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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 1, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE ACT

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 96 of the Statutes of Canada, 1998, c.35, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the third independent review by the Hon. Morris J. Fish, C.C., Q.C., of the provisions and operations of Bill C-25, an act to amend the National Defence Act and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present petition 11279386 regarding the ongoing travesty of logging the last remaining old growth in Canada.

Whereas the climate crisis requires action by all levels of government and industry, old-growth forests provide immeasurable benefits, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity, culture, recreation, food and more. Of the remaining 2.7% of the original high-productivity, old-growth forests in British Columbia, 75% are still slated to be logged.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and first nations to immediately halt logging of endangered old-growth ecosystems, fund the long-term protection of old-growth ecosystems as a priority for Canada's climate action plan and reconciliation with indigenous peoples, support value-added forestry initiatives in partnership with first nations to ensure Canada's forestry industry is sustainable and based on the harvesting of second- and third-growth forests, ban the export of raw logs and maximize resource use for local jobs, and ban the use of whole trees for wood pellet biofuel production.

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise virtually today and present a petition on behalf of the residents of Haida Gwaii.

The petitioners urge this government to amend the Income Tax Act and restore the full northern residents tax deduction for residents of the islands of Haida Gwaii. This, of course, is on account of the remoteness of the islands; they are a full seven-hour ferry ride from Prince Rupert. By extension, there is a very high cost of living borne by people who live there.

Residents received the full deduction until the criteria was reworked in the 1990s. Omitting Haida Gwaii was an oversight and should be restored.

CONVERSION THERAPY

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the House of Commons today to present a petition brought forward by Canadians who are concerned about the government's Bill C-6.

The petitioners call for the House of Commons to take a number of actions: one, ban coercive, degrading practices that would try to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity; two, ensure that no laws discriminate against Canadians by limiting the services they can receive based on their sexual orientation or gender identity; three, allow parents to speak with their own children about sexuality and gender and to set house rules about sex and relationships; four, allow free and open conversations about sexuality and sexual behaviour; and five, avoid criminalizing professional and religious counselling voluntarily requested and consented to by Canadians.

• (1010)

FOREST INDUSTRY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition today on behalf of many residents of Vancouver Island.

As many parliamentarians will know, there have been many arrests recently at Fairy Creek, a valley that still has old-growth forests, of real importance and significance to British Columbia. The petitioners note that only 2.7% of British Columbia's old-growth forest remains, and it is being logged at an unsustainable rate.

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The petitioners are asking the federal government to recognize the importance of old-growth forests in any climate plan; recognize the importance of old-growth forests for biodiversity; halt the logging of old growth and specifically halt the export of raw logs; and ban the practice of taking whole forests and converting them to wood pellets for biofuel alleged to be a climate policy, which is actually degrading the capacity of our forests for sequestration.

FUEL PRICES

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present virtually petition e-3233. The petition has 818 signatures and was submitted out of great concern by many constituents in Kootenay—Columbia regarding the significant increase and inconsistency in fuel prices throughout my riding.

The petitioners, therefore, call on the Government of Canada to focus on the affordability aspects of fuel as it has done for telecom services, investigate through the Federal Competition Act any evidence of anti-competitive conduct in the fuel sector and move to protect consumers from price gouging by fuel suppliers.

I support this petition and present it to the House of Commons on behalf of my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition on behalf of my New Brunswick constituents calling for Parliament to end the abhorrent practice of sex-selective abortions in Canada. Abortions based on gender are currently legally permitted in Canada, yet there is a broad consensus to prohibit them as 84% of Canadians agree that sex-selective abortions should not be permitted.

I hope the House of Commons will reflect this consensus when we vote Wednesday on Bill C-233.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present two petitions.

The first petition results out of a very troublesome crime that happened in Niagara where someone was run over by their own vehicle that was being stolen. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to review the laws related to trespassing and theft in order to include more severe punishments to further deter individuals from committing these crimes.

That petition is e-3061 and was signed by almost 1,500 petitioners.

PHARMACEUTICALS

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): The second petition I want to read into the House is petition e-3265. This was signed by almost 5,000 people who are physicians, scientists and other concerned citizens and residents of Canada. They call upon the Government of Canada to urgently examine the evidence in favour of ivermectin and give due consideration to making ivermectin available immediately to Canadians as a schedule II medication, which can be obtained directly from pharmacists. They point out the fact that there are several countries in the world, including Japan, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Egypt, that are already using ivermectin.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE TRANSFER OF EBOLA AND HENIPAH VIRUSES TO THE WUHAN INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC) moved:

That an order of the House do issue for the unredacted version of all documents produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the March 31, 2021, and May 10, 2021, orders of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, respecting the transfer of Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in March 2019, and the subsequent revocation of security clearances for, and termination of the employment of, Dr. Xiangguo Qiu and Dr. Keding Cheng, provided that:

- (a) these documents shall be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, in both official languages, within 48 hours of the adoption of this order;
- (b) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall promptly thereafter notify the Speaker, who shall forthwith inform the House, whether he is satisfied the documents were produced as ordered;
- (c) the Minister of Health shall be ordered to appear before the special committee, for at least three hours, at a televised meeting, to be held within two weeks of the adoption of this order, to discuss the documents and the matters referred to in them;
- (d) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall confidentially review the documents with a view to redacting information which, in his opinion, could reasonably be expected to compromise national security or reveal details of an ongoing criminal investigation, other than the existence of an investigation;
- (e) the Speaker shall cause the documents, as redacted pursuant to paragraph (d), to be laid upon the table at the next earliest opportunity and, after being tabled, they shall stand referred to the special committee;
- (f) the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall discuss with the special committee, at an in camera meeting, to be held within two weeks of the documents being tabled pursuant to paragraph (e), what information he redacted pursuant to paragraph (d); and
- (g) the special committee may, after hearing from the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel pursuant to paragraph (f), decide to make public any of the information which was redacted, as well as, in lieu of making such information public, rely on such information for the purpose of making findings and recommendations in any subsequent report to the House, provided that, for the purpose of this paragraph, the documents deposited pursuant to paragraph (a) shall be deemed to have been referred to the special committee.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to split my time with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

[*English*]

The government is responsible for national security. It is also responsible for ensuring the safety and security of Canadians. We in this House assume the government is protecting national security, and we assume the government is ensuring the safety and security of Canadians, until information comes to our attention that says otherwise.

When this happens, we have a responsibility to investigate, obtain information and find out exactly what happened in order to hold the government accountable and ensure these mistakes are not repeated in the future. This is why I have introduced this motion.

We have information that this country's national security has been compromised. We have information that the safety and security of Canadians has been compromised. What information is this? We know seven government scientists at the government's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg collaborated with Chinese scientists on some of the world's most dangerous viruses and pathogens.

These scientists co-authored at least six studies from 2016 to 2020. We know some of the research was paid for by China's government and that some of these scientists were part of China's military. We know one of the Canadian government scientists, Dr. Qiu, made at least five trips to China in a two-year period alone to collaborate on virus research, including working at the Wuhan Institute of Virology to train scientists and technicians there up to a level 4 standard, allowing them to handle the world's most deadly viruses and pathogens.

We know the same scientist shipped deadly Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology on March 31, 2019. We know Canada's national security agency, CSIS, raised alarm bells about all of this. We know the two government scientists at the lab, Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng, along with students we believe to be Chinese nationals, were escorted out of the lab by the RCMP on July 5, 2019. We also know that Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng were subsequently terminated in January of this year.

We know Dr. Matthew Gilmour, scientific director general of the lab, quit suddenly on Friday, May 15, just eight weeks into the global pandemic, and that Ms. Tina Namiesniowski, president of the Public Health Agency of Canada, suddenly resigned on Friday, September 18, while Parliament was prorogued.

We know President Biden said last week that there are two likely theories on the origin of the coronavirus. One theory is it emerged from human contact with an infected animal. The other theory is it emerged from an accident at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the same lab the government's lab in Winnipeg collaborated with.

President Biden has ordered U.S. intelligence agencies to report back to him in 90 days, on August 24, as to which theory is most likely, and he ordered that elected members of the U.S. Congress be

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kept fully apprised of the investigation so the people's representatives would be aware of national security issues.

These are the things we know. It is clear from what little we do know that the government has failed to protect Canada's national security and has failed to ensure the safety and security of our fellow citizens.

What we do not know is exactly why Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng were fired. We do not know the totality of the collaboration between the Winnipeg lab and the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We do not know if there were shipments of other viruses or other materials, such as reagents, from Winnipeg to Wuhan.

We do not know how a Chinese military scientist Feihu Yan of the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Science was granted access to work in the government's Winnipeg lab, which appears to be contrary to government policy, or how the students escorted out of the lab by the RCMP, purportedly Chinese nationals, gained access to that same lab.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

We do not know exactly why the two most senior executives of the Public Health Agency of Canada suddenly resigned during the pandemic, on May 15 and September 18 respectively.

[*English*]

It is because of the things known and unknown that we have asked the government for more information. We have been responsible in seeking this information. We began our request for these documents at committee, at the Canada-China committee, on two separate occasions: March 31 and May 10. The committee ordered the government to produce documents about the firing of these two government scientists and about the transfers of viruses from Winnipeg to Wuhan.

In both cases, we were careful to ensure that any documents received would be reviewed by the committee in camera with the law clerk to prevent anything injurious to national security or any details of an ongoing criminal investigation from being made public. The government has failed to comply with both committee orders.

That brings us to today. I have introduced this motion so the House of Commons, as a whole, can put its full weight behind an order to the government to produce these documents. The motion in front of us today ensures that nothing injurious to national security and no details of an ongoing criminal investigation would be made public.

Some might say that the RCMP should investigate this. However, an investigation by the RCMP would be narrowly limited to violations of statute law and would not look at broader concerns about national security and foreign policy.

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Some might say this information is best given to the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. That would be wrong because the government should not be investigating itself. While NSICOP is made up of parliamentarians, unlike the United Kingdom's intelligence and security committee, it is not a committee of Parliament. It is not a committee of this place.

Committee members are appointed and serve at the pleasure of the Prime Minister, including the Chair. The government has the power to terminate the committee's reviews. It is also allowed to withhold information from the committee. The Prime Minister has the power to review and amend the committee's reports before they are made public.

In short, NSICOP is accountable to the government. Under our constitution, the government is accountable to this House. It is to this House that the government should deliver the documents.

• (1025)

[Translation]

It is unfortunate that we are using precious time in the House to debate this motion. This question should have been addressed at committee, but the government ignored two committee orders, so we had no other choice but to bring this matter to the attention of the House of Commons as a whole.

[English]

It is also unfortunate for the government that we are here today, for this was a government that came to office promising to do things differently, promising an open and accountable government, promising to respect Parliament and promising to ensure greater democratic oversight. This is a government headed by a Prime Minister who voted for the motion ordering the previous Conservative government to release the Afghan detainee documents and who now does the opposite of what he said in opposition.

This is a government that says it supports a transparent and independent investigation into the origin of the coronavirus in China, which is so important to the world if we are to prevent the next pandemic. The problem is that China has not been co-operating with the investigation and has not been forthcoming with information about the lab in Wuhan. It has been stalling and refusing to release the information needed for the investigation.

The irony is that the government, whose Winnipeg lab collaborated with the Wuhan lab, is also stalling and refusing to release the information needed for the investigation about the Winnipeg lab and its collaboration with the Wuhan lab.

We live in a world today where there is a great clash between two ideals. On the one hand, authoritarian governments such as China, with their new-found prosperity, wish to spread their model of authoritarianism to much of the world. On the other hand, democracies like ours are on the defensive. The time-tested principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law will triumph once again in the future, but only if we are courageous enough to take a stand for them in the present.

That is why this motion must pass. I ask all members of this House to support this motion to order the government to produce these documents.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for introducing his motion and I will say at the outset that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of it.

That being said, one small part of it bothers us a bit. This motion would give a lot of power to the committee, including the power to make public information that would have been redacted and would not necessarily be of interest to the public. We are obviously not against disseminating information that is of interest to the public, far from it, because it is important in terms of transparency, but giving this power to committee members to act solely on their good judgment, is that not going a bit too far?

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, we put a requirement in the motion to have the Clerk of the House review the documents before discussing them with the special committee in order to ensure that no information regarding national security or a criminal investigation is made public.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I first want to thank the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills for his motion. It comes from a unanimous decision of our Canada-China committee, which I fully support, and our party will be supporting it today. I would also like to say that I am particularly pleased to see that it comes from the Conservative member.

I know the member was present and part of the government at the time, in 2009 and 2010, when Speaker Milliken made a ruling about the powers of Parliament to have access to documents that were in the control of the executive. The member's government opposed that. Am I able to conclude that his party has changed its views on the powers of Parliament and parliamentarians to have access to documents of this nature?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, my colleague's question is an important one.

There was a problem with the motion of December 2009. The motion that called on the government to release the Afghan detainee documents at that time was an order of the House to immediately release them publicly and without redaction. The government's position at the time was that this would be injurious to national security and to the safety of Canadian troops in Afghanistan and those of our allies.

This is why I have worded the motion today in a way that ensures that we protect national security and any ongoing criminal investigations. The motion today is different from the one in December of 2009.

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The member has pointed out Speaker Milliken's ruling of April of 2010. I supported that ruling. I believe it was a precedent-setting ruling and one that reinforced the long-standing privileges and rights of this House to get the information it needs from the government.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the documents were requested by committee, they were provided by the Department of Health. I think this member would know that the ministry is separate from the department or the government officials, who are the people who do not come and go. They are consistent between different ministers and different ministerial staff. They are the ones who redacted the documents that were originally given to the committee.

Is this member, through this motion, saying that he does not have faith that the department officials, not the minister's staff, were able to produce the proper documents?

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Speaker, I will answer the member's question by conveying what his colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said. He said that he had no confidence in the legal advice the justice department had provided to the Public Health Agency officials about the redaction of the documents.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today and to share my time with the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, who just demonstrated the importance of today's debate.

We are also here today to talk about national security and access to information, access to evidence and documents that are very relevant to today's public debate. We are also going to talk about our work as MPs and the Prime Minister's dishonourable behaviour in this case.

Let us remember that what we want today is to make public documents that are currently at the heart of a troubling situation for Canada's national security. These events occurred at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, an extremely important institution for our country, particularly during a pandemic.

There is a relationship between the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg and the Wuhan Institute of Virology in Communist China regarding the transfer of viruses, the forced departure of two researchers from the Canadian lab and the departure of two executives from that same lab in Winnipeg.

Let us review the facts. To varying extents, seven Canadian scientists were involved with Communist China in the events we are discussing today. A Chinese military scientist from the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences was authorized to work in the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

Let us not forget that this story revolves around two researchers attached to the Winnipeg laboratory, Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng, who are a couple. This whole story revolves around them.

In 2017 and 2018, Dr. Qiu travelled to China five times and cooperated directly with Chinese Communist regime researchers.

On July 5, 2019, Dr. Qiu and Dr. Cheng were escorted out of the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg by RCMP officers. That was right when the pandemic was taking hold.

On January 20, 2020, we learned that the two researchers were officially terminated by the National Microbiology Laboratory. They had top-level security clearances because they were working in a lab that was doing extremely important microbiology research, and CSIS revoked those clearances.

We recognized that, on March 31, on board an Air Canada flight, two vials of a deadly virus were transferred from Canada to China to combat the Ebola and Henipah viruses. These vials came from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg and were transferred to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We also know that, on May 15 and September 18, two executives at the National Microbiology Laboratory resigned.

We are at the heart of Canadian scientific research into coronavirus; at the heart of the most important aspect of what we have experienced, scientifically, over the past year and a half; at the heart of an extremely important institution for Canada, the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

Two key people were fired and removed from the lab under police escort and two executives at that lab are no longer employed there and tendered their resignation.

Under the circumstances, we have duties to fulfill as parliamentarians. That is why the recently created Special Committee on Canada-China Relations took a look at the situation. On March 31, the committee called for the tabling of documents to have access to all the available information to understand what happened.

How did two high-ranking scientists, with the highest security clearance, get fired and lose their security access? That seems fairly significant.

• (1035)

We asked for documents on March 31. On April 26, documents were submitted to the committee, but they were heavily redacted. The committee tried again, filing a second motion requesting the documents on May 10. Unfortunately, on May 20, we once again received heavily redacted documents.

We want to be clear. Yes, we want the documents, but they should not be photocopied and made accessible to everyone. We will ask experts, people in the House of Commons who are familiar with this type of study, to assess whether there is a danger to national security or human life. If there is none, the documents must be made public. That is our approach.

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We worked on this issue in committee, unfortunately to no avail. We also asked questions in the House of Commons to get to the bottom of things and to find out where the government stands on this issue. It has refused all our requests for access to the relevant information. Every time we raise the issue, we are told that the two researchers no longer work at the National Microbiology Laboratory and that we cannot ask questions, since an investigation is under way. In the House, members are accountable.

Last week, we asked the Prime Minister questions about this issue. I hate to say it, but he is still the Prime Minister of all Canadians. Unfortunately, he was unable to refrain from making vicious personal attacks, which is shameful for someone in his position.

I would like to cite John Ibbitson's article, which appeared yesterday in *The Globe and Mail*. Allow me to paraphrase. He quoted the Prime Minister, who said last week that he would like to recommend that the members of the Conservative Party, in their zeal to make personal attacks, not start to push too far into intolerance toward Canadians of diverse origins. John Ibbitson wrote that this was a foolish thing to say.

Mr. Ibbitson goes on to say that we need to question this government's willingness to co-operate with China despite its misdeeds. It is irresponsible to slander the opposition for doing its job in asking why scientists at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg were co-operating with Chinese scientists. That is from *The Globe and Mail*; those are not our words.

The journalist then goes on to quote my hon. colleague, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, who was especially shocked and upset by the Prime Minister's contemptuous comments about the Conservative Party and its representatives in the House. The Prime Minister made an offensive link between these legitimate questions and racism.

My colleague said, and I quote:

...the Prime Minister conflated our legitimate concerns about national security with racism against Asian-Canadians. He spun an inflammatory narrative that implies Conservatives are stoking intolerance. By using this false narrative, he has cheapened and undermined the ongoing efforts to combat the rise of anti-Asian racism.

The hon. member knows what she is talking about, having been personally affected by the Prime Minister's disgraceful comments. He associated pertinent questions from parliamentarians about national security with racism. When he could not explain further, he decided to attack by implying that our questions were fuelling racism. This is unbecoming of a Prime Minister. I would hope that today or later the Prime Minister would have the honour and dignity to recuse himself and acknowledge that he has gone too far.

This is an important story, and we need to get to the bottom of it. What happened? What was the connection between the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg and the Communist Chinese laboratory? How is it that two important researchers at the heart of virus research were fired and lost their security clearance? How is it that two important executives at this institute are no longer working there?

Canadians deserve answers. The only way to get to the bottom of this is to release the documents, as requested in today's motion.

• (1040)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and the motion he has put before the House today.

I would simply like him to tell us more specifically what criteria he thinks should be used for the disclosure or publication of official documents concerning public health or public safety.

What criteria does he want to put forward to ensure that these documents are published, made public and accessible to the people of Canada?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for his very pertinent question.

Yes, we want access to the documents, but we do not want to jeopardize national security or the lives of people involved in this matter.

That is why my colleague, who moved the motion, mentioned earlier that Speaker Milliken ruled in 2010 to allow the committee and parliamentarians to have access to certain documents. At that time, the Conservative Party was in power, and we said that we needed to be careful, because if we went as far as was requested, we would have jeopardized the lives of Afghan citizens and of Canadian soldiers involved in that operation.

We want to get to the bottom of this situation without jeopardizing national security and Canadians' lives.

• (1045)

[*English*]

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is not the first time that we see the current Liberal government refusing to allow parliamentary oversight on very serious issues of the day and refusing to submit unredacted documents to committee. Does my colleague find this serial cover-up behaviour in any way transparent, as the Liberals insistently claim they are?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to answer the question from my colleague, who was elected a year and a half ago in a British Columbia riding. I very much appreciate her hard work. I can assure members that she is doing a great job and working very hard on behalf of her constituents.

What we have seen since 2015 is a government that is saying one thing and doing different things, especially when we talk about transparency. The Liberals' transparency is good when it is good for them. However, when we want to go deep into a real problem such as this issue, I do not know why the government is so protective of the truth and the reality, because this is not a political issue; this is an issue of national interest. There is no Conservative, no Liberal, no NDP, no Bloc, no whatever. We are all Canadians on this issue. We want to know the truth and the reality of the situation, and that has nothing to do with partisanship. We hope that today the Liberals will understand that.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague can comment on the remarks of Andy Ellis, the former CSIS assistant director of operations. He said it was “madness” for the Public Health Agency of Canada to be co-operating with the Chinese military and that it just shows “incredible naïveté”. I wonder if my hon. colleague could give his perspective on those comments.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, again, I want to say that I respect my colleague from Manitoba, who was elected a year and a half ago. He is doing a tremendously good job in the House of Commons, in his riding and, I can say, in our caucus.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister is so naive. However, we also have to remind everybody that the Prime Minister, when he was the opposition party leader, said that he had great admiration for the dictatorship of China. What a shame that is.

We also have to remind everyone that a year and a half ago, when the problem of the pandemic situation arose, the first move by the Prime Minister was to knock at the door of CanSino to be sure to have a deal with China. We all know that six months later, it crashed. Yes, the Prime Minister could like the Chinese regime, but I hope he will not put China's interests first, before Canadians' interests.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to address the motion of the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

As summer approaches, we are seeing a strong and steady decline in COVID-19 cases across Canada. Strict public health measures and ramped-up vaccination campaigns have pushed the national case count to its lowest level in weeks. In much of the country, the pandemic outlook is improving. COVID-19 infection rates have peaked in most areas of the country, followed by the slower decline in hospitalization rates.

As members know, there are exceptions. In places where infection rates are still very high, such as in Manitoba, hospitalization rates have not yet begun to decline. That is because the average length of stay for people hospitalized with COVID-19 is two weeks. For those experiencing more severe illness, it is closer to three weeks. The number of hospitalized patients accumulates over time while infection rates remain high, but, as I said, the situation is improving in most areas of the country.

With the steady decline of infection rates and strong and steady increases in vaccination rollout and uptake, we are on track for a better outdoor summer and a safer fall. That is great news for ev-

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eryone, but we have to continue this momentum. The more people who get fully vaccinated, the safer it will be to ease restrictions and individual precautions. Only then can we get back to more interactions and activities, including spending more time together indoors.

As immunity builds up across the population, keeping infection rates down is crucial. It is still important that Canadians continue to follow local public health advice, including when and where to maintain essential precautions, such as masking and spacing. Now is not the time to relax our measures. Doing so would increase the number of community-wide in-person contacts that would likely result in a resurgence of the virus.

The experiences of other countries show the need to maintain strong public health measures as vaccines roll out. Easing measures must be done in a controlled and gradual way as COVID-19 infection rates decline.

In the U.K., more than 70% of adults aged 18 or over have had at least one dose and over 45% are fully immunized. It is important to note that measures have been relaxed slowly and cautiously in that country. It is also worth remembering that the U.K. sustained the most restrictive measures until incidence rates were several times lower than they currently are in Canada.

While countries with high vaccination rates are making great strides, some of them experienced resurgences along the way. Even the U.K. is still experiencing pockets of increased disease activity fuelled by variants of concern in areas with low vaccination coverage. In Canada, gradual and cautious lifting of restrictive measures can happen safely once infection rates are low. We will need to maintain vigilance everywhere, while vaccines continue to build up immunity across the Canadian population.

Several conditions must be met before we consider easing restrictive public health measures. These are controlled transmission; sufficient testing and contact tracing capacity; a low number of cases, allowing for testing and tracing to cope with outbreaks and surges; and high vaccine coverage in at-risk populations and settings, such as congregate living for seniors.

With a plan in place, public health measures could be eased in very low-risk settings. However, if modelling-based forecasts suggest a resurgence, an increase in COVID-19 positive cases or a declining adherence to public health measures, then public health measures should be reinstated. Public health measures should also be reinstated if the spread of variants of concern becomes increasingly prevalent.

Business of Supply

So far, Health Canada has authorized four different COVID-19 vaccines: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca and Janssen. Health Canada has also authorized the use of the Pfizer vaccine in children 12 to 15 years of age. Each of these vaccines have been shown to be very effective at preventing hospitalizations and death. We are making excellent progress in distributing these vaccines to the provinces and territories, with deliveries increasing every week.

• (1050)

More than 22 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Canada since vaccination began in mid-December, providing 62% of eligible adults with at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Indigenous communities and the territories have made excellent strides—

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert on a point of order.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Madam Speaker, we have a motion before us and my hon. colleague is speaking about the progress of vaccination in Canada. She is completely off topic. I will therefore ask my colleague to speak about the motion before us.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I thank the hon. member for his intervention.

[*English*]

The hon. parliamentary secretary and all members know that there is some latitude during debate, however, the speeches must be relevant to the subject at hand. I am sure the hon. member will mention the wording in the opposition motion and ensure her speech is related to that.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, who I am sure will get to it very shortly.

• (1055)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, it is surprising that in the middle of a health pandemic, members opposite are not invested in vaccinations and the state of where we are as a country. That is very concerning.

Part of the groundwork I am laying is connected to the important work of the microbiology lab, so I absolutely will continue. However, this is important information for all Canadians.

Indigenous communities and the territories have made excellent strides in increasing vaccination coverage. To date, more than three-quarters of adults in the three territories have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and 66% have received two doses.

A first dose of COVID-19 vaccine provides us with primary protection, but for maximum protection, we need a second immunity-boosting dose.

The Government of Canada expects that by the end of the next two quarters, Canada will have received in Q2, end of June, more than 40 million cumulative doses and by Q3, end of September, more than 100 million cumulative doses. Looking ahead, we expect weekly shipments of 2.4 million Pfizer doses per week in June and

close to 2.3 million doses weekly in July. Regarding Moderna, we are actively working with our colleagues at Public Service and Procurement Canada and the manufacturers to determine the delivery schedule and shipment sizes for June.

Last month, my hon. colleague, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, announced that Canada had secured COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer for 2022 and 2023, with options—

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Again, on the point of relevance, the member seems to be referring to production orders in a completely different sense than what the motion talks about. The motion talks about the government not giving information to a committee. Now the House of Commons is debating that so we can hold the government to account.

You were very clear, Madam Speaker, that the member should be directly linking her comments to the motion before us, yet that has not happened. I would ask you to rule again on whether the member is following it.

Again, this is an important issue. I would hope the member opposite came prepared to talk about this issue and not her portfolio or other interests.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You were absolutely clear in your ruling. You said that there was some latitude. After you said that, the parliamentary secretary explained that she was laying the groundwork for what she deemed was important to the discussion.

We can keep interrupting her all day long, but all these points of order do is push out possible speakers later in the day. Therefore, we should let the parliamentary secretary finish her speech.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I greatly appreciate the attempt by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands to help me in my deliberations here.

I want to remind the hon. parliamentary secretary, once again, that the speech really does have to be relevant to the motion at hand. Although there is some leniency in speaking about other matters that seem to be related, I would respectfully ask that she consider ensuring she makes reference to the motion throughout her speech.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, and I will say it again, part of our COVID pandemic response has been directly influenced and supported by the work of the microbiology lab, so it is quite important to talk about the significance of the pandemic during this debate.

I would also point out that there were no interruptions when hon. members of the Conservative Party spoke about Afghanistan, which was not directly related to this motion either. I would ask for the same consideration and opportunity to talk about the global pandemic. I will continue to wrap up my comments on the motion, but it is important groundwork in relation to the work of our scientists.

Business of Supply

As we have stated before, we expect that COVID-19 vaccines will be available to every eligible Canadian who wants to be vaccinated by September. Let me assure everyone that the Government of Canada continues to hold regular discussions with provinces and territories, with a particular focus in the coming weeks on ensuring that capacity to administer vaccines is aligned with vaccine availability. This is just part of our commitment to provinces and territories that we stand together in the fight against COVID-19.

We are continuously working with our provincial and territorial partners to ensure they have the help they need to manage outbreaks and keep people safe, from purchasing vaccines and personal protective equipment to boosting rapid testing and contact tracing. Testing and contact tracing is an area in which the microbiology lab is very much involved.

In fact, \$8 out of every \$10 spent across our country to respond to the pandemic has come from the Government of Canada. Much of the support is being provided through the COVID-19 public health rapid surge capacity initiative. This initiative, in addition to the safe restart agreement, has provided the provinces and territories with more than \$19 billion in federal investment. These investments support health care systems, capacity testing and contact tracing, and other social services for Canadians. This allows provinces and territories to respond more effectively to outbreaks and to mitigate transmission in hot zones where there is pressure on health care systems.

I will speak now about testing and screening, work in which the microbiology lab has been critical.

Testing and screening, along with public health measures and vaccination, are key to slowing the spread of COVID-19. As of May 18, nearly 27 million rapid tests have been shipped to provinces and territories. When combined with the federal allocation, more than 41 million rapid tests have been distributed across the country. Provinces and territories determine how to use the test based on the specific needs of their respective jurisdictions, informed by guidance from a variety of sources, including the federal government. The Government of Canada is encouraging jurisdictions to use rapid tests as part of their screening practices and as an additional layer of protection to help slow the spread of the virus.

The Government of Ontario recently launched a new online COVID-19 rapid testing program, the provincial antigen screening program, so essential businesses could access free rapid testing kits. This supports the province's rapid testing initiative for small and medium-sized enterprises through the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, a system and testing that has been directly influenced by the microbiology lab. The provincial antigen screening program provides free rapid antigen tests to screen for asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 in Ontario workplaces. Alberta will also offer free rapid antigen testing to businesses and not-for-profit organizations through chambers of commerce.

Rapid testing can help detect asymptomatic COVID-19 cases and help limit the spread by isolating these individuals early.

It is important for those administering rapid tests to be adequately trained. The Government of Canada has provided provinces and territories with guidance on the use of these tests through the feder-

al testing and screening expert advisory panel; the industry advisory round table on COVID-19 testing, screening, tracing and data management; and the Public Health Agency of Canada's guidance on the use of antigen tests.

• (1100)

The Government of Canada will continue to work closely with provinces and territories to ensure they have the tools they need to respond to the pandemic, including procuring these point-of-care PCR tests and rapid tests. In addition to the public health measures already in place, this is another layer of protection to keep workers safe.

Our response to this pandemic continues to be driven by science. Our National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg is known around the world for its scientific excellence. The work done at this world-class laboratory includes surveillance for infectious diseases, emergency outbreak preparedness and response, training, and research and development. It helps keep Canadians safe each and every day.

Canada is home to some of the most skilled and brightest researchers in the world, and they have been working hard to support domestic and international efforts to fight this virus. COVID-19 is a global pandemic, and it requires a global solution. The participation of researchers around the world to combat COVID-19 is truly a new model for global collaboration. We are proud of that as one of the global leaders in infectious disease research.

The National Microbiology Laboratory has been working tirelessly with Canadian and international partners on this front. Every day we are adding to our knowledge of COVID-19, keeping pace with the rapid growth of new scientific evidence as it emerges. In order to continue to slow and eventually stop the spread of infection, we need to continue to mobilize Canada's research and scientific communities to advance research and technology development.

