be tabled within 10 months. Enough is enough. The time for action is now. No more half measures, no more lofty rhetoric, no more setting up interminable negotiations that get nowhere very slowly over years and years.

Three, I believe the government should consider a cooling-off period when construction activity does not take place. That would allow everyone to step back and assess where things are, clear the space for dialogue and de-escalate current tensions. Whether this period is for one month or for a few months, it can be of benefit to all.

In this time, dialogue between the Wet'suwet'en and the government can take place. As well, the Wet'suwet'en, in my respectful view, need to take responsibility in such a period of time to have, in a very inclusive manner, the internal dialogue needed to bring clarity about how they will approach the future of this project collectively. Also, such a period of time may allow for explorations, as there have been in the past, of alternative routing for small portions of the line that can address some concerns, including, if necessary, government roles in accommodating the costs of such changes, should they be adopted with broad support.

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Four, as a proud indigenous person in this country, I know that indigenous governments also need to lead. The main request I have heard, including meetings with the Prime Minister and premier, is that the RCMP leave the area where it conducted enforcement activity. My understanding as of today is that the company and the Wet'suwet'en are both in the area and things remain currently peaceful. If the RCMP decides it is appropriate to leave, perhaps as part of a cooling-off period, then I would expect indigenous governments, including the Wet'suwet'en leadership, to take action, to look at reconciliation and to look at how they can move forward collectively.

I want to make one last observation about reconciliation and the things that we have heard about reconciliation being dead.

• (2345)

Reconciliation in its true meaning always involves a reckoning. With our past, we are taking responsibility with changing course in real ways, with making the hard choices for our future. These are the choices that every parliamentarian in this place representing their constituents has to make for the benefit of all Canadians. This is our opportunity to finally finish the unfinished business of Confederation and enable indigenous peoples to be self-determining, embrace the minimum standards of the United Nations declaration and finally ensure that indigenous peoples have their rightful place in this amazing country.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vancouver Granville for her thoughtful comments. We are in a very important moment in time in our history, and it is absolutely essential that all of us in the House of Commons be on the right side of history.

The member proposed a number of actions that the government could take, particularly on the question of a cooling-off period. That would mean the RCMP would need to stand down. I think it would also mean, and I would like her clarification, that the provincial government should pause the project as part of a cooling-off period so the discussion toward a peaceful resolution can actually take its course. Did I interpret that correctly from the member's suggestions?

If we can actually come to that place, then we would have set the table to say that we would do things differently and that, yes, for the entire country, the most important relationship is in fact the nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples, recognizing that they have full rights.

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould:** Mr. Speaker, as part of a cooling-off period, I believe fundamentally that leaders, the Prime Minister, the Premier of the Province of British Columbia and Canadians need to have reflections around what happens and how we move forward. An agreement between the Prime Minister, the premier and certainly involving the leadership and citizens of the Wet'suwet'en nation is important to determine the best way forward. Cooler heads prevail when there has been an opportunity to reflect and plan a way forward. I certainly would support that happening.

• (2350)

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a number of the suggestions, such as strong engagement and leadership, including the Prime Minister

potentially getting on a plane and bringing the premier with him. That kind of engagement, which we have seen from the Minister of Indigenous Services, has been important. Additional engagement would be important.

With respect to provincial versus federal actions, I understand that the member for Vancouver Granville is suggesting a pause, a cooling-off period, from the provincial government. On the federal side, with respect to cooling off and in regard to the RCMP, I understand that under the RCMP Act, the minister could request a review of actions undertaken to date by the RCMP on enforcing the court order and potentially stepping outside of that court order. That would be a positive potential step, given that much of the problem at the outset had to do with the RCMP overstepping its jurisdiction in some ways.

With respect to requesting the RCMP to stand down, given the member's former experience, to what extent does she think direction of the RCMP would be appropriate in the circumstances?

**Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould:** Mr. Speaker, I have heard the debate all night. Based on my former role, I generally understand the role of the RCMP and police forces and the reality of not having political interference happening. I know that very well.

I am familiar with the authorities in the RCMP Act. I am also familiar with the necessity to ensure the RCMP has the ability to exercise its discretion as appropriate. However, there has been a conversation in the country, and perhaps it might be a result of this debate for this conversation to continue, on the balance between the independence of police forces and the authorities of ministers. We have had inquiries about this, Ipperwash for one. This is a conversation that needs to continue, but appropriately with political action and agreement on all sides. Perhaps that would lead the way for decisions to be made by police and the RCMP.

**The Deputy Speaker:** We are resuming debate. I will let the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport know that there are seven minutes remaining in the time for tonight's debate. I will give him the usual signal when we are getting close to that time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

**Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it has obviously been a difficult past 12 days for our country. I will be making my speech today from the perspective of transport, but I would like to preface my remarks by acknowledging that many of the issues we are struggling with go well beyond transportation.

As Canadians, whether we realize it or not, we inherit and benefit from the rich legacy of those who came before us, of the indigenous peoples who lived here from time immemorial, of the Europeans and others who came later and settled here, of all those who built the infrastructure and institutions that underline our present wealth and status as one of the most successful countries in human history, including the rail networks, ports, bridges and roads that continue to play a vital role in connecting our vast country from coast to coast to coast.

However, in addition to inheriting this tremendously valuable legacy, we also inherited the mistakes and misdeeds of those who came before us. Much of our present good fortune came at the expense of indigenous people and communities who were displaced and had their lives and customs disrupted, some of whom we made treaties with, which were often violated either in word or spirit, and many of whom were forced into residential schools in an attempt at cultural assimilation.

We all live with the consequences of those decisions, the dual legacy of the accomplishments, the mistakes and the mistreatment. As a government and a country, we possess a better understanding today of those mistakes that were made in the past, the effects of which are still felt today and are reflective of things such as a lower quality of life for indigenous people or systemic challenges, including higher rates of incarceration.

We have embarked upon a long and difficult process of reconciliation. It presents many challenges, but it is also essential if we want to move forward and build a country that we can be more proud of. However, untangling some of those past mistakes and patterns is challenging. Many indigenous people in this country are angry over how their communities have been treated and are suspicious and mistrustful of the government, of our system of law and our police forces that enforce it, and not without some justification. To their credit, many non-indigenous Canadians sympathize with these feelings.

All this is to say, to repeat an earlier remark, that these issues raised by the protests we have been experiencing over the last 12 days go well beyond transport. They are complex and not easily resolved. They stir deep feelings of anger and resentment.

It is easy to feel frustrated over the cost and inconvenience of these blockades and the protests that are causing them, but it is important to understand the reasons behind them. It is also essential to show compassion and understanding toward each other, to show some patience and take the time necessary to truly listen. We have to think about the people who are losing their jobs and seeing their lives disrupted as a result of the blockades, but we also have to think about those lives that have been impacted by a legacy of racism, neglect, marginalization and ignorance. What is called for at this moment is empathy, patience and cooler heads as we try to find a peaceful, negotiated solution. As the Minister of Indigenous Services has remarked, we have a choice in this country: We can either repeat some of the mistakes we have been making for hundreds of years or we can find a more peaceful path.

Let me turn to discussing some transportation aspects, with an emphasis on safety.

*S. O. 52*

The government feels very strongly about safety, especially around our rail transportation corridors. As a government, we have a duty to ensure that our rail system and its infrastructure are safe. We take that responsibility seriously. Our rail companies are also working to make their operations as safe as possible. Consequently, we are preoccupied with the recent activities in and around rail lines and rail yards across our country.

As the Minister of Transport remarked last Friday, let us be clear that rail lines and rail yards are dangerous places for people without the proper training. Working in proximity to rail lines and railcars requires a complete awareness of safety procedures. Furthermore, large moving trains confronted with unexpected obstacles on a rail line cannot stop instantly. This presents an extreme hazard to the lives of those inside the train and in front of a moving train.

I also want to remind Canadians that tampering with rail lines, railcars or signalling systems is illegal and extremely dangerous. In addition to putting themselves at risk, they are endangering rail workers and train passengers, as well as the living communities around them.

● (2355)

I would ask those who are violating the Railway Safety Act to consider the consequences should a serious accident occur, that injuries may kill innocent people. Will this advance the cause of reconciliation? Will it help indigenous people?

However sincerely the protesters hold their concerns, we cannot condone activity that deliberately obstructs rail operations. Therefore, I am calling on all Canadians to respect the Railway Safety Act and be conscious of the dangers associated with recent demonstrations. I know there are some who may perceive rail stoppages as something that only affects large companies' profitability. However, when rail services are disrupted we cannot overlook the impact on people's jobs, livelihoods and lives. We cannot overlook the impact of safe and efficient shipping of things such as propane and other fuels for heating homes, agriculture products, medical supplies, de-icing fluid at airports and so much more. These and other shipments are all sitting idle, unable to get to their destinations, because of obstructions on rail corridors. CN announced that blockages could force the rail company to shut down significant parts of its network. Hundreds of trains have been halted because of those blockages. VIA cancellations mean people cannot get to their homes or other destinations.

*S. O. 52*

As I alluded to earlier in my remarks, there is no denying that there is a sense of alienation. There is no sense denying that there is a divide between us and different perspectives on an important issue. There is no denying that Canadians should have freedom to express their frustrations and concerns, but taking those frustrations and concerns to the country's vital rail network is dangerous. Livelihoods are at stake; lives are at stake. Canada is a trading nation, and our coastal inline ports are critical for both domestic and international trade.

• (2400)

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 12 a.m.)

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