That is why, in March 2020, the Government of Canada announced a \$1 billion government-wide COVID-19 response fund, which includes \$275 million to enhance our capacity to test antivirals, develop vaccines and support clinical trials. It is why what I was speaking about earlier in my speech is so critical to this.

Business of Supply

Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research rapid research response program, the Government of Canada has invested a total of \$54.2 million to support 99 research teams from across Canada. These teams are focusing on developing and implementing measures to rapidly detect, manage and reduce transmission of COVID-19. This includes vaccine research and the development of strategies to combat stigma, misinformation and fear.

Canada's public health advice will continue to be based on trusted, expert science provided by our National Microbiology Laboratory scientists and our international partners.

Let me also answer some questions regarding former employees of the National Microbiology Laboratory. The two scientists in question are no longer employed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. We cannot disclose additional information for privacy and confidentiality reasons. However, I can say that the National Microbiology Laboratory will continue to play a critical role in protecting the health and safety of Canadians.

We are committed to supporting open, collaborative research while also protecting our research, our national security and our economic interests. Outside interference poses real threats to Canadian research security. This is a threat we have always taken seriously. In 2020, public safety officials met with more than 34 universities to help ensure the safety and security of their research, and CSIS has engaged more than 225 different organizations, including universities, to ensure they are aware of foreign threats.

In March, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry requested the development of specific guidelines that incorporate national security into the evaluation of any research partnerships. As we move forward in our fight against COVID-19, we continue to ensure that we welcome the international scientific community. At the same time, we will work with our security agencies to help keep Canadians safe.

To date, more than 22 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Canada. Relatively few cases of the virus have been reported among people who have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and fewer still among those who have received two doses. We must remember that vaccines take time to work, including up to 14 days after the first dose, to provide good protection, and up to seven days after the second dose to provide strong protection.

• (1105)

Based on data provided by nine provinces and territories up to May 25, people with infections occurring 14 days or more after their first dose accounted for 0.15% of people who had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Compared with unvaccinated cases in these jurisdictions, these individuals were more likely to report no symptoms and less likely to experience severe illness requiring hospitalization. This aligns well with vaccine effectiveness studies showing strong protection against severe illness.

The good news is that nationally, we expect the third wave to continue to decline as long as we maintain current measures and do not increase in-person contact rates around the community. The downward trends show that measures put in place across the country are working to suppress the third wave as vaccination continues.

Things have taken a great turn for the better, but we always need to stay the course.

• (1110)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have three very quick questions for the member. I did not hear from her whether she supports or opposes the motion in front of us. Does she support or oppose the motion?

My second question is this: Does she believe the lab in Winnipeg should continue its collaboration with scientists from China's military?

Finally, does she believe the government should continue to grant access to the lab for scientists from China's military?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, as someone who actually has security clearance and who has gone through that process, and as somebody who has attended secure meetings, I understand that if the member opposite is genuinely concerned about national security, he would not ask for documents that could be of national security interest in an unsecured situation.

I have trust in our national security and intelligence community to do the work of ensuring that the microbiology lab is secure. I question the hon. member and the Conservatives with this motion. Either they truly do not understand national security or they simply do not care.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I must admit that I had to pay very close attention to the parliamentary secretary's speech to ensure that she understood what today's motion is about, since her comments seemed to be all over the place.

I find it hard to understand this cavalier attitude towards the lack of transparency shown by the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is actually a very serious issue. It is as though this is no big deal and there is nothing there.

Could our colleague reassure us that the government does, in fact, take this very seriously? What happened at the lab in Winnipeg is very worrisome. I am very concerned about the government's apparent indifference to this issue, and I worry about what this means for the future.

I look forward to hearing the parliamentary secretary's response.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, let me start by apologizing to the member for his having to pay attention to my speech for an extended period of time. However, given the fact that we are in a global pandemic, I think discussing the pandemic and rates of vaccination are things that Canadians deeply care about.

In terms of the member's question, as has been said many times, the microbiology lab is a secure facility. Anyone working there or visiting must obtain the proper security clearances. The two employees in question are no longer employees with the Public Health Agency of Canada. We take national security and the protection of Canadians extremely seriously, and the suggestion otherwise is simply not accurate.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened while the member used her time to talk about the pandemic, viruses and vaccinations, in particular, but I did not hear her address the question of the special committee carrying out its duty and due diligence, and looking at the goings-on at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg.

Does the member believe that this committee has the obligation and the power to require these papers to carry out its duty under the Constitution and under the rulings of previous speakers of the House?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, I believe committees have the ability to request and acquire these documents. That is precisely what was provided to the committee; however, the documents were redacted for privacy and national security reasons.

If the member opposite, the NDP and the Bloc want to prop up the Conservatives by having an unsecured meeting to address confidential documents, again, I ask whether the hon. member understands the difference between national security, secure documents and secure meetings and meetings that are in camera in the House of Commons.

It is an important distinction that members need to take very seriously when thinking about this motion.

• (1115)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I certainly listened to the member's speech and I think that she was very much on point when trying to lay the groundwork for what this microbiology lab actually does. It provides context for the debate we are having today. A lot of Canadians are probably unaware that this lab even exists, let alone of the incredible work it has done throughout the pandemic.

Could the parliamentary secretary please provide some more information with respect to what the lab does, how it operates, what it is responsible for and perhaps some of its accomplishments?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, the member for Kingston and the Islands is absolutely correct. Many Canadians probably do not know about the existence of this lab. The fact remains that the lab has been operating and studying infectious diseases for a long time. When the pandemic broke out, it had some of the top scientists and experts who had already been working on infectious diseases in this country.

Points of Order

I spoke often about the role of testing. The microbiology lab has been crucial in the development and understanding of testing to ensure that we help stop the spread and save lives.

When it comes to our scientists and our research, this lab has allowed Canada to be at the forefront of fighting this incredibly dangerous disease. I thank the scientists and researchers for their work.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am not sure what that speech was. For a second I thought our parliamentary system had turned into the CCTV broadcast out of mainland China, where the member was going through a job application as a spokesperson.

My question for the member is simple. Is it her position that the Government of Canada is no more obliged to provide documents to Parliament than the Chinese government is to provide documents to the people in China? Is there no right of accountability in Canada during a pandemic?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In the preamble to the last question, the member seemed to suggest that the parliamentary secretary was working for the Chinese government or applying for a job for the Chinese government—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would say that is a point of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for rising on that. I was actually going to point out how incredibly offended I am that the member opposite questioned my allegiance to this country. I would ask that the member apologize.

As I stated, I have served on the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. The suggestion that my allegiance to Canada is in any way in question is incredibly offensive, and again it shows me the complete lack of knowledge that the Conservatives have when it comes to the serious threat of China to this country.

The member's offensive comments are a disgrace to this country and to parliamentarians. I strongly recommend that he apologize, because he has absolutely no idea what he speaks of and it is deeply offensive that he would question my allegiance to my country in this fashion. He may disagree with the politics, but he is outrageous and offensive. I deeply urge him to apologize for those baseless comments.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ALLEGED USE OF UNPARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our procedural rules specifically state that one cannot impute motive upon another member of this House.

I encourage you to review your previous ruling and ask the member to apologize for the extremely offensive comment he made toward one of our colleagues in this House.

Business of Supply

● (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the point of order and the comments made in response to the question put to the parliamentary secretary.

I will review the previous comments made and will come back to the House with my feedback and recommendation. I also remind all members to ensure that they are respectful toward each member of the House and ensure there is no language being used that is derogatory toward members.

[Translation]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Montarville.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE TRANSFER OF EBOLA AND HENIPAH VIRUSES TO THE WUHAN INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, today's debate is a very important one. Some might argue that this is simply a partisan attempt to embarrass the government. However, aside from the very important national security issues, what is at issue today is the pre-eminence of Parliament, the fact that it takes precedence over any laws a government might invoke to avoid being held accountable to parliamentarians. I will come back to this point later.

My colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot already said that the Bloc Québécois would vote in favour of this motion, moved by my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills. We will vote for this motion because it is nearly identical to a motion that was unanimously passed by the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. I said "unanimously", because the Liberal members supported it. This motion was adopted in response to the Public Health Agency of Canada's intransigent, stubborn and bullheaded refusal to provide the documents parliamentarians were requesting. Even our Liberal colleagues were frustrated by the tight-lipped, stubborn attitude of PHAC representatives, so much so that they voted in favour of this motion, which was the subject of a recent report from the special committee.

I will touch briefly on this point, but I wonder why the Conservatives are using an opposition day to present a motion that is virtually identical to a motion that the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations reported on to the House and that could have been called for debate before being adopted.

Why are the Conservatives moving this motion this morning? The Liberal Party's claim that the Conservatives are simply trying to embarrass the government may have some truth to it. However, beyond this strictly partisan aspect, which, I think, deserves to be mentioned, there is the fundamental issue I raised earlier: Parliament's pre-eminence, the fact that it takes precedence over any laws the government might invoke to avoid complying with a request from a parliamentary committee.

Let us start at the beginning. We created the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations to look into the deterioration of rela-

tions between Canada and the People's Republic of China and to consider ways of re-establishing contact between the two countries. In the past, our relations have always been positive, cordial and characterized by a spirit of collaboration.

Canada was one of the first countries to recognize the People's Republic of China when it was created and to establish trade and diplomatic relations with the country. Consider the writings of Quebec physician Norman Bethune, who took part in the legendary Long March of the Communist Party of China. Consider as well the aid provided by Canada, in the form of wheat and other grain, when the Chinese were literally starving to death. I think that this is a solid foundation for key, cordial relations between the two countries, but it is obvious that these relations have deteriorated dramatically in recent months.

● (1125)

We therefore set up this committee to look into the deterioration of relations, the possible causes and potential solutions.

Given that this is a minority government and that an election can be called at any time, we chose to partition our study into sections to safeguard our work.

Accordingly, we produce periodic progress reports on what we have done so far. For example, we issued a report on the situation in Hong Kong, which I believe deserves our careful attention. At that point in our work we were looking into the security issue.

In this part of the study pertaining to security, we were looking at everything from the Chinese government's foreign influence operations in Canada to interference or, at the very least, possible espionage activities by Chinese companies that report to the Government of the People's Republic of China. Obviously, the Canada-China relationship concerning microbiology research was also discussed.

I must say that, for our part, this portion of our investigation on security started out rather candidly. Of course, we wanted to look into the CanSino case, for example, the collaboration between Canadian and Chinese institutions to develop a vaccine. Curiously, the plug was pulled on this collaboration, and now China is using vaccine diplomacy to increase its influence in the world by generously offering its vaccine to developing countries that desperately need it, but also making sure to create a state-client relationship between the People's Republic of China and these countries.

When the Public Health Agency of Canada appeared on March 22, we met with its president, Iain Stewart, as well as with Guillaume Poliquin, who heads the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. We were surprised when Mr. Stewart refused to answer entirely legitimate questions. The fact remains that, on March 31, 2019, two researchers at the Winnipeg laboratory, Dr. Xiangguo Qiu and Dr. Keding Cheng, took a commercial Air Canada flight carrying two living viruses, Ebola and Henipah, in their luggage to deliver them to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, now infamous due to the rumours and allegations that continue to circulate to the effect that the coronavirus may have escaped from the facility.

Obviously, we were concerned by the fact that they were able to carry two extremely dangerous viruses to a Chinese laboratory on a commercial flight. In the same March 22 committee meeting, Mr. Stewart explained that everything was done according to standards. I do not know what standards apply when carrying deadly viruses on a regular commercial flight. In any event, we were assured that this was the case, and we have no reason to believe that this approach was based on a scientific, evidence-based assessment.

I would like to point out that Dr. Qiu received the Governor General's award in 2018 for having helped develop a treatment for Ebola at the Winnipeg laboratory. This award is normally given to Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada. This shows how highly Dr. Qiu's work was regarded.

• (1130)

On July 5, 2019, however, Dr. Qiu, Dr. Cheng and their students were removed from the Winnipeg laboratory. That is more than a little curious.

We also learned that, on January 20, 2021, the couple was officially fired, and an explanation has never been given for their removal or their dismissal. Candidly, I asked Mr. Stewart why, if everything was done according to standards in the transfer of the viruses on a commercial Air Canada flight to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, the couple had been removed from the Winnipeg laboratory and fired without explanation. Mr. Stewart told us that he could not answer that question.

We asked him why he could not answer and told him that he was required to. It became apparent that Mr. Stewart had certain privacy concerns. Of course, these concerns may be legitimate. They may have to do with national security or an ongoing criminal investigation. All of these concerns may be entirely legitimate.

We gave Mr. Stewart the opportunity to send the committee information confidentially, so that it could better understand what was going on without any potentially harmful information in terms of the protection of personal information, national security or a criminal investigation reaching the public.

To our surprise, we received a letter from Mr. Stewart stating simply that he could not submit any documents because of the Privacy Act. Despite the fact that we offered him the opportunity to provide the information confidentially, he told us that he could not comply or did not want to comply with this request from the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

Business of Supply

We insisted and, a few days later, on April 20, we received a first batch of heavily redacted documents. Obviously, we were unhappy that the agency continues to refuse to provide the documents. We met with the House's Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel, who told us that the committee was within its rights. We therefore recalled Mr. Stewart, who appeared with Mr. Poliquin on May 10.

We were once again told that it was impossible to provide the committee with the information requested, because of the provisions of the Privacy Act, as if the parliamentary committee were just another litigant requesting information from the agency. This parliamentary committee is not just another litigant requesting information in the House.

• (1135)

I want to share an opinion that was shared with us by the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons. It states, and I quote:

...the committee's powers to send for papers and records comes from section 18 of the Constitution. It comes from parliamentary privilege and gives the power to send for persons and papers. It is at a higher level than ordinary statutes, and Speaker Milliken in his ruling and the Supreme Court of Canada have recognized the primacy of Constitutional provisions, and in particular parliamentary privilege....

It's the same authority that is pointed to, and that authority from Speaker Milliken makes it very clear, as does the authority in other Parliaments, that the constitutional authority of committees and of the House supersedes and is not limited by ordinary statutes like the Privacy Act or the Access to Information Act....Speaker Milliken was explicit on the point that the statutes do not allow the government to unilaterally determine that something would be confidential.

At the May 10 meeting, our colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills also referred to provisions of the Privacy Act that clearly state that the act does not apply to parliamentary committees, it applies only to individuals subject to the law who request information. After repeated refusals by authorities at the Public Health Agency of Canada, the committee adopted a motion that is very similar to the one moved today by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

At first, our questions for PHAC were straightforward, but PHAC's stubborn, systematic refusal to provide the information requested by the special committee raised suspicions. Moreover, we have since learned of some disturbing information.

Business of Supply

Last May, *The Globe and Mail* reported that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service had recommended that two researchers, Dr. Qiu and her husband, Dr. Cheng, have their access to the Winnipeg laboratory revoked for national security reasons. Why? CSIS also had concerns, particularly about the transfer of intellectual property, with regard to information that the couple and their students had sent to China.

That same month, *The Globe and Mail* reported that at least seven scientists at the Winnipeg laboratory were collaborating with the Chinese army, publishing several articles jointly. One researcher, Professor Feihu Yan, had been able to work at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg despite working directly for the People's Liberation Army of China.

From what we have been able to glean, Canadian authorities have been rather nonchalant about national security. When Parliament tried to get to the bottom of this apparent lack of rigour, the government invoked completely specious reasons in a bid to escape its obligation to answer to Parliament.

It was disturbing enough that the Public Health Agency of Canada was refusing to answer questions from members of Parliament. It was even more disturbing to hear the Prime Minister and some of his ministers doing exactly the same thing during oral question period, when they responded to members' questions by saying that the two people had been fired and that they could unfortunately not provide any more information. By doing this, the Prime Minister and the ministers in question may also have been breaching the privileges of the House.

Getting back to what I was saying at the beginning of my speech, the issue here, beyond the partisan bickering, is Parliament's supremacy over ordinary Canadian laws by virtue of the parliamentary privilege enshrined in the Canadian Constitution, which the government is using as an excuse to refuse to provide parliamentarians with the information they are requesting. We thought only PHAC was doing this, but we now have proof that it is the entire government. Under the circumstances, we have no choice but to support our colleague's motion.

● (1140)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. I would like to ask him a question.

Does he think that, when the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations adopted the two motions and in the House's debate on this motion, everyone took care to make decisions that protected national security and the integrity of an ongoing criminal investigation?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, we clearly showed that members of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations wanted to act responsibly.

When we realized that there were legitimate national security, privacy and criminal investigation concerns, we gave the Public Health Agency of Canada the opportunity to provide the information confidentially. Even so, the agency refused.

We had no choice but to resort to extreme measures and put the matter before the House. That is what we are doing today in order to shed light on the matter and make the information available to parliamentarians.

To be clear, we are not going to get our hands on the information and then release it all, jeopardizing privacy, national security and police investigations. It will go to the law clerk, and we will assess whether some of the information can be made public. I can assure the House that we will not act irresponsibly.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I also thank him for his shout-out to Dr. Bethune. It is not every day that he gets a mention in the Parliament of Canada.

The government lacks transparency and refuses to disclose certain documents because it has something to hide. I would like to hear a little bit more from my colleague about that.

What does he think the government is trying to hide from us?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I usually do not respond to questions that are purely hypothetical. Sadly, this one is just that, in every respect.

I have no idea what the government is trying to hide, but it seems to have been rather nonchalant about national security, and when we try to get to the bottom of what might have happened, it refuses to give us information by invoking utterly specious arguments that just do not hold water legally.

This government boasted about standing up for the rights of parliamentarians when Stephen Harper's government refused to provide information pertaining to Afghan detainees. At the time, Speaker Milliken made an unequivocal ruling. We are asking the government to comply with that ruling. That is all.

● (1145)

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, the power of Parliament to send for papers is absolute. That is a very well-established privilege and power that we have in this place.

While the Liberals may rightly have concerns about the sensitive nature of the documents, there are no arguments that can be made against Parliament's right to send for these papers and to organize a way in which it views them. That cannot be argued against.

However, my question to my hon. colleague concerns scientific collaboration. Does he have any ideas on how a country like Canada, while protecting very sensitive technology and information, could find secure ways to collaborate internationally while also looking after our national security interests? Does he have any thoughts on that particular subject?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining.

Rather than trying to protect itself and covering up the truth, the government should be using these events as an opportunity to strengthen the safeguards that must be in place any time countries collaborate on such sensitive issues as microbiology and virology research.

We know very well that the components of biological warfare are strictly forbidden on the international scene, but we also know that there are a number of delinquent rogue states. We therefore need to tighten security measures to ensure that the results of research done in Canada do not fall into the wrong hands.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very eloquent speech. He is as relevant as ever, and I just hope to speak as well as him in the House of Commons one day, when I become a “grown-up”.

In his speech earlier, my colleague said that Liberal members were quite co-operative in committee on the subject of requesting information from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

However, the speeches we have heard from the Liberal members so far this morning suggest a certain closed-mindedness. Right before my colleague's speech, a Liberal member spoke for 10 minutes about something else entirely, namely the progress of vaccination in Canada. She did not appear to have any interest in debating the motion before the House today. There seems to be a double standard.

Can my colleague think of an explanation for this?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his complimentary comments.

His question is very interesting. It is true that, at first, the Liberals on the committee appeared to be protecting the Public Health Agency of Canada. I denounced their behaviour, asking what the government members were trying to hide from members of Parliament. This provoked anger on the part of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Afterwards, faced with the obstinacy and stubbornness of the people from the agency, even the Liberal members had no choice but to acknowledge that the agency had violated parliamentary privilege. They therefore joined us in adopting this motion, which is almost identical to the one presented here today.

Of course, I would expect the Liberals to be consistent and to vote in favour of today's motion, as they did in committee. However, it appears that the Prime Minister and some of his ministers have adopted a different position, which may cause our colleagues to adopt a different position as well. If that is the case, I will be very disappointed.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure working with this member at the foreign affairs committee and the Canada-China committee. We do not always agree, but, more and more, we find ourselves in alignment.

There is an important principle at stake here, which is the supremacy of Parliament in a parliamentary democracy and, therefore, the right of Parliament to send for the documents that it needs

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in order to scrutinize the actions of the executive. In a case like this, where it seems like something very serious has gone wrong, it is important for Parliament to be able to exercise that power in a responsible way.

The member rightly pointed out that there has been some flip-flopping among the Liberals at committee. They initially voted against the motion, but, they said, only because it did not give enough time. Then the second motion that sent for documents was actually a motion proposed by a Liberal member and supported by Liberal MPs. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the justice department gets it wrong in its legal advice all the time. Then we have the Minister of Foreign Affairs repudiating the principle of document disclosure.

Can the member comment on how the Liberals have been back and forth on this issue of the right of Parliament, and how we need to stand together for this principle of parliamentary supremacy in our democracy?

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, this is a test of the Liberals' principles today. I remember that they made of point of demanding that Stephen Harper's government comply with parliamentary privilege in the Afghan detainee matter. We will see if the principles the Liberals claimed to espouse at the time still stand when they are in power.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to join in this debate today. I think it is an extremely important debate, having to do, principally, with the powers of the members of Parliament to do their duty to hold the government to account and to be, as has been determined, the ultimate arbiter of democracy in this country, once having been elected. I say this after listening to some very fulsome speeches, particularly by senior, experienced members of Parliament like the member for Wellington—Halton Hills and the member for Montarville discussing these important matters.

I share with the member for Montarville a question, I suppose, as to why we are doing this as an opposition day motion, as there was not an order of reference to the House from the parliamentary committee, the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. I think it could have been dealt with that way. Perhaps it has something to do with why the government seems to have politicized this, as opposed to treating it as a serious motion with respect to the duties of parliamentarians, which is how I wish to treat it. I think this is something that should be treated that way by the House.

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After all, we are dealing with the result of a unanimous decision of the Canada-China committee, after much deliberation, consideration and various amendments to the motion to ensure that it would be unanimous. We were unanimously of the view that the committee needed and was entitled to the documents in their unredacted form, so that we could carry out the committee's duty of due diligence with respect to whether the government, through PHAC, was withholding documents that we needed in order to do our job.

We have to put it into the context of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. The committee was formed for a very good reason, given the circumstances we were facing in the fall of 2019 with the situation with China. A number of things had come up that were of great concern, particularly the detention of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, as well as relationships of concern and matters that had been raised. For example, there were concerns about the co-operation between the People's Liberation Army and the Canadian Armed Forces for a training exercise, which was subsequently cancelled due to security concerns being raised by some of our allies.

We heard testimony at the Canada-China committee regarding foreign influence within Canada and intimidation of Canadians, Chinese students and other Chinese nationals in Canada, which raised concerns. We had concerns about whether this had been dealt with properly by government agencies, police forces and others. We had concerns regarding the influence of China, through its agencies and other efforts, on research and intellectual property capture at our universities and other institutions.

This matter came up with respect to the Public Health Agency of Canada. The committee was concerned about the level of collaboration with Chinese researchers, in particular with the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China, and then the indications of co-operation with researchers who were associated with the People's Liberation Army, as well, and its other lab in China, which is engaged in research with a military point of view.

These concerns were serious. They were legitimate. They were relevant to the relationship between Canada and China, what measures Canada was taking to protect itself and whether it was doing a proper job doing so. These are matters of great concern, and the committee, under its obligation to carry out this task assigned to it by Parliament, was doing this work. As it happened, we all know what the Public Health Agency of Canada decided when we asked for documentation behind the notorious incident, in the sense of being well known and concerning, of the two individuals, researchers, being escorted out of the laboratory in Winnipeg and the subsequent termination of their services by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

• (1155)

This was something we were looking into in good faith to attempt to discover the factual basis and to see whether the concerns that were raised were dealt with appropriately and whether there were other concerns Canada might have with respect to this matter that were not being properly looked after. In fact, as was pointed out by the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, our job, in part, is to ensure that if there is something wrong, and there clearly was something wrong, this kind of activity would not occur again.

This is a normal carrying out of the function of Parliament that is supported by law, by our Constitution and by our rules of procedure. As has been pointed out, it is very well established, but it was not very well established for a long time. It was established by Parliament in the classic and seminal ruling of Speaker Peter Milliken in April 2010, on a case involving the necessity of a parliamentary committee, another special committee, seeking documentation in support of an inquiry into Canada's activities in Afghanistan in relation to its obligations toward prisoners of war under the Geneva Convention.

This was of a much higher level of concern and evaluation, and the refusal of the government of the day to make those documents available to the special committee on Afghanistan ultimately resulted in orders of the House and subsequent activities, which I will not go into in detail. However, the importance of the ruling of Speaker Milliken was that, under the Constitution, particularly section 18 of the Constitution, under the Parliament of Canada Act and under the rules and procedures of our House, this was something that very clearly needed to be delineated and was delineated by the Speaker.

This information, of course, was available to our committee and the rulings of our committee. When we made the inquiries that have been outlined by the member for Montarville and the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, we did not receive the documents, and the reasons we were given had to do with statutes such as the Privacy Act and some reference to the context of national security. Well, that does not necessarily give rise to concerns about national security, but we were deprived of these documents.

In the ordinary course of the law, the decisions that were made by the Public Health Agency in refusing to make these documents available were, in fact, already determined by parliamentary procedure and by our own procedural rules: that the Privacy Act does not, in fact, relate to a reason for members of Parliament not having access to these documents.

In its report "Access to Information Requests and Parliamentary Privilege", the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs reported, back in 1991, as early as then, that "[s]ince parliamentary privileges form part of the Constitution, laws must be interpreted and applied in a manner consistent with them, and where there is a conflict between privileges and statutory provisions, the statutory provisions are 'of no force and effect'". Therefore, assertions by the Public Health Agency of Canada, and by Mr. Stewart on its behalf, that it could not make documents available to members of Parliament on a parliamentary committee have already, in fact, been overruled, ruled to be of no force or effect.

The specific ruling set out in our Constitution Act, 1982, in section 52, says, "The Constitution of Canada is the supreme law of Canada, and any law that is inconsistent with the provisions of the Constitution is, to the extent of that inconsistency, of no force or effect". What was being presented to our committee by the Public Health Agency of Canada, on behalf of the Government of Canada, was that it was bound by the Privacy Act not to make available documents to us, as members of Parliament, yet our own Constitution clearly says that such laws are of no force or effect.

• (1200)

That is what we were faced with as a committee, which is why it is not a surprise that the members of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, including, as has been pointed out by me, experienced members such as the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, the member for Montarville and of course the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was on the committee as well, another senior member of Parliament, and the other members of Parliament unanimously supported a motion to not accept the rationale and reasons given by the Public Health Agency of Canada to refuse to make available documents in a non-redacted form.

We do not often see such definitive statements about legal matters, but it is pretty clear that the ruling of Speaker Milliken, a very seminal ruling that probably stands ahead of all others in the annals of parliamentary democracies under the Westminster model, is important. In the quotations provided to us in the rulings given by Speaker Milliken and other authorities, there are no limits on the powers of committees to require the production of papers by private bodies or individuals, provided the papers are relevant to the work of the committee as defined by reference. When select committees ordered papers to be produced by national industry, private solicitors all provided and produced papers related to a client. Statutory regulators have been ordered to produce papers whose release was otherwise subject to a statutory restriction.

It is clear that Parliament is not bound by this legislation and, as has been ruled, there are no limits on the powers of Parliament to get access to documents. Precautions need to be taken, and I think our committee, in making its motion, and the motion before us today, provide for some provision to ensure that documents will not be made public unless the committee, having had the opportunity to review the documents, is satisfied that they can be made public.

It is clear the motion before the House today indicates that the committee, although it may have the power to make documents public, does not have to do so in order to make recommendations or findings. That would sufficiently protect any national security issue of revealing details of an ongoing investigation. In lieu of making any information public, the committee may still rely on it for the purpose of making findings and recommendations in any subsequent report to the House. I think that is there for a purpose. It is there to ensure the committee can carry out its due diligence under its duty to do so and also hold government to account, and that if this measure needs to be brought to the attention of the House, it can do so without making any information public that should not be made public.

I think we have made it very clear that, under the committee's jurisdiction and under the powers that are granted to it by the constitution, our rulings of Speaker Milliken and the privileges of Parliament, this is within our purview as members of Parliament to carry out this function.

There are some who may not agree with that. I think we have seen arguments made in the past about that, but it is up to the House itself or members of the House to determine the appropriate way to safeguard the national interests in these questions. We have a situation where the Special Committee on Canada-China Rela-

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tions has the means to do that through the experience of senior members of this House, as well as the advice of the parliamentary law clerk, who is Parliament's lawyer.

• (1205)

The Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel is giving legal advice to members of Parliament. Members of Parliament in this circumstance, represented by four parties in the House that have party status, are all present and have made a unanimous motion calling for these papers to be available to them in fulfilment of their parliamentary duty. It seems to me this is a matter of constitutional and parliamentary concern, as well as an important matter in dealing with Canada's relationship with China. The committee ought to be able to carry out its work and do so in a proper manner.

I regret that certain members of the Liberal Party who have spoken, in particular the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, have sought to turn it into a partisan issue. That is regrettable. We have to recognize there are serious moments in this House when we have to look at the privileges of members of Parliament, take them seriously and put aside partisan differences in the pursuit of ensuring that we have a Parliament that can operate under the rules based on precedents and recognize that in our parliamentary system, Parliament is supreme. It is Parliament that has the ultimate power and control over whether a government is in office or not. This is not a motion of confidence obviously, but it is a question of whether the House ought to support the motion of a committee asking for documents to be made available to it in the ordinary course of conducting its business.

It is clearly a matter properly before the committee. It is one that is of great importance and important enough for a unanimous decision of the committee to pursue this question by having access to the proper documentation that is necessary for it to conduct its study.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the arguments my hon. colleague has made.

The special committee was responsible for the two motions that it adopted ordering the government to produce these documents. Both orders ensured that no information injurious to national security would be made public and no details concerning an ongoing criminal investigation would be made public. So too does the motion in front of the House today in clause (d).

The difference between the motion in front of us today and the opposition supply day motion introduced by Mr. Dosanjh in December of 2009 and adopted by the House is that the 2009 motion made no provision to prevent the release of information that would be injurious to national security. I will quote from the 2009 motion for the benefit of the House and the member. It states, "accordingly the House hereby orders that these documents be produced in their original and uncensored form forthwith." In other words, the documents in the 2009 motion would be made public immediately and without redaction, and that obviously raised concerns of the government of the day about national security and the protection of Canadian troops in the field.

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I am wondering if my hon. colleague from St. John's East could comment on that.

• (1210)

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Wellington—Halton Hills, who is also my colleague on the Canada-China committee, does make a distinction.

At that time, there was a clear opportunity, because of the wording of that motion, for the historic ruling of Speaker Milliken to be made after considerable debate and deliberation. That motion was in December, as the member noted, and the decision of Speaker Milliken was made on April 27 of the next year after a number of manoeuvres, motions and actions, as well as considerable debate on the issue, which resulted in a ruling that did in fact say that the House had full power to have these documents made available. He offered an opportunity for the parties to consider the way in which those documents—

The Deputy Speaker: We will have to move on to the next question.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has the floor.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member for St. John's East referenced that he hoped there would not be too much partisan discussion in today's debate, I am sure he was referring to when the member for New Brunswick Southwest questioned the allegiance my colleague, the parliamentary secretary from Pickering, has to her country when he suggested that perhaps she was applying for a job with the Chinese government. I am sure that is the partisan political talk he was referencing when he said he was hoping that would not occur today.

The documents requested by the committee were provided to the committee by the health department, and those were redacted by the health department government officials, not the minister's office. For people who do not know, there is a separation between the department, where the staff who are there forever, versus the ministerial staff. I am curious why the information that was provided was not seen to be enough by the committee that required to go a step further.

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I did not actually hear the intervention to which he objects. If his reporting is correct, I would certainly agree with him that is probably unparliamentary and certainly uncalled for in this House and in this debate.

As to the question of whether it is the minister's office or bureaucrats we are talking about, I do not think it matters terribly. It was determined by the committee that the advice given to the Public Health Agency was not in keeping with the rules and parliamentary procedure and that the committee was entitled and in fact it was within its power to request them and it needed them for its work.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for stating the importance of making the documents available to the special committee. As he himself said, it must be done with the necessary caution and disclosure. However, I am shocked that we had to submit a motion in the House to force the agency to make the documents available when they are so important to the committee's work.

I do not need to know the justification for this refusal to disclose information so important that a motion had to be tabled and debated in the House, because I understand, but I would like an explanation.

Can my colleague answer me?

• (1215)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, I suspect the reason it has come to this is because the government itself was well aware of this debate going on in our committee, and instead of the government giving instructions to the Public Health Agency to co-operate on the basis of precedence, the government decided to stand by and let the matter fall the way it does. Why it has to come to an opposition day motion is a question perhaps the Conservatives can better answer. There are various other ways of doing it; I think they just decided this was most expedient.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from St. John's East.

I find today's debate very interesting. I would like to hear more from my colleague about transparency and openness and about the possibility of getting access to the documents. The Liberals have often spoken about an open and transparent government, yet we are obliged to force them to hand over documents they wish to keep secret.

Can my colleague tell me how it affects our ability to act as members of Parliament if the government does not provide us with all the information?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, for starters, it is very unfortunate. We are talking about a constitutional proposition here. In fact, I am a little surprised by the resistance we are seeing today, especially given that the members of the committee were unanimous in their support for this motion and action, led by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

It is a little surprising, and I do not know why they are resisting the way they are. It should be a matter of course. Knowing that the protections were there, the concern of the committee was to ensure there would be no reason to be concerned about national security before releasing any documents.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that this is not the first time we have seen the Liberal government refuse to allow parliamentary oversight on very serious issues of the day. It has refused repeatedly to submit unredacted documents at many committees. I have been on the health and finance committees.

Does my colleague think this constitutes transparency by any stretch of the imagination?

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Speaker, there does seem to be a bit of a habit forming circumstance with the government, not wishing to share information and documents that are within the purview of members of Parliament.

The government talks the talk on a lot of things, but it does not walk the walk. This is another example of that by the Liberal government.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Much is said these days about conspiracy theories. A conspiracy theory is the idea that some covert organization or group of individuals is controlling and directing public events with some nefarious purpose in mind. A conspiracy theory supposes that events are controlled, coordinated and directed, and to a greater extent than appear on the surface. Conspiracy theories presume that someone, somewhere is ultimately coordinating all that takes place.

In the case of events that have unfolded at the Winnipeg Microbiology Lab and the Wuhan Institute of Virology, there was clearly no conspiracy at play. In fact, what we see is the polar opposite of a conspiracy. What we see from the government is an extreme lack of coordination, awareness and basic competence. It is not that the government is secretly trying to control our lives, but rather it is unable to control anything, including even to exercise enough control over its own operations to secure the safe functioning of vital public institutions.

Conspiracy theories always vastly overestimate the competence of government, and in this case, it is clear that the stench of incompetence, not conspiracy, should be what is driving our concerns.

When it comes to what happened in Winnipeg and in Wuhan, there are many things that we still do not know, and that is why the opposition is seeking documents, through our motion today, which will further elucidate the situation. There are many things that we do not know, but here is what we know so far.

We know that two scientists at the Winnipeg Microbiology Lab sent deadly Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China in March 2019. The Wuhan Institute of Virology has connections with the Chinese military and engages in so-called “gain-of-function experiments”.

Gain-of-function experiments are experiments whereby efforts are made to make a virus more deadly or more contagious for research purposes. Therefore, we know that deadly viruses were sent from Canada to a lab in China, and that this lab has a mandate to create new and more dangerous viruses and to collaborate with the Chinese military.

We also know that American officials had already raised serious concerns about security at the Wuhan Institute of Virology before these Canadian viruses were sent. U.S. embassy officials sent cables noting “a serious shortage of appropriately trained technicians and investigators needed to safely operate this high-containment laboratory.” These cables were sent a full year before Canada proceeded with its own deadly virus transfer to Wuhan.

We know, according to sources who spoke to The Globe and Mail, that the Public Health Agency revoked the security clearance for two scientists at the recommendation of CSIS. CSIS was focused on the people who Dr. Qiu was talking to in China and intellectual property that may have been given to Chinese authorities.

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We know that two scientists involved in this transfer of deadly viruses were expelled a few months after that transfer, along with various Chinese students, for so-called “policy breaches”. They no longer work at the lab, although we still have no idea why.

We know as well about explicit connections between the Winnipeg lab and Chinese military researchers. For example, Feihu Yan, not one of the two scientists involved in the Ebola and Henipah transfer, came from the People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Medical Sciences.

Military Medical Sciences should have triggered someone. It should have triggered an awareness that maybe something was going on. However, the person involved in the PLA Military Medical Sciences lab worked at the Winnipeg lab and even co-authored a number of papers, in which he directly identifies his simultaneous affiliation with the PLA academy and with the Winnipeg lab. In other words, this Chinese military scientist was hiding in plain sight. It seems that the government did not know or did not care that we had co-operation between a supposedly high-security Canadian lab and the Chinese military.

To summarize, we know that there was co-operation between Canada's only level-4 laboratory, a lab that is supposed to be so secret that most Canadian researchers cannot access it, and the Chinese military. We know that deadly viruses were transferred from Canada's only level-4 lab to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in spite of serious concerns about security protocols in Wuhan already raised by the Americans. We know that other people with Chinese military affiliations were working at the Winnipeg lab. We also know that the people responsible for the transfer of deadly viruses as well as others were subsequently expelled from the lab following the recommendation of CSIS.

● (1220)

We know, in general, that the Government of China runs vast operations that try to influence the direction of discussion at universities and gathers intellectual property that will advance its national interests. The leverage that is exerted on institutions of research through various associations and through threats to withdraw funding for students are well known and well established. Indeed, it is core to how the Government of China operates. It tries to use research partnerships with foreign countries to learn from and absorb technologies for both civilian and military applications, including for the horrific human rights abuses that are taking place in China as we speak.

We also know that the COVID-19 outbreak began in Wuhan. On the face of it, it would seem like a very odd coincidence for a pandemic involving a novel coronavirus to emerge from the same area where gain-of-function experiments are being done on coronaviruses in a lab with known security deficiencies, yet to have had nothing to do with the lab in question.

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The Chinese government's own more than usually aggressive secrecy around information about the origins of this virus clearly points to a cover-up. By now, many independent experts, including Dr. Fauci, have recognized the lab-leak theory is credible and requires further investigation.

The Liberals were calling the lab-leak theory a conspiracy theory until at least a couple weeks ago. Now the government has reversed its position and backed President Biden's efforts to get to the bottom of what happened. That reversal is a good step. However, if we are to get to the bottom of what has been happening in Chinese government-controlled and military-affiliated labs, then we also need to get to the bottom of the relationship that existed between military research in China and our own Winnipeg lab.

To the point about conspiracies, the lab-leak theory is not a conspiracy theory because it does not allege conspiracy. It does not suppose a conspiracy, rather it supposes incompetence. Just as there seems to have been severe bungling of security at the Winnipeg lab in failing to protect our research from espionage and pursuing inadvisable co-operation with the Chinese military, there may have been severe bungling at the Wuhan lab, leading to the leaking out of a novel virus that has now killed over three and a half million people.

Nobody in the House is suggesting that COVID-19 was manufactured in a Winnipeg lab or that coronaviruses were, at any point, transferred from Canada to China. However, we are questioning the level of co-operation in general that seems to have been taking place between Winnipeg and the various Chinese military-affiliated labs, including the one in Wuhan. We are asking these questions because everything we know so far points to severe naiveté and even wilful blindness on the part of the government when it comes to protecting biosecurity in Canada.

There is no conspiracy. The truth may be even more alarming, that the politicians who were supposed to be responsible for keeping us healthy and safe acted with supreme incompetence and showed no understanding of the risks associated with opening the door to Chinese military scientists and military institutions.

There are things that we know and there are things that we do not know, but now what has been done in the darkness must be brought to the light. Canadians must know about the extent to which Canadian research has contributed to dangerous experiments being conducted by the Chinese military. Canadians must know so they can hold their government accountable and insist on putting in place clear protocols that protect our security and our national interests, and that reduce the risk of catastrophic global pandemics in the future.

In March, the Canada-China committee heard testimony from Iain Stewart, president of the Public Health Agency of Canada, about this matter. The only useful testimony that we were able to glean from his appearance was that Canadian labs did not appear to conduct due diligence before they transferred deadly viruses to verify how the viruses were going to be used. Otherwise, he completely refused to answer questions.

Therefore, the committee passed two separate motions ordering PHAC to hand over documents. The committee did not insist on making these documents public. Recognizing the potential national

security issues involved, the committee ordered the production of documents for in-camera review, but even then the agency refused to comply.

I am not surprised if these documents contain embarrassing information for the government, including information about serious security lapses. The fact is that in law, the government must hand over these documents. Parliamentary committees have an unfettered right to send for documents. This right is established in our Constitution and has primacy over statute law, and this right was recognized in the precedent-setting ruling of Speaker Peter Milliken.

The fact that committees have a right to summon these documents has been specifically supported by all the Liberal members of the Canada-China committee. In fact, the second motion ordering the production of these documents was proposed by the Liberal member for Cumberland—Colchester and passed unanimously by the committee.

At the time, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs declared, respecting his own government's refusal to hand over the documents, "lawyers are not always right. Department of Justice lawyers are particularly...not always right." He further stated, "I say that to caution the Public Health Agency of Canada to get a second opinion.... You need a second opinion, because I think the justice department is not giving you the best advice."

The law is clear. The entire Liberal complement on the committee agrees that the government must disclose these documents. When it comes to document disclosure, it seems that we again have a case of the Liberals thinking that the law does not apply to them. It may be hard for the government to acknowledge the degree to which its incompetence has put both the safety and security of Canadians and Canadian research at risk.

• (1225)

Admitting they have a problem and disclosing all of the information is the first step to finding the solution that we need. Let us start the process of getting to the bottom of this. Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Let us see the documents so that we can fix the problem, hold the government accountable, and more importantly, ensure that these serious security lapses that endanger the health and safety of Canadians never happen again.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his speech.

The Liberal government often expresses reservations or seems reluctant to step on the toes of anyone it considers to be a giant. That is what we saw when we asked the government to regulate the web giants. The government tells us that we have to be careful, because they will not agree to be regulated, they will resist or it could spark a trade war.

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I would like my colleague's opinion. Does he think it is possible that, in this case, the government is reluctant to provide the information we are asking for with all the transparency the situation requires, because it is afraid of the reaction of this other giant, which is also one of Canada's trading partners?

Is it possible that it is because our current government lacks a little courage?

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with my colleague that the Liberals have been weak when it comes to responding to the threats posed by the People's Republic of China. Their failure to support our motion on recognizing the Uighur genocide can perhaps be explained by some of this fear.

However, my hunch on today's motion is that this is really more about them covering up their own failures. There were clearly significant problems with the kind of review and oversight that needed to happen in terms of security. I suspect that if we were to actually see these documents, there would be information in the documents that would be embarrassing for the government and would show that the appropriate precautions were not taken by the government in terms of security.

In this case, it is actually more about the Liberals trying to avoid being embarrassed and therefore not wanting the issue brought to light than it is about anything else. The fact is that Liberals have said in the past that Parliament has an unfettered right to access documents. Some Liberal members have even agreed to that at committee, so their inconsistency here really needs to be addressed and responded to.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I share my colleague's concerns with regard to the government's reluctance to produce the documents. It is a worrisome trend that we have seen over the past months.

I wonder if he could comment on one aspect of this that concerns me, which is the rise of anti-Asian racism. At the same time that we push as Parliament to get these documents and to get to the bottom of these questions around the dismissal of the two scientists at the lab in Winnipeg, what steps does the member believe the government should take to combat this worrisome rise of anti-Asian racism here in Canada?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, while I very much welcome the questions from my NDP and Bloc colleagues, I was hoping that after my speech I would get a question from a member of the government. That is what usually happens, and hopefully one of them will actually be willing to stand and put their views on the record on this. They seem reluctant to do that.

To my colleague's very important question, I agree that we need to respond to the threat of rising anti-Asian racism. One of the most critical ways we do that is to establish a clear distinction between the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people, as well as Chinese Canadians. The CCP does not speak for the Chinese people and it does not speak for Chinese Canadians.

In fact, many Chinese Canadians are speaking out about how the Chinese Communist Party is threatening or intimidating them. We heard compelling testimony last night about violence and threats of

violence that Canadians of Asian origin are experiencing from the Chinese Communist Party when they start to speak out about important human rights issues.

We need to always be clear about the distinction between this hostile, foreign political party that does not represent Chinese culture or Chinese identity and certainly does not represent Chinese Canadians. Then there is the very separate issue of affirming and appreciating the great contributions made by Asian Canadians, many of whom are very critical of the Chinese Communist Party.

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Institutes of Health in the U.S. have had 54 scientists resign or be fired as a result of non-disclosure of financial ties to foreign governments. Of the 189 scientists investigated to date, 93% had not disclosed that China was the source of their support.

Seeing how prevalent this situation is in the U.S. makes it all the more imperative that Canadian parliamentarians are fully aware of foreign influences occurring on our soil. Why would the Liberals be hiding these documents, as the security of Canadians is so clearly at risk?

• (1235)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks an excellent question. I note that in my time for questions and comments, I still have not received a question from a member of the government. Also, the Liberals are all over the place on this. They have said different things at committee than they have said in the House, and it just shows again that this is something on which they do not want to disclose the information. They do not want to talk about it.

My colleague is absolutely right about the need to do more work in this area. We are seeing other countries have a stronger response to foreign state-backed interference. There are things happening in the United States. A lot of very good things have happened in Australia. Other countries are standing up. We can work together through international networks. I am part of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, which is a network of legislators working on these issues.

We do not have to reinvent the wheel. We can learn these best practices. However, the Government of Canada, in particular, has really ignored this issue of foreign state-backed interference, particularly its impact on universities and research institutions. We need to see the government finally start to step up and disclose—

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating a motion that deals with a very curious circumstance, to put it mildly, that largely started on March 31, 2019.

Before I describe what the circumstance is, it is important to give a little context around how this played out. A lot of Canadians may only hear about the National Microbiology Laboratory in passing, for example in government press releases. The National Microbiology Laboratory, or the NML, is actually a really important facility in Canada.

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I grew up in Winnipeg. I started my career at the University of Manitoba, in the faculty of medicine, as well as in the intellectual property management office there. There is a lot of research that happens between the University of Manitoba and the National Microbiology Laboratory. It is very important research to Canada. A lot of the research that happened around the Ebola vaccine happened at this facility.

It is a very important resource for Canadian research. It also has something called a level 4 containment lab. That means it has the capacity for some of the world's most deadliest viruses to be safely held and researched.

What we are debating today is the fact that one of the researchers affiliated with the National Microbiology Laboratory, on March 31, 2019, coordinated a shipment of the Ebola and Henipah viruses. These are two very lethal and deadly viruses causing hemorrhagic fevers. That shipment was from the Public Health Agency of Canada to the Wuhan Institute of Virology via Winnipeg to Toronto to Beijing on a commercial Air Canada flight. That is something.

A few months later, on July 5, 2019, the researcher who did this, as well as her students, were escorted out of the lab by the Public Health Agency of Canada. This is a fairly pressing issue for Parliament to look at. What happened here?

I want to talk a little about the importance of research and how research happens. I do not want to give the impression that we do not have controls in place. Having worked in research administration in a prior life, which seems more and more distant by the day, there are usually protocols put in place whenever any sort of biological agent or material is transferred. There are actually agreements called material transfer agreements.

The reason why we need to find out what happened here is to find out whether or not the controls that we have in place in Canada are adequate or if they were followed in this situation. What happened? What was the result of it? Are our controls adequate? When we are talking about something like the Ebola virus, we would think that the public would want to know this information.

This is definitely something that Parliament should be seized with for the following reasons. Any time biological agents are transferred outside of Canada, or even within Canada, we have a fiduciary responsibility to make sure that process is ethical and that it follows ethical standards. I could spend 20 minutes just talking about what that means, in terms of international agreements and Canadian law. We have to make sure, frankly, that that stuff is not going to be weaponized.

We have to make sure that anybody who is allowed to work in these facilities is vetted in the most profound way and that they are screened to make sure they do not have affiliations with organizations that may not have Canada's best interests at heart. Even on a more commercial basis, we need to make sure that when materials are transferred, the intellectual property, any sort of new products or knowledge that come out of that research, is shared appropriately, according to Canadian and international law.

We need to find out what happened here. Clearly, something happened. Ebola was transferred by a researcher who was affiliated with the National Microbiology Laboratory, and then they were es-

corted out of the lab six months later. Then a bunch of other weird stuff sort of happened in that period of time.

• (1240)

One would think we should now be debating what happened and whether we need better controls, but what we are debating today is the fact that the Liberal government will not release the documents surrounding this incident, which is very concerning. The motion before us today, which the Liberals are frankly obstructing and which they obstructed at the health committee, compels the government to give parliamentarians information on what happened so we can evaluate whether processes were followed. My suspicion is that they were not. Subsequently, we can ensure that this never happens again.

The motion before the House would compel the government to put forward documents to the public for scrutiny, not just for Parliament to scrutinize but also the media. It is being blocked every step of the way. We have tried to do this multiple times through the parliamentary committee process. It is not just these documents that the Liberals are blocking. Colleagues on the health committee with me were being filibustered by the government on something as simple as a motion to get the agenda for the health committee.

There is an article in *The Globe and Mail* today about the Liberal government wanting to run the clock out on Parliament. By that, I mean it is obstructing everything so that Parliament will rise at the end of June with no answers on this. I know there is a lot of speculation about the Prime Minister potentially unilaterally calling an election in September. If nothing happened and everything is okay, why are these documents being blocked on something as serious as questions around the transfer of the Ebola virus? I have never seen something like this.

I used to work directly in academic research administration. There are a lot of very serious issues and concerns. Paperwork is put in place in order to hopefully ensure that bad things do not happen. If the system fails, we need to correct that. I have to say that I absolutely support international research collaboration, but it has to be done under a framework of safety and integrity. This motion comes at a time when Canada, frankly, has a very balkanized patchwork of rules and regulations among Canadian universities, our national research facilities, corporate research facilities and international research facilities. I do not think there is any political motivation or partisanship in saying that if a problem happened with this, we need to fix it and Parliament needs to put forward ways to do it.

There are a lot of questions in the world right now about what happened at the Wuhan lab on a lot of other issues. This issue is with regard to the National Microbiology Laboratory in Canada and a sample of the Ebola virus. We need to know what happened, where the system failed, whether an appropriate remedy was put in place, and whether we have the potential for this to happen again. I just cannot believe that we have to spend a day of debate to force the Liberals to produce documents that are owned by the public.

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The public, taxpayers, voting citizens and every person in Canada has the right to know what happened so we can make sure that our processes for research are safe and integrous. This is the Ebola virus. To be clear, we should not be transferring any material without rules in place, but this is a level 4 pathogen. This is something that there should be absolute transparency on, and it is shocking to me that we are having to force this debate in the House.

If there is nothing to hide and everything is fine, why is the Liberal government delaying and obstructing the release of these documents related to the transfer of the Ebola virus to China at every step of the way?

I hope my Liberal colleagues will vote in favour of this motion. I hope they will talk to their folks in the government and say that we need to pass this motion, and I hope we can spend time in debate afterward talking about how to strengthen this system so that Canada can participate in research internationally without these types of concerns.

• (1245)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to voting in favour of this motion, because I fundamentally believe in the concept of parliamentary supremacy and in our right as legislators to hold the government to account and to send for papers in aiding us to do that.

The member talked a bit about the struggles we have in protecting sensitive information in the context of international collaboration, and she referenced the fact that the system we have in Canada is quite decentralized. We have many different moving parts, and sometimes they operate in different jurisdictions.

I realize her answer will be informed by the production of these papers, but I was wondering if she could expand a bit. Does she have any preliminary ideas on how the federal government might start trying to fix the current decentralized system we have in Canada, to add a little more security while respecting our need to collaborate internationally?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had five hours to answer this question. It is such a good question.

At the core of it, there is value. The taxpayer pays for research in Canada. There is a public good associated with research. We have to start with looking at the public benefit derived from research and how we best protect that and promote it, both from a safety perspective and also from the perspective of intellectual property, commercialization and knowledge translation.

The fact that we have a balkanized, patchwork system of intellectual property ownership strategies among Canadian universities, and of security screening properties across research institutions as well, is concerning from a safety perspective and also for Canada's ability to get value from its research. This is such an important area of parliamentary discussion. It is one I feel passionately about, and I certainly look forward to collaborating with any member of any political stripe on putting together national policy that makes sense in this area, especially in light of the fact that Canada has to become more self-reliant in producing things like vaccines to be more resilient for future pandemics.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague for Calgary Nose Hill entirely. This should really be a very straightforward matter of getting information. This is a matter of the utmost national security interest, yet last week in response to a question from our deputy leader, instead of trying to act in a co-operative way, the Prime Minister actually accused Conservatives of trying to foment anti-Asian hatred.

I am wondering if my colleague could comment on the irrationality of this type of response.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, first of all, anti-Asian hate is real, and every Canadian has a responsibility to combat it right now. It is disgusting. I think my colleague who spoke earlier talked about the delineation between the political party that governs China and the people of China and Chinese Canadians. It is something we have to work so hard on.

The fact the Prime Minister would do this is morally repugnant. I would just say that the Prime Minister is a former blackface practitioner, and he really does not have a leg to stand on when it comes to talking about racism.

• (1250)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my friend and colleague, the member of Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie.

I am pleased to speak today about the importance of research that is so critical to the health and well-being of all Canadians as well as to our country's prosperity. Before I begin, I wish to first thank the residents of Vaughan—Woodbridge and York Region for their response to signing up and receiving the vaccine. As of today, nearly 73% of eligible York Region residents have received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. It has been fantastic work by everyone. I wish to encourage all residents to continue to sign up and to check for continual updates at york.ca and through my communications channels. Getting vaccinated is how we will exit the pandemic. Let us continue to make great progress together.

On another note, we were all shocked and saddened by the news of the mistreatment of indigenous children who were sent to residential schools and never able to return home to their families. The loss of these children, these innocent souls, is an insufferable loss for their families and the communities they were a part of. This is a tragic and shameful part of Canada's history. The news from the Kamloops Indian Residential School is truly unfathomable.

Returning to the opposition's motion, support for research has been central to Canada's domestic and international efforts to tackle COVID-19. Since the onset of the global pandemic, the Canadian research community has risen to the challenge at an unprecedented pace. Canada is fortunate to be home to some of the world's best and most innovative minds across academia and industry. They have come together in a concerted and collaborative response to advance urgent and impactful research.

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Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR, our government has been working hand in hand with research partners across Canada and around the globe to find solutions to this pandemic and protect Canadians and their loved ones. As members may know, CIHR was the first government-funded agency in the world to launch an open call for COVID-19 research, in February 2020. In response to the emergence of the pandemic, CIHR quickly shifted its focus to the mobilization and acceleration of Canadian research on COVID-19. It did so while committing to a balanced portfolio of research into medical and social countermeasures against the pandemic and supporting the research community through pandemic disruptions. It was a remarkable pan-Canadian effort that continues to contribute invaluable evidence to inform and guide the health response to COVID-19 across the country.

Our government is proud to support Canadian research that has made, and continues to make, a real difference. It should be no surprise, therefore, that Canada's scientific leadership and expertise are also renowned worldwide. Our academic researchers, leaders in their field, have established strong and successful international networks, most notably with partners in the United States and Europe.

At the government level, we are also working closely with international global counterparts to optimize the impact of COVID-19 research for all. A global health threat, after all, requires global action, and collaboration has proved eminently valuable to mobilizing a rigorous scientific response since the earliest days of the pandemic. This is why we took rapid steps, in concert with global partners, to leverage existing international research partnerships and to forge impactful new collaborative measures.

For instance, on January 31, 2020, CIHR signed a joint statement with Wellcome and 65 other signatories to share research data and findings relevant to the COVID-19 outbreak. Shortly thereafter, CIHR played a leadership role in a forum convened by the World Health Organization, which informed the development of a coordinated global research road map.

Through CIHR, we are also participating in the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness: an international consortium of 29 research-funding organizations worldwide. This network plays an important role in facilitating preparedness and rapid-response research during significant infectious disease outbreaks, including COVID-19. In fact, it is a testament to Canada's scientific leadership that CIHR is currently chair of this international consortium. As pandemic research efforts and outputs accelerated through CIHR, our government signed a joint statement with international partners to make sure that data resulting from clinic trials was disclosed publicly and in a timely manner.

● (1255)

Meanwhile, the scientific director for CIHR's Institute of Population and Public Health led an international effort to identify and prioritize research needs for rebuilding in a post-pandemic era while safeguarding progress on the UN sustainable development goals. This vast collaborative effort resulted in the UN Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery, which was released in November 2020.

As we take sound action to rebuild a stronger, more prosperous and more resilient Canada, our government will further invest to

strengthen international co-operation in science. We believe in science. This includes mobilizing for the prevention and response to future pandemics, as well as other emerging global health threats that may loom on the horizon.

It means leveraging the outputs of our international research collaborations to strengthen Canada's life sciences sector and revitalize our domestic capacity in biomanufacturing and medical innovation. International collaboration has been a critical element to the successful mobilization of both the Canadian and the global research communities long before the pandemic and in response to it.

Long-standing relationships with international partners forged in response to other health issues such as HIV/AIDS, antimicrobial resistance and dementia made the rapid research response to the pandemic possible.

Looking forward, we are encouraged by recent developments, such as efforts by the G7 to address gaps and improve the effectiveness of scientific co-operation, including in clinical trials. This includes addressing barriers and making clinical research more effective through better representation of diverse populations around the world, all while continuing to address our domestic needs and context.

Of paramount importance to the Canadian context is that we remain committed to supporting community-led, meaningful and culturally safe indigenous health research. Through CIHR's rapid response program—

The Deputy Speaker: We have a point of order from the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, although the Standing Orders do provide general latitude for a member who is eventually getting to the point, there are still some limits to the requirements of topicality. I would encourage you to ask the member to remember we are debating a particular motion and ask the member to address the motion being debated in the House today.

The Deputy Speaker: Indeed, relevance is one of those issues relative to the content of speeches in the House. Certainly, the rather precise nature of today's opposition motion may not afford the same degree of latitude members normally have.

I have been listening to the hon. member. I see his discussion on the merits of research and international co-operation as being, in fact, pertinent to the topic at hand from the standpoint of providing background. I recognize he has three minutes remaining in his time, so if he stays on that track, we are well within the bounds of relevance.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

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Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, the research and co-operation of international research is obviously very important for me, for our government and for the world to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and to ensure our national security interests are afforded by and taken care of. We also have to ensure that we have international co-operation between all parties when considering intellectual property and issues of the like.

I thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, for his intervention, but I also wish to address that research and science are of fundamental importance to our government, unlike other governments in the past.

At a global level, we recognize that shared risks, like pandemics and climate change, require collective action. That is why yesterday the Government of Canada, through CIHR, launched a new framework for action on global health research that will mobilize Canadian research to achieve the greatest impact on health and health equity.

As we work to strengthen international research, we are also cognizant that safeguarding our investment in research, Canada's intellectual property on our large economy, is crucial. That is why, in collaboration with academia and industry, we are taking measures to identify and minimize security risks, protect data and disseminate best practices to the research community. For instance, in the fall, the government launched an online security portal to help scientists across the country assess their level of risk and protect their work. We are committed to vigilance and, with our partners, we will do what is necessary to protect Canadian innovation.

Although we are optimistic about the future and what we can accomplish through international co-operation in science, the foremost priority for Canadians remains a swift recovery from the pandemic. This includes addressing the immediate, as well as the potential long-term, impacts of COVID-19. As our knowledge of the pandemic evolves, along with Canadians' needs, the Government of Canada, through CIHR, continues to fund research to address gaps in priority areas of COVID-19 study.

Earlier this year, as part of the federal variants of concern strategy, CIHR once again mobilized the research community to respond to the COVID-19 variants emerging worldwide. This includes support for research coordination in Canada and with global partners to provide decision-makers with rapid guidance regarding drug therapy, vaccine effectiveness and our public health strategies.

We look forward to our continued collaboration with our domestic and international partners, including the WHO, on this important issue. We also continue to support the efforts of Canadian researchers, including those working with international colleagues to address other emergent areas of concern, such as post-COVID condition, also known as long COVID.

Canada's research response to COVID-19 is cutting-edge, focusing on the needs of peoples and communities across the country, while contributing to international efforts against a shared global health threat.

• (1300)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke at length about the value of

international research co-operation. In most cases, in principle, I would certainly agree with him.

However, we are speaking specifically today about instances of co-operation between the Winnipeg lab and the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences, as well as other forms of collaboration between Chinese military-affiliated labs and a Canadian lab. This pertains to dangerous viruses, when we know those labs were involved in gain-of-function experiments. That is, military-affiliated labs in China are intentionally making viruses more dangerous.

I would like a clear answer from this member because we have not had much clarity in terms of what his views are on this motion at all. Does he think that there is a limit? Does he think that Canadian researchers should not be cooperating with foreign militaries in cases where those militaries are, as we speak, involved in committing genocide against minority communities? Is that a point beyond which research co-operation cannot and should not occur?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, first off, our government takes any threat to research security, intellectual property and domestic business interests seriously. We have established policies and processes through the Public Health Agency of Canada that allow for appropriate scientific collaboration while adhering to established security controls.

That is the way we proceed in our government. That is the way our researchers, which are the best in the world, proceed in what they are doing and what they are undertaking.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does the member agree that transparency on public health issues is the most effective way to combat disinformation and conspiracy theories?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, of course transparency and accountability are very important. Obviously, we understand that. When there are issues dealing with privacy or national security, where disclosure cannot be made public, we must have a balance in our system. We aim to achieve that balance on a continual basis.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first opportunity to enter into the debate today, I want to say that I will be voting for this motion to address, as the Conservative Party has suggested we should, the arrangements between scientists in Winnipeg, the People's Republic of China and its government.

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Since this hon. member has raised issues of international scientific collaboration and research, I wonder if he could explain why the decision was taken by the Government of Canada, on the eve of COVID, to cut the funds to the Global Public Health Intelligence Network, which would have given us a much more advanced warning of what we were facing with COVID-19.

• (1305)

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, our government has invested vast resources in research funding, both domestically and with international partnerships, and we will continue to do so. I look forward to our scientists continuing to co-operate on an international level with their peers to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccines are distributed globally, that further research on other matters at hand remain as such, and that we continue going down that path.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, very quickly, does the member agree with this motion? Does he intend to vote for or against it?

Mr. Francesco Sorbara: Mr. Speaker, I continue to analyze the motion at hand. What I will say is the Public Health Agency of Canada employs some of the best researchers and scientists in Canada. Obviously there are many issues that cannot be disclosed for privacy implications, so we must balance national security interests with the issue of transparency. That is how we will proceed forward.

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedNor), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to participate in the debate on the Conservative motion. I am connecting to this virtual Parliament from Sault Ste. Marie, which is the traditional territory of the Garden River First Nation, Batchewana First Nation and the Métis people. I want to acknowledge that our hearts are very sad with the discovery of the 215 graves. We are committed to truth and reconciliation and will continue to move forward with it.

Science and research are more important than ever. As the global pandemic has made abundantly clear, science and research need to take centre stage to help us address economic, environmental and social challenges.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have mobilized Canadian researchers and life science companies to support large-scale efforts to combat COVID-19. As part of its more than \$1 billion COVID-19 response fund, our government invested \$217 million in coronavirus research and medical countermeasures to advance projects undertaken by university researchers and others.

We have also supported the mobilization of experts from Canada's scientific policy and health communities to launch Can-COVID. Hosted by the University of Toronto, this rapid response network connects researchers on different angles of the pandemic, from diagnostics to studying the impacts on vulnerable populations.

Expert advice from the research community and industry has been a key part of our response. The government relies on an evidence-based decision-making process in these and other areas.

For example, Canada's chief science advisor convenes committees of experts to assess the state of knowledge on key issues related to the pandemic. A vaccine task force was also created and com-

prised of vaccine, immunology experts and industry leaders to provide advice on Canada's vaccine strategy.

However, our commitment to science did not start with the pandemic. Since 2016, the government has committed more than \$13 billion to support research and science across Canada. Building on these investments, budget 2021 represents more than \$3 billion in new funding for Canadian researchers and scientists. This includes support for cutting-edge life science research, biotechnology and for national strategies on artificial intelligence, quantum and genomics.

This support recognizes the importance of science and research to address future challenges and as a key pillar of our economic growth strategy. This includes more than \$440 million over 10 years to support a pan-Canadian artificial intelligence strategy; \$360 million over seven years to launch a national quantum strategy; and \$400 million over six years to support a new pandemic genomics strategy. Each of these strategies will help advance key technological advantages for Canada and ensure we have strong communities of research, talent and commercial activity across this great nation.

The Government of Canada recognizes that Canadian innovators need our support to ensure our economic benefits from the enormous growth opportunities ahead. By leveraging our strengths and talent, we can ensure that Canadian values are embedded across widely used global technology platforms. Canadian scientists and entrepreneurs are well positioned to take advantage of these opportunities and Canada benefits from advances in these technologies through effective commercialization.

In addition, we recognize the importance of Canada's colleges in assisting small businesses to develop and adopt new technologies and processes. We know that small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. As we focus on recovery, we must help businesses seize new opportunities to innovate, grow and become more competitive. That is why budget 2021 proposes \$52.6 million over two years through the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the industrial research assistance program to support over 1,400 new collaborations between colleges and small businesses.

We have also learned of the importance of being better prepared for possible future pandemics. Strategic investments in cutting-edge life sciences, research and biotechnology are a critical part of that. These growing fields are not only essential to our safety, but they are fast-growing sectors that support well-paying jobs and attract new investments.

We will make investments that will help protect the health of Canadians in the future by setting aside almost \$1 billion to strengthen Canada's biomanufacturing and life science sectors, including \$500 million for the Canada Foundation for Innovation to support the bioscience capital and infrastructure needs of post-secondary institutions and research hospitals; \$250 million for the federal research granting council to create a new tri-council biomedical research fund; and new investments in anti-microbiological resistance, to name a few.

• (1310)

The National Research Council is also working with partners across government to advance research and development for vaccines and therapies to prevent and treat the spread of COVID-19, in line with the best advice provided by the Government of Canada's vaccine task force and therapeutics task force.

NRC's industrial research assistance program is also working with Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada to provide support to three innovative firms to scale up production facilities and increase Canada's biomanufacturing capacity. Our continued success in science and innovation and in addressing global challenges to our well-being will come not only from domestic initiatives, but also from strong and sustained international collaboration.

Much has been achieved to date by Canadian researchers who are constantly working collaboratively across borders to achieve research excellence.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I think it is deplorable that the Liberal members keep changing the subject. My hon. colleague is going completely off topic talking about economic development, which has absolutely nothing to do with the important Conservative motion we are debating. This is the second time this has happened today, since another Liberal MP went completely off topic this morning talking about vaccines. I would like my hon. colleague to be called to order.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert for his comments. He is absolutely right that the relevance of speeches is part of the Standing Orders.

In this case, I was listening to the parliamentary secretary's speech, and I think the subject he is raising has to do with international research on public health, which is certainly relevant.

However, as I said during the last intervention on the relevance of speeches, today's opposition motion is very specific. Most members do not have the same latitude, so I would ask the parliamentary secretary to ensure that the rest of his speech remains relevant to the subject at hand.

I invite the parliamentary secretary to continue.

• (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is encouraging Canadian researchers to further collaborate with the world's best and to keep Canada at the forefront of science and

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novation through investments in international research under the new frontiers in research fund. Through shared objectives and principles for international research collaboration, the federal research funding agencies are also strengthening Canada's reputation as a valued partner in international research and innovation.

Interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, national and international collaborations continue to amplify the impacts of research on pandemic recovery and future resilience. To this end, Canada is working very closely with international platforms to facilitate global efforts in information sharing, research collaborations and knowledge mobilization, such as the United Nations Research Roadmap for the COVID-19 Recovery, the World Health Organization and the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness.

At the same time, we are witnessing new international threats to Canada's research enterprises. For example, we are aware of new and evolving challenges to protect Canadian researchers' intellectual property from actors that pose security threats or attempt to subvert rules and accepted norms.

Moving forward, we will continue to strive to find the balance between how best to sustain these international science, technology and innovation activities, while supporting our values like good global governance, freedom of science and valuing diversity, equality and inclusion in research in the face of these new challenges. This is happening from coast to coast to coast.

In northern Ontario, Sault Ste. Marie has a variety of international research happening at the local university and college through the Ontario Forest Research Institute, the Ontario Forest Research Institute and the MNR. In fact, we have some of the most Ph.D.s per capita in Canada, according to the local Economic Development Corporation. That research is happening all across Canada and in other places in northern Ontario, including the Experimental Lakes Area in Kenora, which recently received government funding to conduct very important research on water. It is attracting scientists from around the world. There are 60 lakes there and scientists from all over are coming. That collaboration continues as we finish our fight against COVID-19.

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We are calling on all scientists and researchers to continue that kind of collaboration. This speech is evidence that we have put our money where our mouth is to support and finish this fight with such resources that will enable us to continue to do the great work. I think of some young entrepreneurs, three young ladies from North Bay, who are right now seeking IP protection, without saying too much about their product, on some ultraviolet processes that will sterilize and help with COVID-19.

The government is supporting a lot of research across Canada, and we need to continue to finish our fight against COVID-19.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member about the disclosure of documents to Parliament, which is the topic of today's opposition motion.

In 2011, an opposition motion was put forward by the Liberal Party in this place. The motion read:

...given the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested, the government's continuing refusal to comply with reasonable requests for documents...represents a violation of the rights of Parliament...

That motion was put forward by Ralph Goodale. Voting in favour of that Liberal opposition motion were the Prime Minister, the current foreign affairs minister, the current government House leader, the current government whip, the current Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the member for Winnipeg North as well as the chair of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

Given that the Liberals have in the past taken the position that Parliament has an absolute and unfettered right to access documents, does the member agree that right still continues to exist and that his government ought to also comply with the terms of the opposition day motion that was put forward by his party in the past?

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Mr. Speaker, when we talk about past history, it reminds me that our government, in 2015, created a very specific committee, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, the NSICOP, which was a move to ensuring open and public government in a manner that appropriately protected sensitive information, including national security. It was established to review many matters. I would be interested to see how this group, which has members from both houses of Parliament and various opposition members, engage. They hold the appropriate security clearances and have express rights of access to other restricted information and—

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: We will continue with questions and comments.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, having listened to my colleague, I would say that I feel like anything related to the motion before us was redacted from his speech.

The House is debating a motion asking “[t]hat an order of the House do issue for the unredacted version of all documents pro-

duced by the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the...orders of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations”.

Does the member agree with this motion? Can he talk to us about it?

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Sheehan: Mr. Speaker, the question is a bit philosophical in its approach. I truly believe in this democratic process, and it is really important for us to come with the ability to discuss and to take a look at different tools in our tool box that we can use to finish the fight against COVID-19 and to continue to make sure we address security issues. There are lots of tools there, and processes.

I am reminded of what a former local politician used to say when I was on city council for many years. He said, “I make my decisions in chambers.” I know a lot of people have already said their position up front, but I have put forward some ideas and I am listening. At the end of the day, the most important thing to know is that our national security that we have in place in Canada is doing an excellent job and needs to be supported, as well as our scientists and researchers. It is so important for them to continue to be supported, as they are the ones who are saving Canadian lives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

I would like to briefly come back to the Prime Minister's accusations of racism.

Let us remember one thing: Since the beginning of the debate on the problem at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, all the Prime Minister has been doing is accusing us of racism.

Every time the opposition raises an issue that deals with the Chinese Communist regime, as I did last week, the government calls us racist. As I speak, I am looking around to see whether the Prime Minister is going to stand up and accuse me of racism.

That is a serious problem. Using racism as an excuse is a really feeble defence. Racism has nothing to do with it. The Conservative Party has never attacked Chinese people. Our attacks have always been directed at the Chinese Communist regime, which is aggressive and dangerous. What we are saying has absolutely nothing to do with the people of China.

When we raise the issue of Huawei, we are accused of being racist. The Prime Minister never takes a strong stand with regard to the two Michaels, who were imprisoned on trumped-up charges. He even once said that he prefers a communist system to a democracy, which is very disturbing.

We ask questions in committee and in the House. We mostly ask questions in the House because this is where the Prime Minister answers our questions, when he feels like it, that is. This was his answer last time:

The rise in anti-Asian racism we have been seeing over the past number of months should be of concern to everyone. I would recommend that the members of the Conservative Party, in their zeal to make personal attacks, not start to push too far into intolerance towards Canadians of diverse origins.

Even *The Globe and Mail* said the Prime Minister's answer was a foolish thing to say.

This is not the first time the Prime Minister has called us racist. Let us not forget that, last year, early in the COVID-19 crisis, the opposition suggested it might be a good idea to cancel flights from China. What was the response? We were accused of being racist. It was not our fault the virus came from China. That is the reason we wanted to cancel flights from that country.

I know that racism is a delicate subject and that it is easy to lob such accusations. For our part, we always put public health and safety first, regardless of the origins of the virus.

Europe experienced a similar problem. Would anyone cry racism if we were speaking of European people and democracy? Absolutely not. The same is true in this case. If the problem came from Italy, we would be saying the same thing about banning flights. No matter where those flights came from, we would be saying the same thing.

The same thing applies to Huawei. We asked the government many questions in the House about Huawei's probable, possible, and indeed assured interference in our telecommunications system. Once again, we were accused of being racist.

We are not going to give up just because of the Prime Minister's accusations. We will persevere, because we are here to work on behalf of Canadian interests. This is why our motion includes the following:

That an order of the House do issue for the unredacted version of all documents produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the March 31, 2021, and May 10, 2021, orders of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, respecting the transfer of Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in March 2019, and the subsequent revocation of security clearances for, and termination of the employment of, Dr. Xiangguo Qiu and Dr. Keding Cheng.

This is just one part of the problem that needs to be addressed.

The second problem is the following. In September 2020, the Prime Minister appointed Iain Stewart as president of the Public Health Agency of Canada. This appointment was pure and simple politics. The Prime Minister could have appointed any number of other Canadian men and women, but he chose to appoint Mr. Stewart.

• (1325)

Mr. Stewart recently appeared as a witness before the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, of which I am a member. He refused to provide relevant details about the security breach at the Winnipeg laboratory. The committee members requested unredacted versions of all the documents produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Mr. Stewart refused and continues to refuse to provide them. Just yesterday, we received redacted documents, despite the committee's clear demands.

The problem is not simple. On the one hand, Iain Stewart is the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada for the sole reason that he was appointed by the Prime Minister. On the other hand,

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this same gentleman is telling us that it is impossible to provide unredacted information about the dismissal of two scientists linked to the Chinese Communist regime and the revocation of their security clearance because that would be a disclosure of personal information, which is legally prohibited by the Privacy Act.

Mr. Stewart may be deliberately ignoring subparagraph 8(2)(m) (i) of the Privacy Act, which states:

Subject to any other Act of Parliament, personal information under the control of a government institution may be disclosed

(m) for any purpose where, in the opinion of the head of the institution,

(i) the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy that could result from the disclosure,

In other words, the head of the institution, which could include the head of the laboratory, Iain Stewart, who is the head of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Minister of Health or the Prime Minister, may disclose personal information if they decide that it would serve the public interest better to reveal the truth than to hide it. That is what the act says.

That said, neither the Prime Minister nor the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada have any legal grounds for doing what they are currently doing, which is hiding information.

Let us not forget that documents sent to the committee that may contain sensitive national security information must first be reviewed by certain officials before they are shared with members of Parliament. It is not up to the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada to censor documents as he is doing. That is the job of the law clerk of the House. The clerks have the authority to do this work and ensure that the documents submitted to members are properly protected pursuant to the rules of the House, not Iain Stewart's rules.

The question is whether Mr. Stewart is doing this on his own initiative. Did he decide that the information should not be shared with the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, or did the order come from the Prime Minister's Office?

Is the Prime Minister too afraid that the truth will come out? If so, what does he have to fear?

This is our national security and our country. If information from the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg has been passed on to Wuhan and, for example, the Chinese People's Liberation Army has used some viruses to develop others, we have a right to know.

If the members of the House of Commons do not have the most right to know, who does?

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This is about Canada's national security and best interests. The Conservative Party and I are very aware that some information must remain secret to prevent other countries from gaining access to information that is critical to our own security. However, it is not true that all of the information regarding the National Microbiology Laboratory, and especially the information that was given to the Chinese Communist regime, should be kept secret. We have the right to know.

Our request is legitimate, and I believe that the opposition parties all agree with the Conservative Party of Canada that there is nothing racist about wanting to know what the Chinese Communist regime is up to. Canadians have the right to know what happened at the Winnipeg lab.

• (1330)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has made reference to the importance of national security. It is interesting that in the first few years of government we put into place, like other Five Eyes countries, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, which was actually established to review such potential matters, while ensuring appropriate safeguards.

I am wondering if the member could provide any information to the House on whether the suggestion that is being suggested in the motion we are debating today has ever been raised with the chair of this particular committee, or to what degree the Conservatives would even support it going to this committee.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Yesterday evening, the chair of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians did come to testify before the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations about its 2020 report. It was clear that we have serious problems in Canada. He even mentioned that we should act swiftly on the issue of cybersecurity.

Should that committee review the documents? That is not what is at issue today. The issue is that the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada took it upon himself to hide information, and that is inconsistent with parliamentary privilege. All we want is to get the unredacted documents. The law clerk will take it from there.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

One thing struck me. The motion we are debating raises an issue of transparency. We want access to sensitive documents held by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Since this morning, the Liberals have been completely off topic. It must be said that the Liberals do not have a history of being transparent. Last year, we sought to find out the truth about the WE Charity scandal. When we got too close to discovering something, the Liberals prorogued Parliament. That was also about transparency. Today, the Liberals do not seem to be

present in the least. They are talking about economic development and progress with the vaccination rollout.

In my colleague's opinion, why is transparency so problematic for the Liberals?

• (1335)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, that is the million-dollar question. Transparency and the Liberal Party are words that do not go together. That has been obvious for going on six years now.

That was the case with everything to do with COVID-19, and that is why there will be a public inquiry led by a Conservative government.

Why are they like that? I do not know, but I would like to know. It is a great mystery that we may be able to solve one day.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, throughout a number of interventions today, there have been discussions from members regarding the balance that needs to be struck between Canada's national security interests and the importance of international collaboration. I know the member touched on that briefly in his speech.

Does he have any initial proposals that he would like the federal government to engage in on that front, where we look at sensitive information but also broaden our international collaboration, where many hands makes light work?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Obviously, national security must be protected no matter which government is in power. We have to protect our security issues. I had my security clearances when I was in the military, so I know a thing or two about it.

Even so, what we are talking about here is a unilateral Public Health Agency of Canada decision to redact the documents when that was not its job. All we are asking is for the documents to be sent to the committee. The law clerks will take care of any necessary redaction. Then the committee can get the documents, as provided by the Standing Orders of the House of Commons.

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for a brief question.

The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must tell my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles that it is good to hear people speak to the motion we are debating today. This is not the case with my Liberal colleagues. In fact, we have to wonder if they have read the text. We are debating things today that are of great concern.

Earlier, I asked the colleague from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan what was holding the Liberals back from providing the information and being more transparent.

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Is it because they are afraid to step on the toes of a giant again and fear the consequences? Is it because they have something to hide?

Why does my colleague think the Liberals are refusing to address this issue with transparency?

It seems to me that this is a matter of utmost importance to national security.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I have a report here that is not secret. This report provides information about the type of viruses that were transferred by the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. This report refers to Ebola, among others, but all kinds of other pathogens were shared by the laboratories. How Wuhan handles these pathogens is very questionable and that has repercussions.

We are not spreading conspiracy theories, but in the context of COVID-19, we have to wonder about the management of all these pathogens and viruses. That is why it is essential that we understand what happened in Winnipeg.

What was the lab's relationship with the Chinese Communist regime?

It is essential because, as far as I am concerned, in this case China could quite simply be considered as an enemy.

[English]

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Winston Churchill once said, “An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile—hoping it will eat him last.”

Appeasement is the diplomatic policy of making concessions to an aggressive power hoping to avoid a conflict. In Churchill's time, he was referring to Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement to Nazi Germany. Chamberlain's ultimate act of appeasement was in ceding parts of Czechoslovakia to Germany under the 1938 Munich agreement in exchange for Hitler's promise not to invade the rest of that country. However, in 1939, Hitler did just that.

In 1940, Chamberlain lost the confidence of the house, leading to the prime ministership of Winston Churchill.

Chamberlain emerged from history viewed as a weak, vacillating, indecisive and failed leader, so much so that Churchill quipped, “Poor Neville will come badly out of history.”

Today, as a matter of foreign policy, there can be no bigger challenge than our relationship with China. The litany of foreign policy errors when it comes to China by the Prime Minister is truly astonishing.

First, we had the national embarrassment in the aftermath of the arrest of Huawei executive, Meng Wanzhou. Following the arrest, Canada's ambassador to China and former Liberal cabinet minister John McCallum was unceremoniously fired. His embarrassing remarks included, among other things, how great it would be for Canada if the U.S. extradition request was just simply dropped, alleging that the intent of her arrest was to attempt to leverage trade concessions from China.

These statements completely undermined Canada's defence of the arrest, namely that Canada is a rule of law country and politicians do not meddle in these sorts of things.

It is clear that when it comes to meddling in cases before the justice system, the Liberal government picks and chooses where it thinks it is appropriate to do so. That was evident when the Prime Minister tried to strong arm his then-minister of justice, the current member for Vancouver Granville, into interfering with the independent prosecutors over charges against SNC Lavalin.

It is no wonder that when we said that Canada was a rule of law nation and that there was nothing the Prime Minister could do in the Wanzhou case, that the Chinese government simply did not believe us.

The actions of the Prime Minister and the then ambassador seriously weakened our credibility. In retaliation for the arrest of Wanzhou, China did two things. It blocked imports of Canadian canola, pork and beef, hurting our farmers and our agriculture industry, and it arbitrarily arrested and detained Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Those two Canadians remain imprisoned still today.

Jonathan Manthorpe, author of *Claws of the Panda*, said:

I think this has to be a lesson that you can't deal with China like any other country that abides by the law and diplomatic norms. And in that respect, we've been a bit naive in the past.

The reality is that China is not a friendly regime. Frankly, no better evidence of this exists than the arbitrary detention and trials of the two Michaels. Canada has been completely unable thus far to bring this matter to a positive conclusion in part because our credibility as a nation of laws was weakened by the actions of the Prime Minister in the SNC Lavalin affair.

Then came the revelation that our military had decided to cancel training with the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 2019. I am really not sure who thought this was a good idea in the first place. In retrospect, this seems to be the obvious decision, and yet Global Affairs Canada actually pushed back against the military decision to cancel this in an apparent act of appeasement regarding the two Michaels.

Additionally, while most countries have recognized the perils of doing business with Huawei, the Prime Minister simply will not rule it out.

As well, serious concerns have been expressed about Canadian universities' co-operation with the Chinese government on research projects. These concerns range from potential disclosure of intellectual property to national security concerns. Again, no action has been taken by the Liberal government.

As if this were not all enough for the Prime Minister to be on the highest alert in looking out for Canada's national security interests, now comes the issue at hand in today's motion.

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In a May 20, Globe and Mail article, there was the revelation that scientists working in Winnipeg's National Microbiology Lab had been collaborating with Chinese military researchers to study and experiment on deadly pathogens.

This is a lab that works with some of the most infectious diseases on the planet. The security of not only the dangerous physical contents of the lab, but the highly sensitive information regarding its activities should be paramount and of the utmost importance. One of the scientists who co-authored some of the studies on this collaboration was reportedly from the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences, an obvious red flag, to be sure, if there ever was one.

• (1340)

Even the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has stated that the risk of collaboration with the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences is a "very high risk".

As if that were not enough, in January of this year, two of the scientists at the Winnipeg lab were fired and escorted out of work by the RCMP after CSIS recommended that their security clearances be revoked on "national security grounds". CSIS expressed concern over the nature of information being passed on to China's Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Andy Ellis, a former CSIS assistant director, has called all this "madness", saying it is "ill-advised" and classified the actions of the Public Health Agency of Canada for co-operating with the People's Liberation Army as "incredible naïvete".

It is incredibly alarming to see the Minister of Foreign Affairs continuously stonewalling questions on this matter. When asked in question period, we kept hearing answers from the minister stating "we are not at liberty to provide any more details at this point." That just does not cut it. Canadians deserve answers, especially when it comes to matters as serious as these, matters that affect our country's national security.

It should go without saying that Canadians should be rightly concerned when scientists at the top lab in the country are being fired for national security reasons and escorted out by the RCMP. We have government scientists closely collaborating with scientists from the Wuhan Institute of Virology and China's military, including shipping dangerous Ebola and Henipah viruses to Wuhan. Does the Canadian public not have a right to know what the extent of that co-operation was?

How does a military scientist from the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences get granted access to work at Canada's National Microbiology Lab anyway?

I have received many questions from members of my community about these issues, as I am sure other members have, and we are trying to get them answers.

It is the duty of the federal government to protect national security and the safety and security of Canadians. By refusing to be transparent and provide answers to these important questions, the government has failed to assure Canadians that it has upheld this duty.

It is the duty of members of the House of Commons and its committees to hold the government to account by investigating and ordering the production of documents. The Special Committee on Canada-China Relations has tried to get this information, but the Public Health Agency of Canada heavily redacted documents and failed to comply with the request of the committee.

That is why we have introduced this motion today, to order the government to produce these documents. Members of that committee have sought to use this power responsibly and in a way that protects national security. This is evident in the motions adopted by the committee on March 31 and May 10, as well as today's motion, which have been worded to protect national security by having the law clerk review them first.

The government's repeated refusal to comply with the committee's orders to produce documents is troubling and continues to raise very serious questions.

The optimistic heady days of "sunny ways" have quickly given way to a cloudy haze. I recall when the Prime Minister proudly proclaimed, "We will make information more accessible requiring transparency to be a fundamental principle." Apparently when it comes to the Prime Minister's well-known admiration for China's dictatorship, transparency becomes invisible.

Given the Prime Minister's naive and appeasing posture toward the Chinese government, it appears, as Churchill said, that the crocodile may eat us last.

• (1345)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Stephen Harper actually negotiated a secret trade arrangement between China and Canada in complete silence. The member tries to give the impression that we lack transparency.

My question for the member is the same question I posed for his colleague. We have a standing committee, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, that is supposed to deal with security issues. Does the member not believe that might be an appropriate place to have this discussion, if in fact the Conservatives' approach is genuine in wanting to get to the bottom of the issue?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, through you, I would say in response to that question that NSICOP is not a committee of Parliament; it is a committee of the executive branch, which is under the control of the Prime Minister. The government, especially in cases like this where there are serious questions of national security, simply should not be investigating itself.

Business of Supply

• (1350)

Mrs. Tamara Jansen (Cloverdale—Langley City, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in an OPQ that I put through last year on this exact topic we found out there was no other institute that asked for this transfer, only the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Twelve strains of Ebola and three strains of the Nipah virus were authorized for transfer. No compensation was received. No conditions on the transfer of the material were in place. I am curious how my hon. colleague feels this information should be properly treated. How should we be dealing with this terrible situation?

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, I think we have a very serious situation and matter of national security here. It is clear that the Prime Minister and his government are not taking it seriously. I think all Canadians should be very alarmed by that. When the Prime Minister was asked a serious question last week by our deputy leader about this issue, he responded by accusing the Conservatives of fomenting anti-Asian racism. That is shameful behaviour. The Prime Minister is not taking this seriously and Canadians need to be aware of that and should express their frustration.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comments were exactly on point with respect to NSICOP. I just want to add to them.

First, the existence of NSICOP does not, in any way, take away from the rights or prerogatives of a parliamentary committee to send for documents. These rights are unfettered and the legislation that created NSICOP in no way changed that.

Second, NSICOP is not a committee of Parliament; it is a committee that includes parliamentarians, but its membership is controlled by the Prime Minister and it cannot make any information public except by the permission of the executive branch. Therefore, it does not have any of the tools required for effective parliamentary scrutiny with respect to the actions of the executive.

As a member of the Canada-China committee, I can say that we were trying to do a study on national security, not as a committee of parliamentarians controlled by the executive, but as a parliamentary committee that reports to Parliament and holds the executive accountable. We have a right to request these documents. We need to be able to use these documents in the research we are doing. Whatever may be happening within the executive branch has nothing to do with and does not take away from the rights of parliamentary committees to use their prerogatives to hold the government accountable.

Mr. Marty Morantz: Mr. Speaker, I agree 100% with the comments of my colleague.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the question that was just posed I saw the Conservative opposition members being a little defensive realizing that oops, maybe once again, they are missing the boat on a very important fact. They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say they are genuinely concerned and completely overlook a committee that was established in order to deal with things of this nature. On the other hand, when that is being suggested to them, they say that is not good enough, they want to

make it more political. That is really what the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is trying to say.

The National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians has representatives from all political parties and they have a certain security clearance. Everything that the Conservative members are trying to achieve today could be achieved through that committee. However, the Conservatives have a problem with that, because for them, the issue is not what is in the public's best interests, it is what is in the Conservative Party's best political interests.

We have seen that repeatedly. We can go back to last summer and remember the thousands and thousands of papers that were provided to a standing committee. At a time when Canada was in the midst of a pandemic, the Conservative Party of Canada wanted to focus its attention on diverting health care professionals within Health Canada to provide papers and to appear before committee. If I believed for a moment that it had nothing to do with the partisan politics of the Conservative Party, I would be a little more sympathetic.

Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory is a secure facility. We all know that. Everyone working at and visiting the microbiology laboratory must undergo security screening and adhere to strict security protocols and policies. I had the opportunity to drive by the lab on Arlington Street on many occasions and it sits there in isolation. One gets the impression that there are important things that the federal government is doing in that facility. This government, more so than Stephen Harper, invests in science and supports our labs. I think that has been clearly demonstrated.

If we read through the resolution for the opposition day, two things come to my mind: One, is yes, there is a lot of detail and again they are asking for papers and again they are trying to have it go to a committee and again they want to get another minister, the Minister of Health, who has been answering questions during question period virtually every day now. They want that special committee to deal with it.

That is the one thing that comes to my mind in reading it and that is the most obvious. When I first read it, the first thing that came to my mind was that the legislation we passed a number of years ago that we asked the Conservative government of Stephen Harper to bring in. We have the Five Eyes countries and Canada was the only one out of the Five Eyes that did not have a national security and intelligence committee per se. We established that.

• (1355)

As some of the Conservative members will point out, there is a different reporting mechanism but there are members of the Conservative Party who are on that committee. Within that committee they do have the ability to look into the matter at hand and maintain confidence and provide ideas and recommendations and they have done some fine work in the past.

Statements by Members

My first thought in reading this motion was this: Has the Conservative Party given any thought in regard to that committee? Based on the two questions, I now understand why the Conservatives do not want to go to that committee. It is because it is not political enough.

The other thing I find amazing is that here we have a limited number of opposition days and Canadians are thinking of the pandemic and things such as the vaccines, we just tabled billions and billions of dollars being spent in a budget, and this is what the Conservative Party has chosen. I do not think the Conservative Party is in tune with what is happening in the real world or sensitive to what Canadians want us to be talking about.

I see that my time is expiring, so I will be able to continue on, possibly after question period.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary will have 13 and a half minutes remaining in his time for his remarks when the House next gets back to debate on the question, and, of course, the usual period for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HISTORY MONTH

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, June is National Indigenous History Month. Now, more than ever, we ask Canadians to celebrate and create awareness of the history, heritage and diversity of indigenous peoples in Canada. It is also an opportunity to recognize the strength and resilience of indigenous communities.

We recognize the importance of indigenous knowledge, culture and ceremonies that occur during this time, celebrations that reflect the diversity of indigenous peoples across Canada and provide opportunities to share stories, traditions and culture in a way that keeps us connected.

June marks the sixth anniversary of #IndigenousReads, which is aimed to showcase literary works by first nations, Inuit and Métis authors and to help increase our understanding of indigenous issues, culture and history. Through socially distanced or online events, I urge all parliamentarians and Canadians to take time to celebrate National Indigenous History Month.

* * *

CANNABIS

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister was selling the idea of legal marijuana, he said, “We need to make sure we’re keeping our kids safe and keeping our communities safe by removing the black market and the criminal gangs and the street organizations from it.” It is clear the Prime Minister was making things up.

In the last two years, over a dozen multi-million dollar illegal grow operations run by organized crime have been busted in Ontario alone. Organized crime is making millions of dollars hiding

behind the loopholes in the Liberal cannabis legislation. The profits of the drug trade are being used to fuel more crimes. Some of the legal operations are not much better. Mars Wrigley, the famous candy company known for Skittles, is suing Canadian cannabis companies for using their branding on drugs, branding designed to attract children.

It will take a Conservative government to fix this mess.

* * *

NATIONAL ACCESSABILITY WEEK

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is National AccessAbility Week, with this year’s theme being “Disability Inclusion 2021: Leaving no one behind”.

When we remove barriers to employment to allow people living with disabilities to enter the workforce, we create a more positive work environment and a better bottom line. Our government is moving forward with a disability inclusion action plan, which will include a disability benefit and an employment strategy.

Locally, I have seen outstanding work done by organizations such as Goodwill Amity Group, Community Living Oakville, Community Living Burlington, and Xplore Employment, which is enhancing hiring practices to maximize business potential through hiring people living with disabilities.

My good friend Karina Scali lives with Williams Syndrome, but that has not held her back. She will graduate in 2022 with an early childhood education diploma at Sheridan College. This is why disability inclusion matters. It is so that people like Karina can succeed and thrive.

* * *

[*Translation*]

WORLD MILK DAY

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, Tuesday, June 1, is World Milk Day.

It is an opportunity to recognize the contribution of dairy farmers, who work hard to bring to our tables safe, high-quality milk, as well as other much-needed milk products, such as butter, yogourt and cheese. Dairy farmers represent a driving economic force in rural municipalities and contribute to the dynamic use of our land.

Let us show dairy farmers that they are important and let us do everything we can to quickly pass Bill C-216. Farmers should not have to worry about their market shares being undermined again. All of the parties have paid lip service to the idea of protecting supply management. We are now asking them to put their words into action.

Let us hurry up and pass Bill C-216 and protect supply management. Let us raise our glass of milk to the health of our local dairy farmers.

* * *

WORLD MILK DAY

Mrs. Lyne Bessette (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Milk Day. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge our dairy farmers, who play a key role in Canada's agricultural sector and our economy.

Canada is proud of its dairy industry, which adheres to some of the strictest quality standards in the world. Our farmers are also innovating to make their operations as environmentally friendly as possible. Canadian milk now has one of the smallest carbon footprints in the world.

The dairy industry is the lifeblood of our rural communities. This year, I had the pleasure of speaking with local farmers in my riding of Brome—Missisquoi a number of times. Our government has always been there to support them, and I will always make the growth of this industry my priority.

I invite all Canadians to grab a glass of milk or an ice cream cone and join me in celebrating World Milk Day.

* * *

• (1405)

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENT WEEK

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week is Canadian Environment Week, which seeks to encourage us to help protect our environment. That is a subject that my Conservative Party colleagues and I care a lot about. The health and safety of our planet are at stake. We are talking about what we will leave our children and future generations. This is my responsibility as a father.

I would have liked to be able to tell the House that a lot of progress has been made under this government, but unfortunately, the Liberals' broken promise to plant more than two billion trees and their failure to respond to the urgent need to act now to help our environment are just a few examples of this government's lack of commitment and incompetence. Even Greenpeace is criticizing this government.

Tomorrow is Clean Air Day in Canada. Let us work together to keep our air clean. We cannot celebrate the government's achievements this year, but next year's Canadian Environment Week will be an opportunity to see that, with a new Conservative government and its environmental plan, greenhouse gas emissions will have been reduced with the help—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

* * *

[English]

FRONTLINE HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Madam Speaker, vaccines are the way out of the pandemic and there is nothing more important than each one of us doing our part.

Statements by Members

For most of us, that simply means getting our shot. However, for the incredible frontline health care professionals and volunteers across our country, it means an unending commitment to help others receive their shot.

For example, our East Toronto Health Partners have led a phenomenal effort, including through pop-up clinics, to make sure no one is left behind. They even set a national record of over 10,000 doses administered in less than 24 hours. I was glad to be one of them. Thanks to these collective efforts, the single-dose strategy has saved many lives, and Canada is on pace for both a higher level of full vaccination and a much faster overall rollout than almost every other country.

No, it has not been perfect, and yes, we must do much more to address barriers to global vaccine equity. However, for today, on behalf of Beaches—East York, I just want to thank every single person who has contributed. We are lucky to live in Canada and to be surrounded by so many people who bring such compassion and hard work to our communities.

* * *

JATINDER SINGH RANDHAWA

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment and recognize the achievements of Jatinder Singh Randhawa, a Surrey local and friend who championed Punjabi arts and culture across Canada.

Since 2008, the Shan E Punjab Arts Club he founded has taught thousands of youth in the Lower Mainland the art of Punjabi bhangra and giddha dance. From the Olympics to Parliament Hill, Mr. Randhawa's students delivered his passion across the country. He was affectionately called the "King of Bhangra". He was a father to Bhavneet and husband to Rupinder.

While his loss has left a deep wound in the entire Surrey community, his contributions will continue to inspire the coming generations to love the arts, live passionately and give it forward.

* * *

NORTH REGINA LITTLE LEAGUE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday in Regina, hundreds of young boys and girls did something that many of us took for granted when we were children. They grabbed a bat and glove, and headed out to the ball diamond. Government lockdowns cancelled sports last summer, but with Saskatchewan's restrictions finally being lifted, baseball season was back on.

Statements by Members

Today, I pay tribute to the dozens of volunteers at the North Regina Little League. With very short notice and lots of uncertainty, they were able to pull it all together. It took a lot of effort to organize teams, book facilities and plan a season in such a tight time frame. I also want to thank all the parents who helped coach and those who helped get the fields ready to play. This will give us all a season to remember. Thanks to their hard work, kids were able to close their laptops and swap their COVID masks for batting gloves.

There is a magical baseball phrase that goes, “If you build it, they will come.” This year, we can add, “If you let them, they will play”. On behalf of everyone in Regina—Qu'Appelle, and especially starting pitcher Henry Scheer, we thank North Regina Little League.

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[*Translation*]

LOÏCK THOMAS

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a young boy back home in Madawaska—Restigouche is proving that one small gesture can make a big difference. Four-year-old Loïck Thomas was disgusted by all of the litter he was seeing, so in late March, he started picking up litter and putting it into garbage bags.

• (1410)

[*English*]

After having reached his first objective of collecting 1,000 garbage bags, this young boy has set himself a new challenge and is now aiming for 10,000 bags. Through social media, this beautiful initiative by Loïck and his family inspires people of all ages, even outside New Brunswick, to participate in this good deed.

How can we help Loïck to meet his challenge? It is very simple. A person can just post a photo of themselves and their garbage bag full of waste and share it on the Facebook page “Projet de Loïck Project”.

[*Translation*]

Let us all work together to help our planet, one bag at a time.

* * *

WORLD MILK DAY

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, June 1 is recognized around the globe as World Milk Day. This is an important day for Canada and especially for Quebec. It is a day to acknowledge the significant contributions made by the dairy industry, such as providing healthy and nutritious food, as well as dairy farmers' responsible, sustainable and conscientious practices.

Canadian milk is second to none. It is superior to its rivals in every respect. However, we must never forget that our dairy industry is under constant attack from foreign countries looking to scoop up market share with lesser-quality milk. We must never let our guard down. I am proud of our local dairy industry workers. We must protect them.

Our dairy industry is a world leader, and the hard work of our farmers, producers and processors does not go unnoticed. I encourage everyone to join me in raising a virtual glass to our dairy industry and to the Canadians who work hard to make it prosper. Let us continue to support them together.

* * *

WORLD MILK DAY

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Today is the 20th anniversary of World Milk Day.

[*English*]

This is a day to recognize Canadian dairy producers, who work hard supplying the country with nutritious products. Every day, our farmers wake up with a passion and drive to provide us with quality wholesome dairy products that are produced with care, safety and sustainability.

I have visited many dairy farms and have witnessed the hard work and dedication required to get quality products to market such as chocolate milk, yogourt, cheese and ice cream, to name a few. Please join me in celebrating World Milk Day by raising a cold glass to our Canadian dairy farmers.

* * *

SHANNEN KOOSTACHIN

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to describe the squalid and dangerous conditions that the children of Attawapiskat were being educated in, or the indifference of the government officials who knew these children might never see a real school, but let me tell the House about the fire that I saw in the eyes of 13-year-old Shannen Koostachin when she vowed that the little brothers and sisters of James Bay would have a safe, comfy school to go to.

Shannen lit a fire across this country. She took on the government. She inspired a young generation of activists because she said it was not acceptable that first nations children are being denied their rights in a country as rich as Canada. We lost Shannen 11 years ago today in a terrible accident. Her story lives on in movies and books, and as a comic book superhero, but most of all, Shannen's dream continues to challenge us.

I was honoured to know this young warrior. If she were here today, she would say that the systemic discrimination against this young generation of first nations children must end now, because every child has the right to hope and dream for a better future. That was Shannen's dream. We need to make it a reality.

[Translation]

JACQUES LACOURSIÈRE

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is not often that a historian leaves such a mark on his people that he himself becomes a prominent part of his own nation's history, but that is what happened to Jacques Lacoursière, whom we lost earlier today.

On behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to extend my condolences to his family, his loved ones and his magnificent region, the Mauricie. Jacques Lacoursière spent his life showing Quebecers that their history is as beautiful as that of any other country. His book *A People's History of Quebec* is one of our most significant history books. I will also highlight *Épopée en Amérique*, a documentary series he produced with Gilles Carle that explores our history in a different format.

Jacques Lacoursière was made a knight of the Ordre national du Québec, but his legacy was also recognized throughout the French-speaking world, as he was made a knight of the Ordre de la Pléiade and received the insignia of the Legion of Honour. Let us honour the memory and the work of Jacques Lacoursière. It is undoubtedly the best way to thank such a great historian. We will remember him.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Alberta has been an engine of economic growth for our country, but since the Liberals came to power, Albertans have suffered from their failed economic experiments. We suffered through job losses when the Liberals decided to work against Canada's oil and gas industry. During the months of lockdowns and uncertainty, we have experienced the highest unemployment rates in the country. Canadians need a dependable path out of this pandemic and we need a government that is serious about economic recovery.

Canada's Conservatives got Canada out of the last recession and we have a plan to recover the one million jobs lost during the pandemic. We are offering a clear alternative to the risk and uncertainty that is imagined by the Liberal government. The Conservative plan will safely secure our future and deliver economic growth and jobs for Canadian workers and their families. Our work will help those Canadians who have suffered the most during this pandemic and create opportunity in all sectors of the economy and in all parts of the country.

* * *

NATIONAL ACCESSABILITY WEEK

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to mark the beginning of the fifth annual National AccessAbility Week celebrating the contributions that Canadians with disabilities make to our great country. The theme this year is "Disability Inclusion 2021: Leaving no one behind", aligning with our plan to build back better. This includes engaging Canadians and

Oral Questions

developing the first-ever disability inclusion action plan and key investments in programs such as the enabling accessibility fund.

As part of our pandemic response, we worked tirelessly to put a disability lens on decision-making, ensuring that our supports and relief measures were disability-inclusive. As we move forward, we are more committed than ever to a disability-inclusive economic recovery that truly leaves no one behind.

I invite members and all Canadians to join the conversation around disability inclusion and to follow Accessible Canada on Twitter and Facebook to join the National AccessAbility Week celebrations.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the tragedy uncovered at the former residential school in Kamloops is only the beginning.

[English]

The tragedy uncovered at the former residential school is the latest tragedy in the national shame of the residential schools program. In the spirit of reconciliation and partnership, I ask the Prime Minister this: Will the government commit to swift action on calls to action 71 to 76 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report?

[Translation]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work on these calls to action. The discovery of the remains of more than 200 children at the former residential school in Kamloops is heartbreaking. We need to acknowledge that the residential schools are a reality and a tragedy that existed in Canada.

[English]

To honour of the memory of these lost children who got sent away to residential schools and never came home, we have lowered the flags to half-mast. We continue to work with families and communities across the country to put them at the centre of the healing and the research process. We will continue to work with them. We will honour their memories.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government is withholding troubling information regarding security breaches at Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory. We do not know how scientists with ties to the Chinese military received multiple security clearances. We do not know how these scientists got approval to send virus samples to China.

Oral Questions

As the world commits to investigating the source of the coronavirus, why is the Liberal government covering things up?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker, we believe in openness and transparency, including in matters touching on national security. That is why six years ago we created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians to study issues around national security, gathering members from all parties in the House to lean in carefully on things of high sensitivity. That is why we encourage the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians to look at issues like this, to make sure that we can find answers that all Canadians need to be reassured about.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's secret committee does not deprive Parliament of its ability to hold the government to account. It does not deprive Canadians of their right to know the truth, after countless cover-ups by the government.

Two scientists with connections to the Wuhan Institute of Virology were marched out of our top-secret lab. How did these scientists get high security approvals? How did they get approval from the government to send virus samples to China? Why is the government keeping Canadians in the dark?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are many questions that need to be pursued, and that is exactly why we created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians.

The fact that the Conservative leader just referred to it as “the Prime Minister's secret committee” goes to part of the problem of why the Conservative government, under Stephen Harper, for 10 years refused to bring in any oversight by parliamentarians of our national security apparatuses. We all remember the real concerns about Stephen Harper and Bill C-51 and labelling terrorists in Canada.

We brought forward a committee of parliamentarians who have the security clearances necessary to do this work.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two scientists with ties to the Chinese military were expelled from our top-secret laboratory. The Liberal government refuses to justify its actions.

How were the scientists able to get top security clearance for our laboratory?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are important questions that have to do with national security.

I know that members from the opposition party do not want to jeopardize national security. That is why every party is involved in the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. This committee has the power and ability to study the most sensitive issues around national security. That would be the best forum for getting answers to that question.

[*English*]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is saying that we are putting the security of Canadians at risk by asking basic questions of accountability to the government. The Prime Minister is putting Canadian safety at risk with his approval of transactions to Chinese state-owned enterprises and his refusal to act on Huawei. He is putting Canada's reputation globally at risk, as we are the only Five Eyes ally partnering with China at a time that it is taking our citizens hostage and committing cyber-attacks and human rights violations.

When will the Prime Minister finally take a serious approach to the risks with respect to Communist China?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we see once again that the Conservative leader and the Conservative Party will never hesitate to try to score partisan political points, including on the backs of our own national security.

Members of this government take seriously our responsibilities to keep Canadians safe. We will continue to. That is why, among other things, we created the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, something the Conservatives refused to do when they were in office. It has members from all parties, and they are able to come together and lean in deeply on national security issues. They have produced tremendous reports, including with strong representation from the Conservative Party.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the arts and culture sector expressed concerns about the initial version of Bill C-10, which amends the Broadcasting Act.

The Bloc Québécois proposed significant changes with respect to the ownership and effective control of businesses, new Canadian programming and new French-language programming. The Bloc Québécois also offered to ensure that Bill C-10 is passed before the end of the session.

However, the government is squabbling with the Conservatives instead of moving ahead on Bill C-10. Does the Prime Minister intend to ensure that the Broadcasting Act is passed this month?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the partnerships we have with several parties in the House, including the Bloc Québécois, to protect our artists and our content creators, I mean creators, across the country.

We recognize that the new reality of the digital age requires that we adopt new means to support the cultural economy across the country. We continue to move forward with Bill C-10, which will ensure that our culture is protected across the country, and we hope to pass this bill by the end of the session.

• (1425)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our “creatures” will need more than hope.

The Broadcasting Act is an emergency for the cultural community, an emergency for francophone artists. If it is not passed, it will be because the government is playing political chicken with the Conservatives at the expense of artists, creators, and Quebec's film and television industry.

Is the Prime Minister aware that if Bill C-10 is not passed by the House and the Senate by the end of June, he will have an extremely heavy political price to pay in Quebec and among artists?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has always demonstrated its commitment to artists and to the cultural community. It will continue to do so.

During this pandemic, we have implemented targeted measures for the arts community and our artists, who needed additional support. This government has been there for them since we first took office. We reversed the Harper government's cuts, and we have been there to protect the cultural community.

We will continue to work to get Bill C-10 passed. It is indeed concerning that the Conservatives are once again standing in the way of Canadian and Quebec culture, but we will be there to support it.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are still reeling from the discovery of 215 indigenous children at a former residential school in Kamloops. However, while Canadians are reeling from this horror, we cannot ignore the fact that indigenous communities continue to face injustice today. The Prime Minister is fighting indigenous kids in court, and continues to fight residential school survivors in court. As Cindy Blackstock says, “We need to make sure that the injustices stop today.”

Will the Prime Minister commit to stop fighting indigenous kids and residential school survivors in court, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear on this and many other issues in regard to the work we need to do together on reconciliation. Every survivor deserves compensation. We will be there for that. We will work with them and with communities to get there. We also need to fix child and family services. We were the first government to pass legislation to do just that.

We are on the cusp of transformative change. We have been working on it. Over the past years we have made many changes. There is more to do. We will continue to stand with indigenous communities across this country as we do that.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the discovery of the remains of 215 indigenous children has shocked the nation. We mourn the loss of those children, but we cannot

Oral Questions

mourn this loss without acknowledging the fact that indigenous communities continue to suffer injustices today.

Will the Prime Minister commit to stop fighting indigenous kids and residential school survivors in court, yes or no?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past six years, we have been working with indigenous communities and survivors across the country to heal from these tragedies and build a better present and future for all indigenous peoples.

As for compensation, we have recognized as a government that compensation will be given to residential school survivors. We are currently working on this with the community, in order to determine the correct amounts.

We will continue to be there to support indigenous communities and individuals across the country.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week President Biden ordered U.S. intelligence to investigate two likely theories on the origin of the coronavirus, one being that it originated from human contact with an infected animal, and the other that it came from a lab accident at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Last weekend, the foreign affairs minister said the government supports the U.S. investigation.

Given that government scientists at the government's lab in Winnipeg closely collaborated with the Wuhan lab, will the government make available to U.S. investigators all relevant documents, including the scientists' lab notes?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, the two individuals in question are no longer employed at the laboratory, and we cannot provide any further details.

As to the origin of COVID-19, we believe and support the approach taken by President Biden to investigate something that has turned the world upside down and killed over three million people. We feel it is important to do everything we can to determine where COVID-19 originated from.

• (1430)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that seven government scientists at the government's National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg collaborated with scientists in China, particularly at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We also know that one of those government scientists, Dr. Qiu, made at least five trips to China in a two-year period to collaborate on virus research.

Oral Questions

Seeing as the government says that it supports the U.S. investigation, will the Canadian government grant access to U.S. investigators to question scientists from the Winnipeg lab as they pursue the origin of the coronavirus?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that part of scientific research is open and collaborative research. We also know that we have a strong role to play in protecting Canada from human and cyber actors that pose real threats to Canadian research, to integrity, to intellectual property. While the opposition continues to stoke fear, we will remain focused on stopping the spread of COVID-19 and supporting the National Microbiology Lab to do its important work in fighting COVID-19 here domestically and internationally as we uncover the science that will lead us forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister would sure like us to stop asking questions about the Winnipeg lab, but the point is, top-secret information from that lab is currently in the hands of the Chinese military. The Prime Minister seems unconcerned, but he has to realize that nobody believes the Chinese People's Liberation Army intends to use that technology for humanitarian purposes.

Now that the damage has been done, can the Prime Minister confirm that no lab in Canada is currently collaborating with the Chinese military?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, either Conservatives do not understand national security or they do not care. The agency has provided documents in relation to this situation, with redactions to protect confidentiality, of course.

I encourage the Conservative Party not to use national security and put the national security of Canadians at risk for partisan gain.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, we most certainly do understand national security.

What we understand is that top-secret information was stolen from Canada. That is very clear. Now, as to whether the president of Health Canada has the power and the discretion to hide information about documents, we know he does not. The documents must be handed over to the committee as requested.

Does the Minister of Health agree with us, yes or no?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we will participate, and in fact those documents have been provided to the committee, with redactions to protect confidentiality.

Let me be clear. I would encourage the Conservative Party not to put the national security of Canadians at risk for partisan gain. Conservatives are playing a dangerous game. The member opposite knows that we have processes and procedures, and indeed committees that are empowered to take a look at these documents.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals initially failed to provide these documents, it was actually the member for Cumberland—Colchester, a Liberal MP, who put forward a motion at committee demanding the full disclosure of these documents, and all Liberals, including the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, voted in favour of it.

In 2011, Liberals, including the Prime Minister and the foreign affairs minister, voted for a motion that declared “the undisputed privileges of Parliament under Canada's constitution, including the absolute power to require the government to produce uncensored documents when requested”. That is a direct quote from a Liberal opposition motion that was voted for by the Prime Minister and the foreign affairs minister.

Does the government still believe that Parliament maintains these privileges?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, we see the Conservatives trying to stoke fear. Either they do not understand national security or they do not care. It is quite obvious. The agency has provided these documents as requested by the committee, with redactions to protect confidentiality. I encourage the Conservative Party to put the national security of Canadians in the forefront and stop these partisan games.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was clearly not an answer. When it comes to national security, holding the government accountable for its failures on national security is what we must do in order to uphold the national security of Canadians.

When someone affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Military Medical Sciences is working and gathering information at a top-secret Canadian lab, Canadians have a right to know what happened. They have a right to demand answers. Canadians are concerned about the government's willful blindness and naïveté when it comes to threats to our health and national security.

When will the government allow Parliament to do its job and recognize the rights and privileges that are founded in our Constitution when it comes to Parliament? When will the Liberals hand over these documents?

● (1435)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have been clear, those documents have been provided to the committee. In fact, the redactions were minimal, to protect the confidentiality of the situation.

Again, I would encourage the Conservative Party to stay focused on the national security of Canadians and not put it at risk for partisan purposes. We are proud of the critical role that the National Microbiology Laboratory is playing to protect Canadians and, indeed, to partner with researchers around the world to find the tools and the support that we need to get ourselves free of COVID-19 globally.

* * *

[Translation]

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Air Canada's planes have been grounded because of the pandemic, but its senior executives are flying high.

After receiving \$6.5 billion in government assistance, the bosses at Air Canada got greedy and gave themselves \$20 million in bonuses using taxpayers' money.

After laying off 22,000 people and fighting so that they did not have to compensate travellers for cancelled flight tickets, they are now rewarding themselves at our expense.

Will the government withhold the money meant for Air Canada until these fat cats give back their bonuses?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian airline industry was hard hit by the pandemic, and we are determined to support the thousands of Canadians who work in that industry.

The support for Air Canada comes with clear limits on executive compensation. This is an appropriate and necessary measure.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe the minister thinks that is okay.

The government is offering Air Canada \$5.9 billion on the condition that its senior executives cap their compensation at \$1 million a year, which is already quite a lot when the company depends on public funds to survive and when it just put 22,000 families in poverty by dismissing half of its workers.

Nevertheless, the bosses at Air Canada are giving themselves \$20 million in bonuses. They are basically once again thumbing their noses at Canadians.

Will the government withhold the money from Air Canada until the bonuses are paid back so that Quebeckers do not have to fund one cent of those bonuses?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

I want to note that in negotiating our support for Air Canada, we established clear caps on executive compensation. That is an important and necessary measure.

I also want to note that Air Canada agreed to a measure to ensure that every worker remains at Air Canada.

Oral Questions

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, when the current government was elected, it committed to all 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Sections 71 to 76 are very specific about “Missing Children and Burial Information”. Given the horrific discovery of the remains of 215 children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School, will the minister commit to full financial support and other necessary supports for a thorough investigation, not only there but at all former residential schools in Canada?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for all her heartfelt agency on this.

Our thoughts are with the survivors, families and indigenous communities across Canada. The discovery is a reminder of the harms done to residential school attendees and the trauma that survivors and families continue to face every day. We have supported the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to develop the national residential school student death register and create an online registry of residential school cemeteries.

In budget 2019, we allocated \$33.8 million to engage with indigenous communities on how to implement calls to action 74 to 76 and—

• (1440)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with the tragic news out of Kamloops, it is clear that many indigenous Canadians and residential school survivors are being forced to relive their trauma. As Chief Casimir said, “We see you, we love you and we believe you.” We need to ensure that supports are available as they come to terms with these latest findings, as well as their own truth and trauma.

In addition to the support hotline, will the minister commit to requested mental health support?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that exceedingly important question. The answer is yes.

I will take this opportunity, because there is not a single indigenous community that has not been affected by this, to remind people that there is a crisis referral service hotline they can access by dialing 1-866-925-4419.

I have reached out directly to Chief Casimir and the surrounding communities to ensure that they have the full support of the Government of Canada and Indigenous Services Canada as they go through this difficult, emotional time. We will be there for them. We will be working with the First Nations Health Authority to be there for them, now and for the foreseeable future.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AIRLINE INDUSTRY

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in December I specifically asked that the airline assistance plan not include executive compensation. Today we find out that Air Canada paid its executives more than \$20 million in bonuses after receiving nearly \$6 billion from the government.

Why was the government unable to negotiate an agreement that left out executive compensation and instead focused on Canadian workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian airline industry was hard hit by the pandemic, and we are determined to support the thousands of Canadians who work in that industry.

The member is mistaken because the reality is that support for Air Canada comes with clear limits on executive compensation. This is an appropriate and necessary measure.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am certain I am not mistaken.

[English]

The top five executives alone received close to \$2 million each, while tens of thousands of workers lost their jobs or went on government programs. I was clear in my demands in December that it was workers who were desperate for help and not executives. Why was the government incapable of negotiating an agreement that excluded executive compensation instead of focusing on Canadian workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. The government absolutely believed that limits on executive compensation were a priority in our negotiations with Air Canada. That is why the agreement that we reached with Air Canada includes clear and strict limits on executive compensation. These restrictions will be in place for 12 months after the loans have been repaid. Let me also emphasize that Air Canada has committed to maintain employment at or above April 1 levels.

The Speaker: It appears there was a problem with the translation.

[Translation]

Can the Deputy Prime Minister repeat her answer so that everyone can hear it?

[English]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that our government absolutely agrees that it was necessary and it was a priority to include strict limits on executive compensation, including stock options, in our loan agreement with Air Canada. Those restrictions are there, and they will be in place until 12 months after the loans are repaid.

I want to emphasize also, since I know everyone in the House cares about workers, that Air Canada has agreed that employment levels will remain at or above April 1 levels.

• (1445)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bodies of 215 precious children were found at a residential school, and indigenous people are asking for justice, not words. However, the government will not stop taking first nations kids to court.

A human rights tribunal found that the government discriminated against first nations kids. It is now a choice. It is time to make it right. The government cannot have it both ways, offering sympathies for a mass grave while continuing to persecute children in court.

When will the government make the right choice and stop fighting first nations children?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now is in fact the time to stand with the communities that are most deeply affected and support them in their time of grieving.

On the member's question, we have said time and time again that we will compensate first nations children for the discrimination they suffered at the hands of child and family services. We continue on those paths. We continue to work with the three competing court cases to ensure fair compensation to those who have suffered harm.

We will continue on the long path toward transformative change to ensure that no child is apprehended again.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Mi'kmaq fishers from the Sipekne'katik First Nation have been abandoned by the government. DFO has decided that they cannot fish now even though this is a clear violation of their treaty rights to earn a moderate livelihood, which is what indigenous fishers are trying to do: earn a living, feed their families and, in some cases, work their way out of poverty.

They are also afraid of violence from non-indigenous fishers, with good reason. Their property has been burned; they have been threatened and assaulted, and the government has offered no plan to ensure their safety. This is not reconciliation.

What is the government doing to protect the rights and safety of indigenous fishers?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that first nations have an absolute right to fish for a moderate livelihood. We have put in place a plan this year that allows them to fish for that moderate livelihood as we work toward long-term agreements. The plan we put in place for this year is flexible, it allows first nations to sell their catch and it ensures they are the ones who develop their fishing plans.

We will continue to negotiate for longer-term agreements, because we know how important this is to first nations.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Palestinian civilians are suffering profound hardship as a result of the recent violence, displacement and loss of life, and have endured unimaginable pain. All human beings are born with equal, unalienable rights. We must all work to uphold them.

Canadians, including residents of my community, are expressing deep concern over these rights, the urgent need for humanitarian assistance in Gaza and the West Bank, and unfettered access to provide this assistance.

Could the Minister of International Development tell the House how Canada will support Palestinians in coping with the effects of this devastating violence and work to build a foundation for lasting peace?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Mississauga—Lakeshore for his hard work on this issue.

The \$25 million in funding announced last week is being provided through trusted partners and will ensure that emergency relief quickly reaches Palestinian civilians whose humanitarian needs have only been worsened by this conflict. It will go beyond these urgent and immediate needs to also support recovery and rebuilding efforts. It will support critical peacebuilding and people-to-people initiatives to advance the goal of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

* * *

[Translation]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has among the highest rates in the world for cellular services. The Liberals promised in their campaign to reduce prices by 25% by increasing competition, but two CRTC rulings are at odds with these promises. New telecommunications companies have already decided not to reduce the price of the services they offer.

Are the Liberals still committed to reducing prices by 25% for all Canadians, yes or no?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague, for whom I have a lot of respect.

Oral Questions

As he knows, we are still working toward offering affordable prices to every Canadian in the country. We are ensuring that there is greater competition in the telecommunications sector and that there is innovation. That is why we always promote competition in order to lower prices, while striving to improve quality and increase coverage of telecommunications services in Canada.

That is exactly what we have been doing since the beginning of our term and that is what we will continue to do every day.

• (1450)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, among the new competitors that were planning to enter the market and offer lower prices, some are now announcing that their plans are cancelled.

Two CRTC rulings have favoured the large telecommunications giants, limited competition and prevented a flourishing free market in the sector. That is not a recipe for lower prices. The Liberals promised a 25% reduction in prices by this coming October. They are not even close to meeting that promise.

My last question was clear. Again, will every Canadian get a 25% cut in cellphone prices?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the recipe for success is to be relentless in focusing on affordability, competition, innovation and connectivity across Canada. That is why our government, since day one, has been relentless in promoting competition to lower prices, while working to improve quality and increase the coverage of telecom services in Canada.

What I do every time I talk to executives in the telecom industry or Internet service providers is ensure they provide affordable services to Canadians. I will continue to do that every step of the way.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is Pride Month and still, after many years, we have seen the Liberal government fail to make a permanent refugee program for the LGBTQ+ community. Many members of the community are stoned, hung, assaulted and have many other horrifying acts committed against them just for being who they are.

When will the government stop the lip service and commit to a permanent program to help LGBTQ refugees?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the last three years in a row, Canada has led the world when it comes to resettling refugees. We have worked very closely with the LGBTQ2 community to ensure that members of that community are able to resettle to Canada despite the challenges that have been posed by COVID-19.

We will continue that work to uphold human rights around the world, and we will do so proudly.

The Speaker: I want to remind hon. members that when setting up and they know they are either going to ask a question or possibly answer one, to hook up where the ISP is solid so everyone can hear and it does not damage the ears of translators. It is a courtesy of which I want to remind all the members.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. To add insult to injury, there was no French interpretation coming through the headset; it must have gotten lost in the woods.

[English]

The Speaker: I am going to ask the hon. minister to try answering that again. We did not get the translation because of the quality of the sound. Again, the question is on the transmission quality. I will let him try again.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, as I said, for the last three years in a row, Canada has led the world when it comes to resettling refugees [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Speaker: I believe we have lost connection. We are going to move on to the next question. The hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we hear the same old answers with no action, and let me show how.

The Liberal government has repeatedly failed to stand up for persecuted refugees. It ran away from standing up to China, which is committing genocide against Uighur Muslims, and shows no action for persecuted Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan. It has created a Liberal-made backlog nightmare, causing further hardship to families and minority groups.

When will the platitudes end? When will the Liberal government show some fortitude and step up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for our government, LGBTQ2 rights are human rights. Whether that is domestically or internationally, Canada will always take a strong position. Our record demonstrates that.

What is unfortunate is that the member is very bold to ask that question when just yesterday we were debating Bill C-6 in regard to protecting LGBTQ2 rights for Canadians. What are the Conservatives doing? They are holding up that legislation. The Bloc, the NDP and the government are ready to call the question, and the Conservatives are stopping it. Maybe they want to get their act together and take a position, and state that LGBTQ2 rights are in fact human rights.

• (1455)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec wants Bill 101 to apply to federally regulated businesses to make French the language of work. In its white paper of linguistic reform, the federal government says that it plans to use the Official Languages Act to protect French. It is not the same thing. Bill 101 protects French. The Official Languages Act protects bilingualism. Bilingualism is doing just fine. It is French that is struggling.

Will the government allow Quebec to protect French, or will it override Quebec to protect bilingualism?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not at all about overriding Quebec. On the contrary, we are working with Quebec. That is probably why the Bloc Québécois is so upset. That is probably why it is trying to pick a fight where there is no fight to pick. Quebec determined that French is in decline, and so did the Government of Canada. Now, much to the Bloc Québécois's chagrin, both levels of government are working together to strengthen and promote this language we cherish and love so much.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for once, Air Canada is not the top source of complaints to the Commissioner of Official Languages. Of course, no one was flying this year.

I bring this up because Air Canada is subject to the Official Languages Act, but the company still could not care less about French.

The problem is that the federal government's strategy to protect French is to expand the application of the Official Languages Act to all federally regulated businesses.

Why does the government not simply tell Quebec to enforce its Bill 101 instead of doing to Quebec workplaces what it did to Air Canada?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec lieutenant made a similar comment, but the Bloc Québécois is looking to pick a fight. We agree that more protections are needed for the French language.

The current Liberal government is the first federal government in history to acknowledge that French is a minority language in this country. In our reform, we plan to offer protection for French as the language of work and of service in Quebec and in certain communities across the country with a large francophone population. We will work within our jurisdiction to protect French outside of Quebec and also within Quebec.

Oral Questions

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that two scientists, as well as students, from Communist China gained security clearance, had access to and entered the National Microbiology Laboratory. Even more disturbing is that the federal scientists are collaborating with a Communist government that wants to hurt Canada.

I know the Prime Minister said he admires China's basic dictatorship, but my constituents do not. Will the government commit to finally cutting ties with scientists working for China's Communist regime?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what that mishmash is.

Let me be clear, the National Microbiology Laboratory is a Canadian jewel. It has provided an immense amount of support to Canadians during COVID-19 and, indeed, before. World-renowned science, in collaboration with many other countries, is conducted through the lab and through its partners.

In terms of national security, clearly the Conservatives are playing a dangerous game. Either they do not understand or they do not care about national security. I would encourage them not to use the security of Canadians, putting the security of Canadians at risk, for partisan gain.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives have repeatedly tried to get answers for Canadians about how a military scientist from the Communist Chinese regime got access to the Level 4 National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg. The government continues to stonewall and refuses to provide answers. Recent polling has shown that over 60% of Canadians have had their trust in the federal government permanently eroded. Anyone watching, as Liberal ministers continue dodging in question period, can quickly see why.

Canadians deserve a government that they can trust. What is the Liberal government trying to hide?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that this government puts their security, safety and health at the forefront of everything we do. In fact, what Canadians do not appreciate is partisan games with their security. That member opposite knows that we have provided those documents to the committee with minor redactions for the protection of confidentiality. I would encourage the Conservative Party not to put the security of Canadians at risk for partisan gain.

* * *

● (1500)

HOUSING

Mr. James Cumming (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, home prices continue to rise beyond the affordability level for many Canadians. In my city of Edmonton, a single-family detached home increased by more than 11% year over year in the month of April. Inflation in this sector is particularly pronounced and on top of that, we have new mortgage rules. The U.S. is doubling tariffs on

Canadian softwood lumber, yet another factor in increasing the prices on homes.

When will the Prime Minister take decisive action versus hollow announcements to improve housing affordability in this country, or will he continue to ignore this massive issue?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we remain firmly committed to tackling the crucial issue of housing affordability in Canada. Our government is focused on ensuring that Canada's residential housing stock is not used unproductively by non-resident, non-Canadian investors. That is why we are proposing an annual 1% tax on the value of non-resident, non-Canadian-owned residential real estate that is considered to be vacant or underused.

On top of that, budget 2021 is our fifth consecutive budget where we are investing more than ever before in affordable housing for Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is World Milk Day and I would like to thank all our farmers. In Quebec, 11,000 producers on 5,000 farms produce the milk, butter, cream, yogourt and cheese that we are proud of and even the ice cream that I love.

In 1972, the Trudeau Liberal government put in place the supply management system that protects our Canadian producers.

Would the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell us about what our government is doing for the dairy sector?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of Canada's dairy producers, and we keep our promises to them.

They have already received more than \$1 billion in compensation for the agreements signed with the European Union and the trans-Pacific region. They already know what they will receive in 2022 and 2023 and compensation for the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement will follow. We remain committed to protecting the supply management system and not giving up any more market share.

I wish everyone a happy World Milk Day.

The Speaker: I would like to remind members that they cannot name members. They can refer to their riding or their title in the House. I just wanted to give a little reminder.

The hon. member for Beauce.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today being World Milk Day, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Oral Questions

Over the past year, the government has finally made some announcements for dairy farmers, but our dairy processors are still waiting. Negotiations on compensation under CUSMA have stalled. Meanwhile, our American counterparts are already disputing the tariff rate quotas.

What will the minister do to better protect the Canadian dairy sector and the products that cross our borders? When will we see real help for processors?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind my hon. colleague that in the last budget, we announced compensation for Canada's dairy, poultry and egg processors. I am also working closely with the Minister of International Trade to follow up with the Canada-Quebec committee. We are confident that we are applying the tariff rate quotas in accordance with the agreement we very carefully negotiated with the United States.

I want to reassure all milk producers that we have their backs.

* * *

SENIORS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government that chose to create two classes of seniors in Canada also had the bright idea of creating two classes of compensation for damage created by the Phoenix system.

As a result, retirees who are entitled to compensation for failures in the system will have to wait until after the others to claim their due. The Treasury Board does not have any forms to submit to retirees for compensation because the forms will not be available for a few months.

One retiree wrote to us saying, "I am still furious since I do not yet know when the money will be paid to me."

Why is this government treating these retirees as second-class citizens?

• (1505)

[English]

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure my colleague that we are working on behalf of seniors who have worked all their lives. They deserve to have a safe and financially secure retirement. They deserve to be paid their benefits and the payments that they require. We are working very hard to make sure that all seniors receive the payments and the benefits that they are entitled to.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over this past Victoria Day weekend, there were three people shot in Toronto, four shootings in Ottawa, and one person killed and four wounded in a Mississauga shooting. The Lower Mainland in B.C. has seen increased gang violence, with over 20 killings so far this year. Winnipeg experienced a string of three shootings in just one day, last month.

The Liberals' soft-on-crime approach has resulted in huge gang-crime increases and gang violence across this entire country. When will the government start working to protect our communities?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member that we promised Canadians we would strengthen gun control, while his party has promised Canadians that it would weaken it.

We have given the law enforcement agencies across this country \$327 million to strengthen their response to gun and gang violence. The member voted against that. We have also brought forward legislation that has identified the three ways in which criminals gain access to guns: smuggling—

The Speaker: I apologize for the interruption, but there is a problem with translation.

I will ask the hon. minister to start his answer again.

Hon. Bill Blair: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question the member has asked because it gives me an opportunity to remind him that we have promised Canadians we would strengthen gun control, while, of course, his party has promised the gun lobby that it will weaken it.

We have also made significant investments of \$327 million in law enforcement's ability to do gun and gang investigations, a budget measure that the member voted against.

We continue to invest in kids and in communities, but we have also brought forward new legislation identifying the ways in which criminals gain access to guns, and strong new measures to deal with the smuggling of guns, the theft of guns and the criminal diversion of guns. We will continue to work hard to keep Canadians safe. I would encourage the member to support those initiatives and support law enforcement's efforts to keep—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vimy.

* * *

[Translation]

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has affected many Canadians, including young families. My constituents have had to balance work and family, which has resulted in many additional expenses.

Can the Minister of National Revenue tell the House what our government is doing to support families with young children during this difficult time?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vimy for her important question.

Many families have experienced financial difficulties during this pandemic. This is why we announced a Canada child benefit supplement of up to \$1,200 per child under the age of six.

Last Friday, the first payment was issued directly to parents. This measure will help 1.6 million families. The Canada child benefit gives nine out of 10 families more tax-free income. This benefit is indexed to inflation and has helped lift 435,000 children out of poverty since 2015.

My message to families is clear: We will always be there to support you.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this week is Environment Week in Canada. My question to the Prime Minister is this. Would it not be a wonderful thing if, during Environment Week, the environment committee strengthened Bill C-12, the so-called net-zero climate accountability act?

Specifically, one of my amendments has been rejected, and I would be so grateful to know from the Prime Minister why the government does not want the climate targets and climate plans to be based on the best available science. Right now the bill says the best available science must be merely taken into account. Surely we would not just take it into account when we look at COVID. We base our decisions on science.

• (1510)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wish the member a happy Environment Week.

The best available science tells us that we must achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, and certainly we are committed to meeting that target. With this legislation, we are enshrining that commitment in law.

We will be further strengthening this bill to include a number of amendments, including a 2025 review of our 2030 target and an interim emissions reduction objective for 2026, and enshrining the principle of progression of future targets. This legislation is very much a win for Canadians, who expect their parliamentarians to have a real plan to fight climate change and to build a clean growth economy.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-8, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 94), be disposed of as follows:

a) The bill be deemed concurred in on division at report stage; and

Points of Order

b) following Private Members' Hour on Thursday, June 3, 2021, the bill shall be considered at the third reading, a member of each recognized party and a member of the Green Party each speak for not more than 10 minutes followed by five minutes for questions and comments and, at the conclusion of the time provided for debate or when no member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the bill be deemed read a third time and passed on division, and that the House then proceed to Adjournment Proceedings pursuant to Standing Order 38.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member moving the motion will please say nay. It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that after I asked my question about supply management earlier, you intervened and said that I had mentioned the name of a sitting member of Parliament, but I was referring to Pierre Elliott Trudeau in 1972. I would ask you to make any corrections necessary.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. I apologize, because that was not my intention. I do thank you for giving me the opportunity to remind everyone of the rules.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also rise on a point of order.

I would like to start by pointing out that the current Prime Minister was exactly six months old at the time the member for Châteauguay—Lacolle was referring to when she talked about his father.

[English]

We all recognize that we are at the beginning of June and in the last stretch of this session. We all recognize there are some serious and concerning issues for each and every Canadian that we have to debate in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

The House is currently meeting in a hybrid format because of the pandemic. When we accepted the procedural rules of the pandemic, we did so in good faith to ensure the health and safety of parliamentarians and of everyone we work with here in the House, in the buildings around Parliament Hill and in our ridings.

[English]

This provision is very serious, and we shall respect it based on the health of the people.

Points of Order

[Translation]

Just because the House is meeting in a hybrid format does not mean members, let alone ministers, can sit outdoors. Oral question period is a serious affair. It is inappropriate to see a minister sitting outside in a forest, even in a hybrid sitting of the House. That is our opinion.

[English]

More than that, I have to raise the point that during question period, for a full 10 minutes no Liberal members were in the House of Commons.

[Translation]

It is totally unacceptable that for 10 minutes during question period, not a single Liberal parliamentarian was sitting in this House—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I must remind him that he cannot say whether members are present in the House or draw attention to their absence. I know the hon. member is already aware of this rule, but I will take this opportunity to remind all hon. members.

While I am at it, before I move on to the next point of order, I would ask all hon. members who are going to ask or answer questions to set up in a neutral location where the connection is good and they can be heard clearly. This will ensure that their colleagues who are interested in what they have to say are able to hear them. It also allows the interpreters to hear them and interpret what they are saying, so that those who do not speak the same language can understand what is being said.

• (1515)

[English]

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is on the same point of order. Notwithstanding that we are not supposed to reference the presence of members in the House, I suggest that indeed many members from the Liberal Party were in the House. They are participating virtually. This goes to the rules we adopted. They specifically say that members can be—

The Speaker: I am going to stop this right now. I am not sure I want to continue this argument, because we are not supposed to be referring to anyone in the chamber. Also, the fact that we are discussing it means it becomes a debate.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I am just trying to say that they are in the chamber—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: We want to make sure that everything is clear. Referring to someone's presence in the chamber, whether it is an absence or presence, is not allowed, and that rule has gone on for a long time. The main reason for it is that during sessions, MPs have obligations that sometimes take them out of the chamber and it is impossible for them to be here. I am sure we do not want to insult anybody or hurt anyone's work. I am sure they are doing work on behalf of the government, no matter where they are.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am looking for some clarification. I have always been aware that we cannot speak of the presence or absence of a specific member, but I did not think that this extended to empty benches. I guess you are saying that it does extend to empty benches.

The Speaker: I also want to remind the hon. members that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly. I thank the member for her intervention, but members are in the House, according to the convention, because they are joining us virtually.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, you were right to call me to order. I will be more careful next time.

You mentioned earlier in response to our colleague from Kingston and the Islands that we were having connection problems and that the connection was not good. Technically, the connection is working fine here in the House of Commons.

The Speaker: Again, I must remind the House that we cannot do indirectly what we cannot do directly.

[English]

The hon. Minister of Justice is rising on a point of order.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like a clarification regarding the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. When he asked a question during question period, I believe he used a prop, a milk carton, in delivering his question.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord wish to respond to what was said about his point of order?

[English]

I am afraid he has left already, but I—

An hon. member: Mr. Speaker, you cannot refer to the presence of a member.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am sorry; the member is right. I will resign. I am thankful for the reminder. Even the Speaker makes errors. That is why I am very conciliatory when people make mistakes.

There was an issue and a prop may have been used. I want to remind hon. members that using a prop in the chamber is not allowed, and that the minute a member's camera goes on they are in the chamber.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE TRANSFER OF EBOLA AND HENIPAH VIRUSES TO THE WUHAN INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY
The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before question period, I was talking about the politicization of the lab in Winnipeg by the Conservative Party, and alternatives that the Conservatives could have used with respect to what they put forward in their opposition motion.

I would like to expand on that, but first it is important that I emphasize three points.

First, Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory is in fact a secure facility. Everyone working at or visiting the National Microbiology Laboratory must undergo a security screening and adhere to strict security protocols, procedures and policies. That is a very important message as we talk about the lab, which I am very familiar with because of its location on Arlington. It is just outside of my riding of Winnipeg North, and I see the outside of it quite a bit.

With respect to the other two points, Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory plays a critical role in protecting the health and safety of Canadians, and the government is very much aware of that. It is also important to recognize that collaboration takes place among laboratories outside of Canada, which is critical to advancing public health research and science that is aimed at improving public health on a global scale, including research into infectious diseases, and I will start with that as background.

We need to realize that the Government of Canada does not in any way underestimate the importance of the lab. If we were to review question period in tomorrow's Hansard, the Prime Minister was very clear on the issue, and it goes back to what I was saying earlier today.

For years, while the Liberals were in opposition to the Stephen Harper government, we argued that there needed to be a mechanism in place to protect Canada's national interests when it came to security. I spoke in the chamber on many occasions back in those days about Five Eyes partners having intelligence committees except for Canada. When the Prime Minister was leader of the third party in the House of Commons, he also advocated that we needed to establish a security committee. Lo and behold, and no one should be surprised, within months of being elected, we had already put into place a process that ultimately led to the creation of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. Like our other Five Eyes partners, Canada had an intelligence committee.

Members of that committee, and this has been demonstrated over the last number of years, can do a lot of fine work for Canadians in protecting the national interests. We have already seen at least one report. The type of work it does is in the best interest of Canadians.

Business of Supply

It is a way to ensure that there is a certain level of transparency, even on delicate issues where confidentiality needs to be respected.

• (1525)

I was very disappointed in my Conservative friends across the way. I asked whether they had consulted or asked the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians to look into the matter. They seemed to want to throw it to the wayside, that it did not matter. They said that the special committee on China had to deal with it. In fact, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan had the audacity to stand and say that they could still do this, that they did not have to be completely reliant.

This is where it gets into what the Prime Minister indicated in question period, and that is that the Conservative leader would not hesitate at all to try to score political points, partisanship, even on the issue of national security.

If we go beyond the leader's round to when the Minister of Health spoke, she indicated very clearly to all members that the information being requested, at least in good part if not in whole, had been provided to the committee. The committee has the information.

This is the problem. From the Conservatives' point of view, they do not like the fact that certain parts have been redacted. Redactions occur because there is a need to protect issues surrounding confidentiality and personal issues. That is why if the Conservative Party were really more interested in national security, it would allow the National Security Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians to deal with it. However, that is not the real agenda of the Conservative Party of Canada.

The Conservative Party and its leader want to play politics with this issue. At a time when Canadians are concerned with the pandemic, are concerned about getting shots in their arms and the vaccine doses, the Conservative Party is more concerned about partisan politics. They want to see more information and call ministers before a committee. That is fine. I have always been an advocate of standing committees. They are creatures of their own and they will decide what they decide. There is a very strong element of independence to those committees.

I look back to Conservative tactics last summer. I would remind members of the House that literally thousands and thousands of pages were provided to a committee. One would think the Conservative Party believes there is an unlimited amount of personnel and resources to meet its every whim in trying to uncover an issue that it can call a scandal. The Conservatives continue to push that button, especially in the last few months.

Business of Supply

• (1530)

The government, led by a Prime Minister, is committed to being there for Canadians day in and day out, seven days a week, with a single focus on battling the pandemic. We will continue to make that a priority of this government and Liberal members of Parliament. Whether physically in the House or in their constituencies, where a vast majority of our Liberal members are because of the virtual Parliament situation, members are able to gauge what their constituents are telling them and can funnel that information back to where decisions are made.

When I look at the motion before us today and what it asks the government to do, I believe the Conservatives are somewhat misguided. I can only hope that other opposition parties will see that and not vote in favour of it.

We could have been talking about many things. Let us think about the remains of the children found buried last week in Kamloops. Let us think of the pandemic and the number of cases in some of our provinces, including my home province of Manitoba. Let's think about the billions and billions of dollars that have been spent and are proposed in the budget to be spent in the coming months. I would suggest the opposition could talk about these issues on opposition days.

The official opposition is trying to force its way on a special standing committee to compel the government to do something when, for all intents and purposes, it is just not needed. There are other venues in which this can be done. I would remind members, in particular members of the Bloc, the Green Party and the NDP, that information has been provided to the committee, albeit redacted for a good reason.

I ask them not to buy into the Conservative agenda, a partisan agenda, but to stay focused on what Canadians want the House of Commons to be focused on. There are many other things we should be spending the rare time we have to debate in the House of Commons—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, quite frankly, I am astounded that the member opposite would suggest that it is somehow partisan posturing to demand accountability of the government. It seems that he has forgotten the very basis of the parliamentary system in which we are all a part, which is that government is a function of Parliament, not the other way around, not simply an inconvenience.

Specifically to a comment that the member made during his speech, I would suggest that maybe he has not read the NSICOP Act, the act that empowers the NSICOP to do its work. It does not allow for parliamentarians or MPs to make a request for it to study things. I wonder if the member would like to correct the record regarding his comments on the NSICOP.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the member has a point, but parliamentarians from all political caucuses sit on that committee, which is an appropriate thing. Nothing at all prevents members of the committee, whether the Prime Minister, the leader of the official opposition or any member of the House of Com-

mons, from talking about it in hopes that the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians will accept this as a serious issue and do the fine work that it has been able to demonstrate very clearly over the last couple of years. I would not underestimate the potential of this committee.

I realize the Conservative Party did not support the need for a committee of this nature while it was in government, but for confidentiality and security purposes—

• (1535)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, my colleague takes issue with certain parties scoring political points at the expense of the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg. I would like to remind him that reports published by the national media clearly show how naive the Liberal government is.

According to those reports, members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army have access to our supposedly high-security facilities. What does he have to say about that?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I do not take, as much as possible, anything for granted. I realize there are unique and special relationships with countries around the world and between that country and Canada. At the end of the day, that has to be taken into consideration for a multitude of countries. I do not make any assumptions. I believe we have ministries that do their job and protect the national interests of Canada, depending on which country it happens to be, the issues of the day and so forth, and I have the confidence that it is being done properly.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague. I would rather be spending today talking about indigenous issues and the government's failure to take action on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action or supports for small businesses in the pandemic. Instead, we are talking about this motion because the government failed to be transparent on public health issues by not releasing documents that were requested by the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations in March, and again in May, with all-party agreement that the committee has a constitutional right to access these documents.

Does my colleague not agree that being transparent and releasing these public health documents would be the most effective way to combat disinformation and conspiracy theories? How is it that the government has not found a way to work with the Public Health Agency to find a resolution that respects the constitutional rights of parliamentarians?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, just because we have this unholy alliance of opposition parties saying there is no transparency, that does not mean there is no transparency. This government has demonstrated transparency even prior to the Prime Minister being Prime Minister of Canada, through proactive disclosure, where we had to bring the NDP kicking and screaming. I could speak on this endlessly, but suffice it to say that the member is wrong in this assertion.

There have been documents that have been requested, fulfilled and provided to the committee, albeit redacted. Is the member trying to say that we should not be providing redacted documents and there is nothing confidential, that we should just provide the whole document and should not care about national security and national interest? I think the NDP is being hoodwinked once again in terms of supporting this motion. I hope I am wrong.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier and throughout the debate we heard calls to action from the other side of the House to not be political and to be open and transparent, that this has nothing to do with politics and is about just being open and transparent.

Meanwhile, and I am not sure if the member caught it earlier, the member for New Brunswick Southwest actually suggested that the member from Pickering, the parliamentary secretary, might be working for the Chinese government. Here we are, talking about not wanting to be overly partisan and political; meanwhile, we get accusations like that coming from Conservatives.

I am wondering if the parliamentary secretary can weigh in with his thoughts on that.

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, not too much could be said inside the House that would surprise me. On this particular issue, the issue of transparency and China, the biggest thing I would point out to those who might be following the debate is that whenever Conservatives use the word “transparency”, one should reflect back to a number of years ago when Stephen Harper actually negotiated a trade agreement of sorts with China and did not tell anyone about it. It never came back for any sort of approval.

I know the former leader of the Green Party would be able to talk at great length on that particular issue. We do not need to take any lessons from the Conservative Party on the issue of transparency when it comes to China.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member has spoken about NSICOP and he is clearly way off base in terms of the way NSICOP works. He asked why we could not ask it to study this. NSICOP could not answer the question and could not tell us if it was studying it. It could not disclose any information about the study without the permission of the government. The government could also prevent NSICOP from studying it if it wished.

I want to quote directly the words of Ms. Suzanne Legault, the Information Commissioner who testified about the bill that created NSICOP. She said:

...clause 8(b) of the bill undercuts this mandate by providing that the minister of a department may override a review where the minister determines it would be injurious to national security.

This override essentially turns the committee's broad mandate into a mirage. It will undermine any goodwill and public trust that may have built up towards the committee and, by extension, the national security agencies it oversees.

The Information Commissioner said that the government can shut down a study of NSICOP any time it thinks it is convenient and we would never know about it. That is why the work of parliamentary committees, completely different from committees of Parliament created by legislation, is so important.

Business of Supply

Does the member understand what NSICOP is and recognize that parliamentary committees still have an important job to do?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I understand the importance of this committee. After all, when we were in opposition, I was part of a Liberal caucus advocating that we have such a committee, while the member's own caucus at the time, Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, said they did not want a committee like this.

Am I surprised that the Conservatives today do not have confidence in the committee? I think they should have more confidence in their members on the committee and understand and appreciate the vital role they could play on this issue. I disagree with the member and the leader of the official opposition. I do not believe we should be playing partisan politics on the important issue of national security, especially during a pandemic.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, since the hon. parliamentary secretary has given me the opening to mention what happened with the Canada-China foreign investment protection act, I will say that it was never debated in Parliament. It was approved by cabinet as a Governor in Council approval for a treaty, and the treaty allows foreign corporations from the People's Republic of China to bring financial challenges against Canada for any decision of our government that they do not like.

This is just to bring it full circle to the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, it was the member who just spoke who educated me a bit more about it, and that is the reason I figured I should attribute it to her. It was a sneaky thing, and that is why I say that when it comes to transparency the Conservatives are not the party to try to emulate.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam this afternoon.

Like other members of this House and hundreds of thousands of Canadians, I have had the pleasure and privilege of living in Hong Kong. I was fortunate enough to be on hand for the territory's handover from Britain to the People's Republic of China on July 1, 1997. It was a heavy moment, with feelings of both apprehension and opportunity.

I visited Asia frequently after returning to Canada a year later, and I have fond memories of both rural and urban China, Hong Kong and remote Tibet. Today, I would not travel to any part of mainland China for any reason. This saddens me, because I have a deep affection for the Chinese people. One cannot travel for weeks at a time and leave untouched by their hospitality, fondness for family, tradition and cuisine. As well, I admire China's culture and long history of struggle, perseverance and accomplishments. However, travel today in the Middle Kingdom is risky, because the PRC's governing system is not subject to oversight, nor the rule of law. Instead, it is arbitrary and dangerous.

Business of Supply

As of Friday last week, May 28 to be exact, two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, have been illegally detained by the Chinese Communist Party for over 900 days. This is a disgrace. We have witnessed how Beijing has increasingly revealed itself to be at odds with international law, accountability and openness, as well as the rights of people, including China's own citizens.

Beijing, instead, is devoted to control and secrecy, at home and abroad. Its ruling politburo believes its opaque and autocratic institution offers its country superior economic and social outcomes compared to nations that govern themselves democratically, like ours. Certainly, too many Sinophiles, otherwise committed to democracy in their home countries, are tempted to agree, but I do not. Totalitarian nations can make societal advances, but to sustain them requires ingenuity and human freedom. These flourish when people are free and govern themselves as free people.

At the core of today's motion is Canada's long-standing commitment to accountable government. It appears to me, from the filibuster speeches made today by some Liberal MPs, that the government bench might well oppose this accountability motion. I should not need to remind government MPs that under our system, the federal government is accountable to Parliament, and Parliament is accountable to Canadians.

My hon. colleague, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, earlier today made the compelling case that the Liberal mismanagement of Winnipeg's National Microbiology Laboratory failed to protect Canada's national security and the safety of Canadians. We know that Canadian scientists worked at the Winnipeg lab with mainland Chinese scientists, including military scientists, on some of the world's deadliest viruses and pathogens. We know that the RCMP escorted NML employees out of the facility, and those two employees were terminated. Later, other senior staff resigned, suddenly and without explanation.

Does this not beg for answers? It does, which is why every MP on the special parliamentary committee examining Canada's relationship with mainland China voted, twice, for answers, by summoning the production of unredacted documents produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada concerning the transfer of deadly viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in 2019 and the subsequent revocation of security clearances for, and termination of, two employees.

PHAC has stonewalled Parliament, twice. Canadians, through their elected representatives, have a responsibility to scrutinize the federal government and find answers.

I wish to reinforce my position today by highlighting Speaker Milliken's ruling in 2010. Speaker Milliken confirmed that parliamentary committees, through this House of Commons, have unfettered constitutional power to send for persons and papers, a power greater than ordinary statute law, through parliamentary privilege. This fact is confirmed in section 18 of the Constitution and subsection 8(2) of the Privacy Act. It has been confirmed by our Supreme Court. It has been confirmed again by the House law clerk. Most recently, it has been confirmed, twice, by the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, on which I sit.

• (1545)

Today we are debating an egregious affront to the will of Parliament: Documents requested by a parliamentary committee are not being released to Parliament. It is a deliberate act infringing on the supremacy of Parliament, and it sets a precedent that could weaken our institutions if it goes unanswered. To put it in a different context, officials who report directly to the health minister are knowingly withholding pertinent information on a study regarding national security: specifically, how scientists with deep connections to the Chinese military were able to gain access to a Canadian high-level security-cleared laboratory with the world's most dangerous viruses.

We should consider some of the following information discovered through other channels. The member for Cloverdale—Langley City, on her Order Paper question from last year about the National Microbiology Laboratory, asked: "What is the reason that officials from the laboratory wrote on March 28, 2019, that they were really hoping that the transferred viruses go through Vancouver instead of Toronto, and fingers crossed?" The government's reply was, "These comments relate to the administrative process associated with transit through Toronto. The process for shipment through Vancouver is simpler."

Why is that? Should security not be identical at any of Canada's borders? Why would health officials hope for loopholes when dealing with viruses and pathogens?

The member for Cloverdale—Langley City asked about the lab's inner workings on the same Order Paper question concerning a September 14, 2018, email from Matthew Gilmour, the lab's former senior official. She asked: "Are there materials that the Wuhan Institute of Virology has that we would benefit from receiving?" The government's reply was, "There have been no requests from the National Microbiology Laboratory for materials from the Wuhan Institute of Virology."

Exactly what was the relationship between the two labs, and was it strictly one-way?

I highlight these questions today for the record because they demand further explanation, and because each of the responses received from the Order Paper questions was more revealing than the documents released by PHAC under order of a parliamentary committee. The question that remains is this: What is the federal government hiding? Is it bureaucratic incompetence, a gross security error, being duped by Beijing or some sort of malfeasance? Could it be how a foreign government scientist with direct ties to a foreign military received secret clearance to work at one of the most secure facilities in Canada?

Does the government not want to disclose more ill-advised partnerships that failed to protect sensitive information from being accessed by hostile foreign agents? Have there been additional instances of wilful ignorance concerning partnerships on sensitive technologies with counterparts in China, causing research to be delivered to the Chinese military? Why is a government that was elected in 2015, and that promised to be the most open and transparent in Canadian history, ignoring a lawful request by Parliament?

Business of Supply

It appears to me this is a case of Canadian officials ignoring our national security and bending over backwards to collaborate in a partnership with the Chinese military. Now those same officials are citing national security, or even privacy concerns, as justification for not disclosing important details to Parliament. They certainly earn points for moxie, but is it a cover-up? That shall be revealed by the Liberal government's next few moves in the House. We know now how easily our most secure institutions have been compromised by the Prime Minister. Canadians should be informed of the toll of that security lapse to our collective safety and security.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of the official opposition's motion.

However, we are somewhat concerned about the section that would give committee members the power to decide whether any of the redacted information should be made public. We think that is a problem and would set a dangerous precedent.

Can my colleague reassure us in that regard?

• (1555)

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Under the motion that we moved today, the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations would take steps to make absolutely sure that only information that does not jeopardize our national security is shared with the public.

Until now, we have asked the clerk of the committee to verify what is sent over. In the future, committee members would have a discussion to ensure that Canada's interests are protected.

[*English*]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, sometimes in these debates it is possible to get lost in the weeds. When we step back, we see allegations that something very serious happened with respect to the potential for viruses and research to be taken from one of the highest-security Canadian labs, here in Winnipeg, somewhere else to serve some other nation's interests, potentially against Canada. In those times, we need a government that can provide clear answers. Everybody here is sensitive to the importance of protecting Canadian national security and respects that not all information can be released to the public. However, the government has not shown that it is even trying to assuage the concerns of the opposition within the context of Parliament and in camera meetings, or to have the proper redaction of documents in a way that opposition members can feel confident in, rather than the government itself redacting them. I believe that is what the Conservative motion is trying to do.

We look at the government and we think of John McCallum, who had a very tight relationship with the Chinese government, and the lack of progress with respect to the two Michaels and the lack of a decision on Huawei. We are trying to get an answer Canadians can trust, and the government is not volunteering that.

Does the member want to speak to the nature of the leadership we need from the government to give Canadians an actual reassuring answer, instead of more of its expectation that we will trust it to get it done? It is clearly not getting it done, with respect to Canada's relationship with China.

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague is spot on. This is a question of the Canada-China parliamentary committee setting up a number of measures to protect the information we receive from PHAC so it can be reviewed by outside counsel, or parliamentary committee counsel, before it is reviewed by members to decide on next steps. Previously, the government deputy House leader threw out a red herring by saying the government could not release the information publicly and that it questioned whether we cared about national security. Of course we do. That is why we are taking that step, but that is also why we think these answers are important. We need to protect national security and find areas where it is lacking and how we can improve on it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member serves on the Canada-China committee, and one of the excuses we have heard from the government relates to the Privacy Act. However, we know, and it was argued at committee and agreed to by Liberal members at the time, that the Privacy Act cannot overrule the constitutional prerogatives of Parliament, and further, that the Privacy Act itself is explicit that information may be disclosed “for the purpose of complying with a subpoena or warrant issued or order made by a court, person or body with jurisdiction to compel the production of information or for any purpose where the public interest in disclosure clearly outweighs any invasion of privacy”.

This clearly makes nonsense of the government's arguments about the Privacy Act.

Mr. John Williamson: Madam Speaker, that is absolutely right. I think that reasoning, twinned with Speaker Milliken's ruling in 2010, will make it virtually very difficult for the government to vote against this. Should it do so, it would raise further questions about what exactly it is hiding.

Business of Supply

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Madam Speaker, patriotism is a glue that unites the people of any nation. It is a basic requirement for all elected officials, regardless of the tier of government in which they serve. As members of Parliament, we are given various privileges of position and authority for the sake of furthering the well-being and prosperity of our people, our institutions and our land. Canadians look to leaders for protection and care, especially during COVID-19. Trust and expectations of leaders are intertwined with people's assurance of survival, safety and hope for their future. Patriotism was demonstrated by our fallen heroes and war veterans who fought and died to defend our nation's ability to thrive in peace and freedom, and with the capacity to pursue our dreams. We do not take their sacrifices lightly.

I raise the issue of patriotism and the duties of patriotism, because these are at the heart of our debate today. We are debating a Conservative motion for documents related to the transfer of the Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. The motion reads: "That an order of the House do issue for the unredacted version of all documents produced by the Public Health Agency of Canada in response to the March 31, 2021, and May 10, 2021, orders of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, respecting the transfer of Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology in March 2019, and the subsequent revocation of security clearances for, and termination of the employment of, Dr. Xiangguo Qiu and Dr. Keding Cheng".

It is unfortunate that we have had to put forward this motion, in that we are seeing a pattern with the Prime Minister of dereliction of his patriotic duty to protect the people of Canada, dodging accountability and transparency, and attempting to conceal a host of ethical breaches that have occurred one after another consistently over the duration of his office. I would like to give a summary of his breaches to lead up to the premise on which I am seeking to ask my colleagues to vote in favour of this motion.

In 2019, the Prime Minister tried to interfere with the justice system by inappropriately pressuring the then Minister of Justice and Attorney General to intervene in an ongoing criminal case against SNC-Lavalin. The Prime Minister and his Liberal Party undermined any attempt from the opposition to fact-find and seek an investigation. In the end, rather than confess and apologize for his ethical breaches, he made the excuse that he was trying to save jobs. The outcome of that fiasco was the departure of three powerful female MPs from his party.

In 2020, regarding the WE Charity affair, the Prime Minister dodged questions for months, deliberately ignored the committee's will and presented redacted documents to cover up the truth and protect himself. He went as far as proroguing Parliament in the middle of a national crisis, when Canadians needed us to discuss solutions to help them.

These are just a couple of ethics breaches that had the largest news coverage, but the pattern of dodging accountability and cover-ups is a continuum with the Prime Minister. When it comes to Canada-China issues, the issues of patriotism and serving the best interests of Canadians are highly questionable. We have the government's deal with CanSino. The CanSino vaccine was Canada's first vaccine procured. The Prime Minister was confident about the deal in his announcement, yet the Communist regime of China held up

the vaccine and Canadians did not really know what was happening until four months later, when the government had to procure vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna.

Our country was in the midst of a crisis, and instead of keeping the minority Parliament properly briefed on the challenges facing our nation so we could act in the best interests of Canadians, the Prime Minister hoarded the information and hindered Parliament from being able to do its job. My question still stands. Why did the Prime Minister gamble the safety and well-being of our nation with a Communist regime that does not have our best interests at heart or take human rights seriously? Why did his pursuit of procuring our first vaccines from this regime, which is committing genocide against Uighur Muslims and detaining our two Michaels, take precedence over the lives of Canadians?

There is Huawei and the Prime Minister's refusal to ban its technology, despite Canada being the only Five Eyes nation not to do so. This is an issue of the privacy of Canadians and national security.

There is a recurring theme here. Canadians and the House have every reason to question the Prime Minister when he continues to make decisions that jeopardize our safety and national security. There has been a lack of accountability and transparency from the Prime Minister. We must pass this motion, because we need to get to the bottom of the truth on the transfer of Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. We need unredacted documents and to allow the committee to get to the truth to protect our nation's security. It is our patriotic duty.

The two scientists, Xiangguo Qiu and Keding Cheng, with deep connections to the Communist regime of China's military, lost their security clearances and were dismissed from the high-security infectious diseases lab in Winnipeg after they transferred deadly viruses to the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

• (1600)

The Globe and Mail reports that they were fired because of concerns over the intellectual property they were sharing with Chinese authorities. PHAC has said they were fired for reasons unrelated to the transfer of the two diseases and that the investigation goes back to 2018. However, since as far back as 2008, CSIS has been warning Canadians and the research community about the infiltration of the Communist regime of China for its own economic and military advantage.

Unredacted versions of documents PHAC was ordered to produce by the Canada-China relations committee on March 31 and May 10, 2021, must be provided for further review. We need to know why these scientists were fired. What actually happened? What implications does this have on the safety of Canadians and the security of our nation? It is the duty of the government to provide members with the tools we need to get to the bottom of this. We need to know the truth. Canadians deserve our utmost care, especially now when they need our help the most at this very vulnerable juncture.

It is clear that Liberals have a track record of covering up scandals and covering for China. We as the opposition, and any member of the government who would dare make a stand for accountability, must support this motion. Furthermore, I am still waiting for an apology from the Prime Minister for conflating Conservatives asking questions of accountability on this issue with stoking intolerance.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister why is he pandering to the Communist regime of China's strategy to silence the opposition from seeking the truth. I would like to ask him if he is trying to save face. Is he being complicit with the Chinese Communist Party?

The apology I am seeking is not just my own, it is that of Canadians who want to have confidence that we are safe and that our Canadian government puts the best interests of Canadians first. We need to not lose heart that, in the middle of this pandemic, a crisis, we have to be scrambling to have these kinds of discussions.

I agree with the many comments made today that we should not be having this discussion, but it comes to a matter of safety. If we do not have safety and security, and we allow whatever is at the root of all this, and if we do not know the truth, and we cannot tackle this issue for what it is, then in the long term, we do not know what our country will be up against.

This is a matter of asking the Prime Minister to be accountable for the decisions he makes. Trust has been breached again and again. We need to review document by document, testimony by testimony, in a non-partisan way, as true patriots of our country, to find a means for Canada to restore security and know where our security has been compromised, for who knows how long.

Canadians do not know the extent that the Prime Minister has pulled the wool over our eyes or if he has pandered himself to a dictator. Thought there is a pattern there that raises concerns. At this stage we need to know what damage control needs to be done to put our nation back on a path to national security. If there have been serious breaches, we need to restore our peace, and protect our privacy and data, so our safety will not be compromised.

Today, I call upon all my colleagues to remember our national anthem, the words, and to consider why they are serving in Parliament. Is it for their party? For their own agenda? Or is it for the people of Canada and the long-term flourishing future of our country? I call upon all my colleagues to support this motion for the sake of our national security, our people and the future of our beautiful Canada. May God keep our land glorious and free.

Business of Supply

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

As my colleagues have said, the Bloc Québécois is mostly in favour of this motion. However, we have a bit of a problem with part (g) because information could be disclosed and could compromise national security if it is made public.

Does my colleague believe that, if members of the special committee release this information, it could set a dangerous precedent?

• (1610)

[*English*]

Ms. Nelly Shin: Madam Speaker, at all times I believe that it is dutiful and responsible in terms of any committee or member disclosing public testimony, but it should be only information that will help the cause. As we know with committee work, it is not a one-man show or a one-woman show. It is a collaborative process. These issues may be raised in that collaborative process.

I believe that the spirit of this motion really is about drawing the line. It is about coming to a place where we can draw the line to finally say that we are tired of the lack of transparency and accountability. Our security could be and is probably at stake to a certain degree, as I shared in my speech. It is a matter of our future and resetting a pathway to more transparency and accountability in our Parliament.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, as a fellow British Columbian, I join my colleague in calling for more transparency from the government.

On this, though, we have seen the government and the Prime Minister, time and time again, instead of answering reasonable questions and working with the opposition to present more information so the public can know that the government understands that it must protect our national interests and ensure public safety, it has recriminated us. They have called us out for stoking tensions. It is the whole gamut.

If there is one thing the member would like more than anything from the government, in terms of its response, could she please name it?

Ms. Nelly Shin: Madam Speaker, I wish for once that the government and the Prime Minister would be able to own up, turn their will toward personal accountability, do what is right, and stop covering up things that could potentially put our country in danger.

I would say, in that spirit, that whatever they did in the past that was wrong, a moment of correction and self-assessment could help turn the page even for them.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, could the member indicate to the House if she has confidence at all in the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians? This committee could, in fact, do virtually everything that is being requested here. Does her party not have confidence in that committee?

Ms. Nelly Shin: Madam Speaker, I have a lot of confidence in my colleagues, the processes, parliamentarians and committees. However, I question what interferences happen to impact the effectiveness of the tools we have and how we use them.

My question is not about the competence of our fellow members. It is about the interferences, cover-ups and lack of accountability that prevent that effectiveness.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Surrey Centre.

I am grateful for the opportunity to rise in the House to speak to the motion before us today.

The Public Health Agency of Canada's National Microbiology Laboratory is known around the world for its scientific excellence and contributions to global health. The Public Health Agency of Canada engages in important research collaborations to advance science in order to improve public health here at home and abroad.

As we have learned over the last 16 months, pathogens that have the ability to transmit broadly can quickly reshape society on a global scale. Working closely as an international community is an essential part of the global public health ecosystem trying to keep us all safe.

A simple example of multinational collaboration can be found at the outset of this current pandemic. Chinese researchers openly published the SARS-CoV-2 sequence on January 11, 2020. This allowed National Microbiology Laboratory scientists to generate a functional, first-generation assay, which is a type of analysis or test for things like potency, in just five days. This was well ahead of the first SARS-CoV-2 case arriving in Canada.

While this did not stop SARS-CoV-2 from having a devastating impact on our society both domestically and globally, it would have been impossible to identify the first Canadian cases without this assay. This means that initial transmission chains would have gone unnoticed, and the devastation of that first wave would have been magnified. This multilateral co-operation helped partners around the world to develop tests to identify the virus much earlier than if each country had to identify the sequence independently.

Collaborating with laboratories outside of Canada is critical to advancing public health research and science aimed at improving public health on a global scale, including research into infectious diseases. As an institution with global partnerships, the National Microbiology Laboratory looks to open science and collaboration as a central tenet of its work while recognizing the need to balance open collaboration with a need for agreements that dictate the terms of each collaboration when appropriate.

Collaborations can include working together on a common research agenda, such as the World Health Organization R&D Blueprint. It could be about sharing pathogens through the Global Health Security Action Group Laboratory Network and others, collaborating on developing medical countermeasures and sharing critical surveillance data.

The National Microbiology Laboratory shares samples with other public health laboratories in a safe, responsible and transparent fashion to advance public health research. Sharing samples and information is carried out routinely within the scientific community as part of fostering a robust, global health agenda and to enable scientific advancements regarding high-consequence pathogens with potentially significant societal consequences.

The maximum containment laboratory has a long-standing, international reputation for security in the sharing of materials for the purpose of advancing scientific knowledge. Given the National Microbiology Laboratory's standing as a World Health Organization collaborating partner for viral hemorrhagic fever viruses, as well as its knowledge on regulations and standards for these types of transfers, the laboratory in Winnipeg is often asked to share its material.

It is the laboratory's objective to foster global co-operation rather than enable a monopoly of research on any given disease. In addition, the National Microbiology Laboratory's policies ensure that samples are only sent to reputable labs that meet the appropriate federal laboratory requirements. All transfers follow strict protocols and have the proper security protocols in place.

• (1615)

Furthermore, for close to 20 years, the National Microbiology Laboratory has been offering mobile diagnostic laboratory support. Working alongside the World Health Organization and Médecins Sans Frontières, the laboratory has supported missions to contain high-consequence pathogen outbreaks. Timely diagnostic capabilities located close to the outbreak zone have proven to be the most efficient way to mitigate further outbreak spread.

The National Microbiology Laboratory has demonstrated that international collaborations can lead to fruitful discoveries. Through the knowledge learned in part during deployments in the support of outbreak control, the laboratory was able to advance the development of an Ebola vaccine, which played an instrumental role in stemming the recent Ebola outbreaks in Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through discoveries such as this vaccine, Canada takes a leadership role as a global citizen using our knowledge to support the world well beyond our borders.

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The National Microbiology Laboratory is also involved in providing training to international laboratory professionals, and has previously trained scientists from many countries, including the United Kingdom, when it was developing its own level 4 program. The lab routinely engages the international community, through established scientific networks such as the global health security action group laboratory network, the alliance of North American public health laboratory networks, the Caribbean Public Health Laboratory Network and the Biosafety Level 4 Zoonotic Laboratory Network. Engaging with the international community through networks like these, the National Microbiology Laboratory is always seeking to find opportunities to enhance its connections to support its programs, all of which are ultimately in service of improving the health of Canadians.

With the current international focus on SARS-CoV-2, the National Microbiology Laboratory has been leveraging these fora to understand how other countries are meeting the laboratory and research challenges of this virus. As we have seen with the variants that have emerged around the world, the threat of COVID-19 to the health of Canadians continues to evolve. Working with the international community to increase our understanding of these emerging unknown variants has been critical to help Canada stay on top of the science related to SARS-CoV-2.

The National Microbiology Laboratory has also been collaborating with partners to securely share information and best practices on testing and sequencing and on how other countries have used available information to improve forecasting and modelling tools. These international resources and partnerships have been critical in the Public Health Agency of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to finish by reaffirming that the pandemic has clearly demonstrated that no country can single-handedly fend off highly infectious diseases. Canada must continue to collaborate internationally as a means not just to protect ourselves from the disease, but also to help protect citizens around the world. That can be done while respecting security requirements, including national security, and the protection of classified and sensitive information. The ability to continue this work must be safeguarded, and we have the mechanisms in place to do just that.

• (1620)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was very interesting to listen to the speech from the member opposite. I certainly hope that she does not conflate some of the very important issues here, including the need for the government to be held accountable for its actions by Parliament.

Specifically, she seems to talk about the need for intelligence and the significant issues surrounding the work done by the lab in Winnipeg. That is fair, but does she have comments as to why her government decided to silence the global pandemic early warning system that would have done significant work in ensuring that Canada was better prepared to respond to the COVID pandemic in its early days?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Madam Speaker, I have heard that before. However, in January 2020, I was at a high-technology round table meeting and we were briefed then that GPHIN was up

and operating and had identified a cluster of activity of concern in Wuhan, China. That was in January 2020. To my knowledge and based on what I was briefed, and this was not particularly a health issue but was about technology as a whole, at that time they were briefing that GPHIN had identified something in China in late 2019.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, with respect to the Winnipeg lab and this request for the unredacted version, I would like my colleague to comment on the fine line between national security and our need and right to get more information.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague's question is a good one, and there is no easy answer. After spending 31 years in the military and having held secret and top secret security clearances, I know how important it is to safeguard national security and how to do the work that needs to be done and still protect national security and the classified information out there. That is the concern, along with trying to find a balance.

That is what we have tried to do with the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. It is about having a place to take that kind of classified information to people who have the security clearance to deal with it. That is the balance we need to find.

That is a very good question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will speak to research co-operation.

My grandmother was a Holocaust survivor, and I am well aware of the horrific experimentation and violence in the name of science that happened in concentration camps. When we have a country that is running concentration camps, committing genocide and running forced organ harvesting on an industrial scale, I submit that we need to have some clear red lines when it comes to research co-operation. Liberal members are talking favourably about research co-operation, but they are saying nothing about the risks associated with co-operation when it involves countries that are going to use the information they gather for human rights violations and nefarious military purposes.

Does this member of the government believe that it is acceptable for Canadian labs to be collaborating with Chinese military institutions, such as the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Medical Sciences, under any circumstances, and is such co-operation happening at the moment?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon: Madam Speaker, I do not have the answer to your last question, but you're right that there are always risks. It would be easier if we could just do everything by ourselves and we did not have to work with anybody else, but that is not how the world works right now. We have to take the risks into account when we are designing collaboration.

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However, you are right. It is not always easy and it needs to be done very carefully.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the hon. member that she is to address her comments to the Chair, not to individual members.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Surrey Centre.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise in the House to speak to this motion before us today.

Science and research play a key role in supporting a dynamic society and a thriving economy. Science and research expand our understanding of the world, lead to new ideas and create a better tomorrow by providing solutions to many of the issues that are most important to Canadians.

Scientific discoveries and new technologies give us the means to protect and improve health and enhance public safety. That is why the Government of Canada is investing so heavily in science and in making sure that science is at the centre of federal decision-making.

As we know, science does not happen in isolation. To deliver leading-edge world-class science and to be at the forefront of discoveries that will improve our daily lives, researchers and scientists need to work in an environment that encourages collaboration and partnership. Communication among scientists and researchers and exchanging with a wide variety of partners in the global scientific community are essential to building knowledge, to contributing to the knowledge economy and to finding solutions to the problems and challenges of today and tomorrow.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given us many examples of the ways that collaboration can lead to the advancement of knowledge in ways and at a speed that would otherwise be highly unlikely. From the beginning of the pandemic, scientists have shared samples to identify and sequence SARS-CoV-2, and today, through the lab networks of the global health security initiative, many countries, including Canada, have access to different COVID-19 strains for research and information-sharing purposes, so that scientists all over the world can monitor and assess emerging COVID-19 variants of concern.

Specialists in genome epidemiology, virology and public health genomics work together to track and help understand the genetic variations of the COVID-19 virus as it evolves. This tracking provides critical information for making important decisions about the way forward, including what public health measures to maintain or lift; how to adapt our testing and tracing strategies; and developing, acquiring and distributing vaccines.

Before the pandemic, we did not know if non-medical masks would be effective at preventing the spread of COVID-19. However, scientists from different disciplines worked together and shared the results to advance knowledge. Environmental scientists and engineers worked with infectious disease specialists to conduct simulations to find out how far COVID-19 aerosols and droplets could travel. Scientists experimented with different types of fabric to see how effective they would be at preventing the spread of the virus. Behavioural scientists studied what encouraged or stopped people from wearing masks, and mathematicians took all these results into

account to build mathematical models to predict the impact of masks on the transmission of COVID-19.

All of these research results were openly shared so that scientists could build upon the knowledge developed by their peers and rapidly develop the expertise needed to manage the pandemic. It is why the Government of Canada encourages and facilitates research, collaborations and partnerships with the external scientific communities in universities and colleges; in provincial, territorial and indigenous governments; and internationally. These linkages provide opportunities to leverage global expertise, knowledge and infrastructure in developing research and scientific knowledge to address a wide scope of public health issues for the benefit of Canadians. These linkages are also critical in maintaining Canada's scientific credibility and reputation and enhancing the social and economic development of Canada.

This government has made a commitment to a new vision for science, aiming to build a stronger, more collaborative federal science and technology ecosystem. Budget 2018 included a financial commitment of \$2.8 billion over five years to rebuild federal laboratories as a sustainable, multi-purpose, collaborative federal science and technology infrastructure portfolio. This federal science and technology infrastructure initiative, known as Laboratories Canada, has a long-term vision and a plan that will drive an integrated approach not only to build new federal laboratories, but to foster the cultural change necessary to amplify successful collaborative efforts.

These renewed federal laboratories will serve as collaborative hubs, will enable modern real property approaches and will appropriate connectivity. They will support science and science collaborations by bringing together scientists from inside and outside of government. A culture of openness, along with pooling and sharing of scientific knowledge and expertise across jurisdictions, will promote knowledge transfer and advance the pace of discovery. This open collaboration will benefit researchers at all stages of their career, advance Government of Canada science priorities, stimulate scientific advances and spark innovation. It will shape federal science for decades to come.

• (1630)

While recognizing the importance of openness, transparency and collaboration in science and research, the government recognizes that there are various challenges presented by current threats to research security, nationally and internationally. To address this, the health portfolio is engaged with other relevant federal departments and international counterparts to raise awareness and enhance dialogue among the research community on these issues.

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Recognizing that science and research are essential to address the increasingly complex challenges that we face as a society, the government has made clear its commitment to science, research and evidence-informed decision-making. Science-based departments and agencies, including Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada adopted scientific integrity policies in 2019-20. These policies recognize that the public trust in their credibility and reliability of government science and research is tied to the integrity of these activities, and to how scientific evidence and information is managed and communicated.

Scientific integrity involves fostering a culture that supports and promotes the application of concepts of transparency, openness, high-quality work, research ethics, high standards of impartiality, and avoidance of conflict of interest. These are applied at all stages of research, including design, conduct, management, review and communication of science and related activities.

Government scientists and researchers must therefore uphold and conform to the standards of responsible research, conduct and science excellence. These actions aim at increasing trust and demonstrating the government's commitment to having the best evidence base possible to inform our decision for the benefit of the health and well-being of all Canadians.

• (1635)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, just as I asked the previous Liberal speaker, we understand, or should understand, how science can be used as a tool for researching how to repress people, how to advance the military objectives of hostile powers, and how to undermine human rights, which means that in the process of scientific co-operation, we should never be sharing information with the militaries of countries that are involved in committing genocide.

Does the member agree that we should be focusing research co-operation on institutions that we can trust, and that we should never be supplying information to the Chinese military?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I think the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is kind of infatuated with this one fixation, that we should not and cannot share with others.

We have several layers of protection that Canadians rely on. We have CSIS, we have the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, we have the RCMP and various other protocols to protect Canadian interests. We have to share research with countries around the world, some of which we do not always see eye to eye with or that we have a lot of a concern with.

With COVID-19, for example, we know the pandemic originated from China. If we did not collaborate or work with scientists who have the first samples of this, it would be very difficult, and late for us, to collaborate. The whole world has to take that approach, that, when it is a pandemic, when there are things that affect society as a whole, we all have to work with them, whether we approve of some of the methodologies and activities that they do or do not do.

For the sake of protecting our citizens and others, we have to partner with many different countries.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I think the motion had to be moved today, but on May 20, which is not that long ago, The Globe and Mail reported that seven scientists at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg were part of and had collaborated with the Chinese military. Even a retired member of CSIS stated that it was madness to let members of the Chinese People's Liberation Army work at the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg, especially since Canadians must obtain high-level security clearances to work there.

Why the double standard?

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I absolutely think that there should be layers of screening and layers of protection ongoing.

This is something we will always have, where we have to be ahead of the game and we have to have layers of protection for our laboratories, our research centres, whether it is epidemiology or other scientific research. We must protect our interests. We shall continue to do so.

That is why we have agencies like the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, like CSIS, and why we have oversight committees, like the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. We have these committees and these agencies for that very reason. When they see loopholes or any holes, they must plug them. That is where we must have faith, rely on them and give them the resources they need to do what they know how to do best.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am extremely disappointed that we are spending a whole day debating this in one of the darkest moments of our history. We have a climate crisis, we have an opioid crisis, we have small businesses needing help. Does my colleague not agree that this could have all been avoided if there was greater transparency on public health issues?

What has the minister done to try to resolve the issue with the Public Health Agency of Canada to get these documents released to the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Madam Speaker, I agree in part with my colleague. There are many other very important things happening right now, not to mention what we just discovered at a residential school in British Columbia, in Kamloops, which is heartbreaking. We have a climate change challenge right now that we have to deal with. There are many other things we should be debating.

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The all-party National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians has the ability to look at and flesh out these unredacted documents. That is what it is there for, so that we do not jeopardize our security, but, at the same time, it has oversight. It is parliamentarians in this House, as well as the Senate, who are privy to that. Let them do their job. Let us allow them—

● (1640)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, the time has expired.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Lakeland.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will split my time with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

The most recent report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians confirmed what security officials, academics, activists, dissidents and many elected representatives have been warning for years, that China is one of the “most significant long-term threats to Canada's sovereignty and prosperity” and is increasingly targeting Canada's health, science and technology sector.

In the U.S. in January last year, the chair of the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Harvard University was charged in relation to his activities as a so-called strategic scientist at the Wuhan University of Technology in China and as a contractual participant in the Thousand Talents Plan, China's massive attraction, recruitment and cultivation program of high-level scientific talent to the benefit of China's scientific development, economic prosperity and national security. It lures Chinese talent overseas and foreign experts to China for their knowledge and experience and offers rewards for stealing proprietary information. The Canadian NSICOP report says China transfers intellectual property and technologies like AI, quantum technology, 5G, biopharma from other countries for China's military in particular.

Last summer, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service cautioned Canada's universities and research institutions that China uses academic recruitment programs to obtain cutting-edge science, research and technology capacity for the regime's economic and military advantage. A CSIS spokesperson said it is “at the expense of Canada's national interest” and intellectual property capacity “including lost jobs, revenue for public services and a diminished competitive global advantage”.

A Carleton University professor says CSIS has reported 400 companies and research organizations comprising 2,000 individuals in universities, the private sector and research fields including 40 universities across Canada, all 15 main research universities among them about this threat.

In January, here in Canada just four months ago and a year after the charges of the Harvard professor and two Chinese nationals in the U.S., Dr. Xiangguo Qiu, the head of vaccine development and anti-viral therapies and her husband, biologist, Dr. Keding Cheng, were fired from the Public Health Agency of Canada having been removed from their work in a special pathogens section of the National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg in the summer of 2019.

CSIS had urged PHAC to revoke the scientists' clearances along with an unknown number of Dr. Qiu's students because of national security concerns around their work with China's Wuhan Institute of Virology. Winnipeg's lab is not an ordinary one; it is Canada's top infectious disease facility. The Winnipeg and the Wuhan labs have level 4 scientific designations equipped to deal with the world's deadliest and most dangerous viruses.

It is important to consider the level of the Canadian security clearances held by the government-funded researchers and students who were escorted out of Winnipeg's lab in 2019. Canadian security clearance is granted under three categories: reliability status, secret clearance and top-secret clearance, all of which require identity verification and assessments of personal backgrounds, educational and professional credentials, personal and professional references, and credit and criminal record checks.

Due to the top-level information to which secret and top secret clearances enable access, subjects undergo more extensive examination of the previous decade of their activity and a meticulous assessment of reliability and/or loyalty to Canada by CSIS. Secret clearances are valid for 10 years and top secret for only five. What is known without doubt is that a number of scientists from the Winnipeg lab collaborated with scientists from China over several years. Close work between scientists in the Winnipeg and Wuhan labs have resulted in co-published papers and involved trips of scientists from the Winnipeg lab to China and to Wuhan in particular.

There has been association and collaboration with Chinese military scientists, including their access to the Winnipeg lab. It is clear that it is fair to say that the Winnipeg lab did help to build the capacity of the Wuhan lab and it is known that the Winnipeg lab did ship Ebola and Henipah viruses to the Wuhan Virology Institute four months before the couple was expelled from the lab.

Other than those facts, there are a whole lot more questions than answers. The Public Health Agency of Canada, which has had an outsized role and extraordinary impact on everyday Canadians' lives during the past year and a half, has withheld hundreds of pages of documents related to the information and reasons for firing the two scientists despite repeated requests from MPs.

PHAC says it is “obligated to safeguard sensitive information, particularly in the context of national security and...employee privacy”, but Conservatives are asking for transparency because Canadians must be able to have confidence that the federal government has protected Canada's national security and the safety and security of all Canadians. This disclosure will both help assure Canadians it has done so and allow elected representatives to ensure accountability and determine any policy or legislative gaps where improvement is required.

• (1645)

The Conservative proposal for the House of Commons law clerk to review the material, meet confidentially with MPs on the special Canada-China committee and redact anything that might harm national security or interfere with a criminal investigation before it is made public is responsible, prudent and conscientious.

I have to say personally, having questioned PHAC representatives about the disastrous, unfounded and costly hotel quarantine debacle, and the alleged sexual assault, that I am very concerned with what has evolved to be the wide scope and scale of PHAC's power over the lives, livelihoods, families and businesses of everyday Canadians without much transparency, accountability, checks or scrutiny. Their committee responses were as prepared, repeated, evasive and slick as any skilled politician. On at least one occasion, answers given to a different question later in the meeting directly contradicted earlier responses on the same subject. Requests for information were obfuscated. There were half-hearted claims that additional material, such as the actual evidence and facts to justify and perpetuate a particular policy, would be forthcoming, but they were never delivered.

Canadians, rightfully, want answers. They are reasonably skeptical about what appears to be an opaque institution that has remarkable influence and authority over them and in which it seems turmoil and challenges have been obscured. The head of the lab, the president and two executives have also quit during the past several months. That is why MPs should enable transparency and clarity for all Canadians by compelling PHAC to release the information it is withholding.

Some might question whether this issue merits all this attention, being elevated for debate for an entire day after months of work at a dedicated committee. The warnings in NSICOP reports, from CSIS, the RCMP and media reporting about China's growing and complicated influence and intimidation campaigns around the world explain the gravity. The Conservatives are trying to get answers for Canadians about what has happened here, but the top lab and PHAC officials report to the health minister.

Experts are pleading for legislators, especially in free democracies, to recognize and combat the ever-increasing reach of China's Communist regime. China manipulates and basically secures ownership of poor countries by building critical infrastructure they cannot afford. It victimizes its own citizens and threatens, coerces and bullies expats for the economic knowledge and military benefit of the regime.

In one year, China coerced 680 people worldwide with a stark option: return or kill themselves. Families in China are harassed, threatened and arrested to enforce compliance. Canada's intelli-

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gence has said this operation is even carried out here in RCMP offices. The U.S. has made several arrests, while Canadian cabinet ministers and officials simply say that more must be done.

China engages in influence campaigns on politicians worldwide and in economic warfare against developed countries that implement policies to protect their own sovereignty and security. China derides free media and infiltrates social media with millions of state-sponsored actors to spread disinformation for the regime and against detractors.

China methodically carries out foreign interference and espionage, and infiltrates free democracies, threatening the cyber, economic, intellectual and personal security and liberty of citizens. China expands its state-owned companies into the IT and communications networks of countries worldwide, violates privacy, mandates the reporting of information back to China's regime and military, and uses apps and online services for surveillance and monitoring.

Last year in the U.S., more than 1,000 “high-risk graduate students and research scholars” were expelled from universities to counter what it referred to as a “wide-ranging and heavily resourced campaign to acquire sensitive United States technologies and intellectual property, in part to bolster the modernization and capability of its military”.

In 2018, an Australia think tank studied co-authored, peer-reviewed papers by China's military scientists and overseas researchers. Three Canadian universities are in the top 10. That year the former director of CSIS warned that China views Canada as an “easier target”. This clearly should get the attention of Canadians, and serious urgency from Canadian MPs, because Canadians are vulnerable.

The current Prime Minister admires China's basic dictatorship, will not name the genocide of the Uighurs, had an ambassador hold a retreat near concentration camps, gave tens of millions of dollars to China for vaccine research and Huawei research projects, has not banned Huawei like all of Canada's allies, had a foreign affairs minister financed by the state-run Bank of China, and calls anyone who asks questions conspiracy theorists and racists, all while China literally detains Canadians.

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Parliament must do its job since the Prime Minister will not.

• (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there was a day when the Conservative Party, under Prime Minister Harper at the time, would say that there were limitations and that there was a need to protect privacy at our special committees and standing committees. Somewhere between then and the Conservatives losing office and becoming part of an opposition, in their burning desire to politicize, the Conservative Party now seems to be saying that everything is off the table.

Today, is the Conservative Party's position opposite to what Stephen Harper said? Is it the party's position that a standing committee can ask and receive any documents completely unredacted? Are there situations where redaction is, in fact, acceptable, under the new Conservative leadership?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, one part of the motion Conservatives put forward today, and which we are debating, says, "the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel shall...review the documents with a view to redacting information which...could reasonably be expected to compromise national security or reveal details of an ongoing criminal investigation, other than the existence of an investigation". The motion also says that the law clerk would meet confidentially with MPs on the Canada-China committee and no information would be released that would compromise Canada's national security or a criminal investigation.

I would ask the member opposite why it is that his government is working so hard and bending over backward all day today and, as a colleague said earlier today, taking up a much-needed day of debate when we could be discussing other issues, to cover up what they obviously must be trying to hide.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech, and also for her work on the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It is very pleasant working with her.

Although the committee has asked for this information several times, neither the government nor the Public Health Agency of Canada has ever explained what happened. Now the House is having to force the government to provide this information.

Does my colleague agree that the public has the right to know and that the federal government has a responsibility to disclose the information that was requested?

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, I share the same sentiments about our work together on the public safety committee, and I think my colleague is an extremely capable member of Parliament.

Absolutely, I agree. Conservatives agree wholeheartedly that Canadians deserve answers, and it is the job of members of Parliament to get those answers. I think it is quite mind-boggling that an

agency has refused repeated requests from a committee of members of Parliament, and I think it is regrettable that the Liberal government is obviously enabling that agency to continue to withhold that information, so I agree completely. It is the responsibility of MPs to ensure that information gets released without compromising national security, and Canadians deserve those answers.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, one of the things that is a concern here is Asian hate crimes, and the discussion of this creates a sensitivity that is very important. What do the Conservatives propose to do during this to ensure we do not have that continuation? We have seen this across North America, and we have witnessed this across our ridings.

This issue is really about non-democratic governments and their involvement, as opposed to individuals in Canada. What do they suggest to actually augment these arguments against this, as a tool?

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Madam Speaker, Conservatives wholeheartedly believe that, for criminal activities and hate crimes, the full force of the law and consequences for perpetrators must be meted out. On the other hand, I think it does a disservice to all people, particularly people who are Chinese citizens or from China, when, for example, government ministers allege that asking questions about this information can be equated to bigotry.

Doing so actually empowers and enables an autocratic, hostile state regime, which makes its own citizens and people around the world vulnerable.

• (1655)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to follow my able colleague from Lakeland in this important debate on the House of Commons issuing an order for the production of unredacted versions of documents that have been ordered by the Canada-China committee.

We have a situation where the Liberal government is refusing to provide information that has been lawfully ordered by a parliamentary committee. We see it as a bit of a theme with the government, a bit of an air that the rules do not apply to them. We have seen that before. We saw it when this House issued an order for individuals to appear as witnesses at committee and for the production of documents to committee. The House issued the order, and the government ignored it. It went so far as to have ministers of the Crown order individuals not to appear, contrary to the order of this House.

We have parliamentary committees attempting to do their work to serve as the check against the executive, and the government is hindering that work at every turn. We saw this over the course of the last year when Parliament was prorogued after tough questions were asked of the government last summer regarding the government's fiduciary responsibilities to Canadians and a \$912-million contract. It was an ethical quagmire for the Prime Minister and the then finance minister. Then we saw filibustering at committees and now, during a public health crisis, we have had government members even filibustering at the health committee.

We find ourselves on the floor of the House of Commons looking to do the work that a committee has attempted to do in ordering the production of documents on a very important matter. Twice the Canada-China committee has ordered the documents relating to the potential breach at the Winnipeg lab and twice the Liberal government has not followed through on the order of the committee. It provided blacked out documents that do not satisfy the order of a committee, which is again a bit of a theme for the government.

We saw that last summer. The government likes to cite the number of pages that they released to the finance committee during the WE scandal, but it does not talk about how much of it was blacked out or how pertinent the information was and how repetitive the information was, instead of the pertinent information that the committee was seeking and that parliamentarians had rightly requested.

The government is responsible for guarding national security. It is a task that it should hold to the highest level and apply the most serious lens to. Not surprisingly, Canadians are concerned about that. We are seeing that through reporting. That is how this issue has largely come to light, with reporting in publications such as the *Globe and Mail*. When parliamentarians seek answers for Canadians, the government demonstrates that it has something to hide, perhaps afraid that it has failed in its responsibility to protect the security of Canadians.

We had two scientists who were fired and escorted out of the lab that handles the most dangerous pathogens, the ones that could wipe out a population, a lab with the highest security clearance required to work there. CSIS had raised concerns about two of the individuals who were working there, individuals who were identified as collaborating with the Wuhan Institute of Virology and China's military, and there were questions about pathogens that were sent from the Winnipeg lab to the Wuhan lab.

These are questions that Canadians are concerned about. Of course, we are in the middle of a global pandemic, so Canadians have questions about this. Parliamentarians have questions about this. There have been unanimous decisions across party lines at the Canada-China committee to get answers to these questions, yet the government has refused to exercise its franchise to make sure that parliamentarians are able to do their job. When we are dealing with some of the most deadly viruses, such as Ebola, parliamentarians are going to be concerned and Canadians are going to be concerned.

• (1700)

When the Conservatives addressed these questions to the government, and when I addressed my questions to the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister replied that these types of questions fomented

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racism. I categorically reject the inference that he made not only about me but about my colleagues. When the Prime Minister conflates criticism of China's government with anti-Asian racism, he is playing right out of the propaganda playbook used by China's Communist leadership. Beijing's goal is to conflate legitimate criticism of China's government with intolerance toward anyone of Chinese heritage. It is unacceptable.

My colleagues have said it best, and I will quote them. The member for Steveston—Richmond East said:

Pointing that out is not racism. Suggesting otherwise plays into the propaganda effort of our opponent. That is something of great concern in my home of Richmond. To see our national leadership downplay these concerns is simply shameful. Many critics of the CPP are of Asian descent themselves, either born as equal partners in Canada or having joined the equal partnership as immigrants.

On the same topic, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam said:

All members should call out racism wherever it exists, but no member, especially the Prime Minister, should ever use this kind of hatred as a tool to distract from his own incompetence. As an Asian-Canadian MP who has combatted racism my whole life, I am appalled by the Prime Minister's audacity to belittle the seriousness and sensitivity of anti-Asian racism.

When the opposition dials in on an area of major concern, a serious issue, the Prime Minister deflects and launches ad hominem attacks.

Long gone are the days of sunny ways and open and transparent government by default. Transparency was a commitment by the government, and we have heard a lot of talk about previous governments. Well, I do not think that members of the government ran, first in 2015 and then again in 2019, saying that they were going to do the same or be just as good. They said, "Better is always possible." The most transparent government in Canadian history is what they promised. Canadians are seeing anything but that. It is corruption, cover-ups and more of the same from the government.

Canadians deserve a government that is not a defender of the Communist Chinese regime, but a government that will stand up for Canadian sovereignty, for national security and for the safety of all Canadians. The Liberals have been willfully blind to threats to our national security from China and are trying to cover them up, and that raises the question of why.

We have in the government the only partner of the Five Eyes that refuses to ban Huawei. Testimony at parliamentary committees yesterday highlighted the risks that are being posed by agents acting on behalf of the Government of China through partnerships with educational institutions and through technology companies. Why will the government not take the step to ban Huawei and demonstrate that it is prepared to stand up to China for Canadians' interests?

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Once these documents are ordered, parliamentarians are entitled to them. The rules do apply to the Liberals. They must not only defend Canada's security interests, but also defend the confidence that Canadians have in their democratic institutions. The Conservatives will secure our future by protecting our national security and will continue to hold this corrupt government to account.

• (1705)

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciated my hon. colleague and friend's speech. He articulated very well the hypocrisy that is being demonstrated daily by the government.

There has been a lot of conversation about the need to balance national security interests with accountability. To suggest that this motion does not take that into account is simply a tactic from the government to distract from the real issue of accountability.

I wonder if the member could comment further on how this motion does strike the correct balance.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, it is tremendously important that we highlight the attention to national security that this motion pays. It lays out very clearly that it is the parliamentary law clerk, not a partisan politician, not the official opposition, not me, not even you, Madam Speaker, who would decide which information is sensitive and which is of national security interest. The parliamentary law clerk would be the arbiter of that. It is so important that we protect national security while upholding the rights of parliamentarians in this place to have unfettered access to documents that they request, particularly when they are in such high demand and speak to the interests of Canadians' confidence in public institutions.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have two quick points. First and foremost, we need to recognize that documents have been provided to the special committee, albeit redacted. They are redacted because of issues of privacy, confidentiality and national security. There was a time when the Conservatives, under Stephen Harper, understood that this was important, but the Conservatives have done a complete flip on the position now that they are in opposition.

Does the member not have any confidence in the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, which could do exactly what is being asked in this particular motion? Why was there a change in attitude from the Conservative Party between when it was in government and now, when it is in opposition?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is talking about the documents that have been given to the committee. They were heavily redacted. Those are illegal redactions. The committee has the authority to receive the documents in their original form. It is not up to anyone to black them out unless the committee has specifically instructed that it be done. It was not the parliamentary law clerk who redacted them; it was the government. That is not consistent with the rules of this place.

In this case, we want the documents to be unredacted and then reviewed by the law clerk. I have full confidence in the parliamen-

tary law clerk, who is not going to be exercising a partisan process for his employer.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is incorrect, and what we just heard the member say is that he has faith in the law clerk but he does not have faith in the department. This is what the Conservatives are confusing all day long. Those documents were provided, in the form they are in, by the department. A lot of Canadians might not realize that there is a separation between the department and ministerial staff.

The member says the government redacted them, but no, it did not. The government is the ministerial part of a minister's portfolio, certainly not the departmental part. These documents were handed over by the department, by the civil servants of Canada.

• (1710)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, the redactions were illegal. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who serves in caucus with the member, said as much himself. They do not have the authority to make those redactions. The Liberals do not get to make up the rules and then say they got the public service to do it and they love the public service. That is great. Public servants work very hard for this country. However, that was not the job they were to supposed do. The documents were to be tendered unredacted, and today we are asking for them in their original form to be reviewed by the law clerk.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before recognizing the hon. member for Jonquière, I must inform him that he has about four minutes.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Jonquière.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, I do not know what I will manage to accomplish in four minutes. Perhaps I will simply talk about the intentions that I noticed while following today's debate.

I do not always agree with my Conservative friends because I sometimes find that they are too quick to engage in partisanship. However, today, I was disappointed by my Liberal colleagues, whose attitude made it clear that they were simply trying to avoid the issue, as I noticed in many speeches. A few times, they even went so far as to justify their moral failings by bringing up errors from the past.

What we are talking about today is a value that is fundamental to democracy, and that is transparency. Without transparency, there is no democracy. What do our constituents base their decisions on? They base them on the information that journalists and we, as legislators, are able to provide to them.

Right now, it looks to me like the Liberals are mired in scandal. Just think how much trouble we had getting information about WE Charity and about what happened with General Vance.

Then there was CanSino, a file that I followed very closely. The government bragged about the vaccine working group, which is apparently the best there is. This working group clearly told the government not to get involved with CanSino. Why did the government not listen to this working group? Why did the government not listen to scientists? We do not know.

The Liberals have never talked about that. This shows a blatant lack of transparency, and transparency is key to any democracy. In my opinion, it is clear that without transparency, we have nothing.

Ultimately, what effect does that have? It affects everyone's faith in our institutions. The reason there is so much cynicism about politics nowadays is that more and more people do not believe they can trust our institutions. We are emerging from a serious public health crisis in which legislators played a crucial role, yet the Liberal Party does not seem to understand the situation.

The worst part is how consistently the Liberals resort to rhetoric. If someone questions a Liberal Party decision, the Liberal Party does one of two things. If it is the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals say we are trying to pick a fight. That is the way the government House leader thinks: if we challenge anything the Liberals say, we are picking a fight. Their other dodge is labelling anyone who does not agree with what the government says as racist. These diversionary tactics reinforce cynicism about politics and are completely unacceptable.

I see today's Conservative motion as a call for transparency. The government missed a great opportunity to respond to the issue.

I will be a good sport. Since I had only four minutes, I will stop there in hopes the government will ask me a question.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Bloc again for its support of the motion and for the great work it does with us at committee in seeking accountability.

It is so striking to me that 10 years ago, the Prime Minister, the member for Winnipeg North and other members voted in favour of a motion to recognize the undisputed privilege of Parliament under the Constitution to send for uncensored documents. It was a Liberal opposition day motion that the member for Winnipeg North, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs voted for, and now the government has reversed its position simply because it is convenient.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Chair, I did not pick up on a question there, but I did hear a statement that I would also be prepared to support.

I talked about the transparency issue, but there is also a serious lack of accountability. I get the impression the government is sometimes allergic to the idea of accountability.

• (1715)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forth with every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The question is on the motion.

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, I request a recorded division.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 2, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1999

The House resumed from May 14 consideration of the motion that Bill C-204, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (final disposal of plastic waste), be read the third time and passed.

Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands had nine minutes remaining in debate the last time this was before the House.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise again to speak to Bill C-204, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, the final disposal of plastic waste.

This bill, if enacted, will prohibit the export of plastic waste from Canada for final disposal. The government will not be supporting the legislation for multiple reasons, including because the approach it takes is deeply flawed and unlikely to be effective at addressing the problem it purports to solve, which is the shipment of waste to countries that are unable to handle it.

Private Members' Business

Let me be clear that the government firmly believes we must handle our waste in an environmentally sound manner both at home and internationally. That is why domestically we have advanced a comprehensive agenda to achieve zero plastic waste. Our approach will ensure we drive a circular economy for plastics; that means keeping plastics in our economy and out of our environment. Our comprehensive approach includes banning harmful single-use plastics, where warranted, supported by science.

Specifically, we are proposing to ban six items that have been shown to be prevalent in the environment causing harm, are difficult to recycle and where readily available alternatives exist. These items are plastic checkout bags, straws, stir sticks, six-pack rings, cutlery and foodware made from hard-to-recycle plastics.

However, our approach is not just about bans. We know that plastics are a valuable commodity and that we need to be better managing them at the end of their useful life. That is why we are working with provinces and territories to advance extended producer responsibility, which will make plastic producers responsible for their plastic waste.

Additionally, we are working toward the introduction of minimum recycled content standards for plastic products. This approach will ensure that we keep the plastics we use in Canada in the Canadian economy and not export them. These actions will drive the transition to a more circular economy. This will not only reduce pressure on the environment, but will also increase competitiveness, stimulate innovation and create jobs.

To this end, Canada will host the World Circular Economy Forum later this year. The WCEF recognizes that truly competitive solutions are born when the economy and the environment go hand in hand, a phrase the Conservatives have recently adopted. The WCEF brings together a broad range of stakeholders, including policy-makers, business leaders and other experts. The WCEF explores the world's best circular economy solutions, with the aim of accelerating the global transition of a circular economy.

Organized for the first time in North America, the WCEF 2021 in Canada will bring dynamic new voices to the global conversation on a circular economy and take an in-depth look at circular opportunities in a North American global context. It will also offer an excellent opportunity to demonstrate Canada's progress on plastics and explore the systemic changes needed to accelerate the global circulation transition.

The WCEF seeks to position the circular economy as a tool to help us respond to the challenges we face from the pandemic as well as the crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, including that of plastic pollution. We want to play our part as responsible global citizens, which is why we are following through on new international controls on trade in plastic waste and taking a leadership role on plastic on the international stage.

These controls, advanced under Basel Convention on transboundary movement of hazardous wastes and their disposal, will ensure that we are not exporting our waste to countries that are not able to manage it in an environmentally sound manner.

Recently, Canada ratified amendments under the Basel Convention respecting the control of plastic waste. These amendments in-

clude within the scope of the convention certain non-hazardous and non-recyclable plastic waste, like mixing or contaminated plastic waste and certain resins and PVC.

The Basel amendments on plastic waste also clarify that hazardous plastic waste is covered by the convention. With the amendments, prior and informed consent must be obtained before plastic waste covered by the convention can be exported. The purpose of the amendments is to contribute to a cleaner trade of plastic waste globally by controlling exports of plastic waste to countries that face challenges to properly manage it.

• (1720)

These controls effectively make Bill C-204 redundant, because Canada is already implementing effective controls on the movement of plastic waste. Further, Bill C-204 would have the effect of creating two sets of potentially conflicting requirements for plastic waste exports in Canada: those captured under this bill and those captured under the Basel Convention.

Last, Bill C-204 would leave the much larger issue of plastic waste destined for recycling unaddressed. If the member's intent was to address plastic waste exports to countries that were unable to manage them in an environmentally sound manner, the bill would be unlikely to address this problem.

The federal government is implementing a comprehensive agenda to manage our plastic waste both domestically and internationally. In contrast, Bill C-204 would be ineffective at addressing the problem it purports to solve. It would be problematic to administer and enforce and it would very likely create conflicting requirements with respect to Canada's management of plastic waste exports. As I have also said, it is unnecessary. Canada is already implementing controls under the Basel Convention to ensure we are managing our waste in a responsible manner, so it is not being exported to countries that are unable to manage it.

Given these considerations, the government remains opposed to the legislation. I hope my opposition colleagues will re-evaluate their support for the legislation, given the arguments I have advanced today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House, especially to talk about the environment and how we must move forward on protecting the environment and reducing greenhouse gases.

Private Members' Business

I have to say that it is rather refreshing to see members of the Conservative Party introduce environmental bills. Although it lacks some teeth and is still timid, it is a good step forward, and I thank the hon. member for York—Simcoe for his work.

On the other hand, I would say that it is rather discouraging to see the Liberals oppose this bill.

I would remind the House that the bill seeks to prohibit the export to foreign countries of certain types of plastic waste for final disposal. This makes sense to us.

In Canada right now, we should be able to recycle all the plastic waste we produce. No plastic waste should be destined for final disposal. Unfortunately, the reality is that this is not the case.

Still, a number of things happened during the study in committee, and it is clear that the bill is not perfect.

For example, it could have been improved by an opposition amendment proposing that the prohibition “not apply to plastic waste consisting exclusively of one non-halogenated polymer or resin”, certain other types of polymers and other materials that I will not list because they have rather complicated names, “provided the plastic waste is destined for recycling in an environmentally sound manner”.

As I said, Canada does not recycle all of its plastic waste. Countries like the United States, by contrast, have technology that allows them to recycle certain types of plastic waste. The amendment would have allowed us to continue, for example, to export certain types of plastic waste to the United States, on the condition that they be recycled in an environmentally sound manner.

Unfortunately, the amendment was rejected, but the bill still works, so long as there is a provision in clause 1(1.3) that allows the government to amend the list of plastic wastes set out in Schedule 7. This schedule would thus allow the government to exclude the prohibition of certain plastics destined for export to the United States to be recycled there.

It is not perfect, but at least it allows the bill to pass muster. It is a good bill and the Bloc Québécois remains in favour of its adoption.

However, we need to acknowledge that we might not necessarily be tackling the right problem, and we need to go further. The fact is, we need to produce less waste and be able to dispose of the waste we do produce ourselves. This bill once again highlights the Liberals' doublespeak on environmental issues.

On the one hand, the government wants to ban straws and four or five other single-use plastics. That is great, but it is not nearly enough. On the other hand, it wants to keep sending its garbage to other countries, without worrying about it being used as fuel or ending up in the environment.

Why does the government refuse to accept responsibility and manage its own waste?

Is it because that would be too embarrassing, since it would reveal the enormous amount of plastic we produce, import, use and throw away? It is a valid question.

It is clear that we need to do more than the provisions of Bill C-204 because that is what is needed to tackle the climate crisis. As a rich country, we have a duty to lead by example. The next generation is watching us and will judge the government by its actions, not just the speeches it makes.

Prohibiting the export of our waste is important, we can all agree on that, but the thing that requires more urgent action is the production of that waste. It seems pretty clear that the limitation of Bill C-204 is that it does not get to the heart of the problem. We must absolutely reduce our production of plastic waste.

Look at the production and distribution of single-use plastic. Why is that still allowed? We definitely need to rethink the way we manage the life cycle of materials in our economy.

If the government really wants to take action on this issue and walk the green talk, it should transfer funds to Quebec and the provinces that, like Quebec, are already implementing a strategy of extended producer responsibility. The transfers should come with no strings attached because the provinces are entirely capable of finding winning solutions to this incredible challenge. In fact, the federal government must act now to give recycling companies the means to recycle more complex plastic products.

There is a very real and urgent need to reduce our production and consumption of single-use plastics. Municipalities in my riding understand the urgency and are already doing their part.

• (1725)

In 2020, the mayors of the 34 municipalities in the RCMs of La Mitis and La Matapédia voted to ban single-use plastic bags as of January 1, 2021. Elected officials in La Mitis went one step further: They will ban single-use packaging, such as styrofoam, which is widely found in grocery stores or cafeterias, for instance. Theoretically, RCMs do not have the authority to ban these products. It is, therefore, up to each municipality to adopt a resolution to ban them. On May 17, the Mont-Joli municipal council got the ball rolling by adopting a bylaw to ban single-use plastics.

I must admit that I am quite proud to represent a region that is already more proactive on environmental issues than the federal government. I hope that municipalities across the country will follow this example and get involved. By doing so, we are taking part in the fight against climate change in a concrete way. Taking action means taking concrete steps that will certainly have a positive impact in the end. I also hope that they will inspire the federal government to take concrete action on a larger scale.

I remind members that one of the most visible consequences of plastic products is the massive amount of waste produced that remains in the environment for years. Small amounts of plastics can be found in the water and in the ground, and they sadly pose a serious threat to wildlife and ecosystems.

Private Members' Business

We already knew that Canada was a big consumer of single-use plastics, but the pandemic has exacerbated the problem. In its September 2020 report, Oceana Canada says that Canada currently uses 4.6 million tonnes of plastics every year. That is roughly 125 kilograms per person, which is a massive amount. Experts predict that, by 2030, that number will grow to more than six million tonnes of plastic.

Plastic packaging accounts for nearly half of all plastic waste, and the COVID-19 pandemic is only making things worse. Just think of all of the plastic containers used for takeout meals or the increased use of disposable masks and gloves.

Renowned magazine *The Economist*, a mostly right-leaning magazine, reported that consumption of single-use plastic may have grown by 250% to 300% in North America during the pandemic, as a result of the increased use of food containers.

Again, according to Oceana Canada, that increase is even more worrisome because most of the plastic used in Canada never gets recycled. The federal government itself estimated the rate of recycling at less than 10% in 2019. The rest mainly ends up in landfills, but it also gets discarded in the environment, in waterways and oceans.

I was saying that we need to rethink how materials circulate. It is important to understand that we need to transition to a circular economy. In a circular logic, the goal is to reduce the environmental footprint while contributing to the well-being of individuals and communities. It is a way to produce, trade and consume goods and services by optimizing the use of resources at all stages of their life cycle. To make that happen on a large scale, we need to rethink our methods of production and consumption in order to use fewer resources and protect the ecosystems that generate them. To that end, we need to extend the lifespan of our products and give them new life.

The circular economy gives priority to the shortest and most local routes. It has many advantages and positive spinoffs. It makes it possible to create wealth by adding value to our raw materials, keeping our raw materials here, promoting the local economy and establishing successful companies. It is a win-win situation.

The federal government should encourage this practice. It is a cycle. We need to produce less, convert our waste into new products, and give those products a second life here instead of sending them overseas.

Oceana Canada has sounded the alarm. Over a 30-year period, Canada exported four million tonnes of plastic waste. That is the weight of 800 blue whales per year. It is a striking image. The organization estimates that Canada's contribution to the global plastic catastrophe is disproportionate. Canada produces up to 3.6 times more plastic waste than some countries in Southeast Asia and almost twice as much as some Scandinavian countries.

It goes without saying that the government must take urgent action. It must ban single-use plastics immediately. Its current plan targets a paltry six products. The government needs to do better or it will not come close to achieving its zero plastic waste goal by 2030.

Earlier, I talked about the circular economy and waste reduction. That is important because recycling is not a panacea. Given the quantity of plastic we produce, getting people to recycle will not cut it. The government needs to do its part, stop talking out of both sides of its mouth and introduce initiatives like my colleague from York—Simcoe's Bill C-204. I want to reassure my colleague that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of that bill and I thank him again for his work. I hope the debate at second reading will be productive.

* * *

● (1730)

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that a message has been received from the Senate informing this House that the Senate has passed the following bill, to which the concurrence of the House is desired: Bill S-4, an act to amend the Parliament of Canada Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other acts.

* * *

● (1735)

[English]

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT, 1999

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-204, An Act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999 (final disposal of plastic waste), be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a privilege to rise today to comment on Bill C-204, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act in the final disposal of plastic waste.

Coming from a coastal community in a country that has the largest coastline in the world, and understanding that a garbage truck of plastic is going into our waterways every minute around the world, one can imagine that combatting plastic pollution is of the utmost priority for anybody who lives in coastal communities. In a country that has the most fresh water per capita in the world, it is something that is very important to all Canadians.

I have risen many times on plastic pollution and raised awareness in the House. I was very fortunate to have the support of my colleagues from all parties in passing my Motion No. 151 to come up with a strategy to combat plastic pollution back in 2018. However, I am happy to see this bill come forward from my enthusiastic colleague from York—Simcoe, who is passionate about the bill and about tackling plastic pollution.

Private Members' Business

I do have some concerns. Certainly, as Canadians, we are among the largest producers of plastic waste in the world per capita, which means that we need to take greater leadership. It also means that when we bring forward legislation, it needs to be legislation that is going to make a great impact on our reduction of plastic waste and our responsibility when it comes to tackling plastic waste.

Half of the plastic right now in our country is produced from packaging alone. My former colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley, Nathan Cullen, the new minister of state for British Columbia, tabled a bill about plastic packaging, to eliminate packaging that is absolutely useless.

I was disappointed when government members came up with only six items to ban on single-use plastics. They had an opportunity to stretch that quite a bit further. They did not even ban plastic lids on coffee cups, which can easily be replaced by paper. They have come up with a theory that they are going to take a very small stab at the reduction of plastics and are really going to focus on the creation of and actually growing the plastic industry.

I was glad to hear my colleague previous to me speak about the need for us to reduce and eliminate the use of plastics, especially where it is unnecessary. However, the government's approach is that it is going to take a small stab at reducing a few items and claim that it is going to take real action, but we have not seen the action that is necessary.

We need the government to invest in robust structures across our country when it comes to recycling so that we can do our part when it comes to recycling, but we need to reduce plastics. It is expected that plastic production is going to be over 13% of the overall carbon budget in terms of greenhouse gas emissions globally by 2050. This is something that has to be taken care of, and can be, by good legislation.

Now, it is clear that we need to stop exporting waste to developing countries. We are contributors and responsible for plastic slums that exist in developing nations that do not have the capacity. Canada has decided to ship our waste, or our problem, if we want to call it that, to other countries that do not have the systems in place, and it is ending up in their waterways, river systems and drinking water. Children are living in plastic slums, and it is our responsibility.

In 2016, it is estimated that only 9% of our plastics were actually recycled; 86% were landfilled; 4% were incinerated for energy recovery, and 1% were released directly into the environment. We are failing at a rate that is absolutely alarming, and we know that non-recycled plastic poses a serious threat to our environment and to human health. This is proven. Plastic waste is considered a hazardous substance because of the pollutants it creates, particularly if it is burned. It is not responsible for us to look at burning plastic as a solution in the long term. We have to ensure that we have the infrastructure to deal with it. We know about our history in terms of shipping plastic to other countries.

I do appreciate the spirit of the bill, but I do believe it has been hijacked by industry.

• (1740)

We ship over 44,000 tonnes of plastic to other countries. Members heard me in the House calling out the Canadian government for our failure to deal with garbage that had been left in the Philippines, in Manila. Back in 2019, the government spent over a million dollars bringing illegally shipped garbage back to our country. We had a similar diplomatic dispute with Malaysia. It has been embarrassing.

Not only do we have to be more responsible, but we have to improve diplomatic ties with developing nations around the world by improving our systems and showing responsibility here at home in how we are going to manage our plastic pollution. We also must support those countries in developing their systems, because our oceans are all interconnected. We can do better.

When we look at the legislation that is being brought forward and we see other countries, such as China, pivoting away and not accepting our garbage, it is important that the wealthiest nations, such as ours, take action.

Canada was one of the original signatories to the Basel Convention, which restricts shipping waste to the developing world. Had Canada actually adhered to the Basel Convention and taken leadership, this bill would be completely unnecessary and would not have been brought to the floor of the House of Commons.

We refused to ratify the plastic waste amendments to the Basel Convention initially that would have stopped plastic waste exports, which absolutely needs to happen. Canada has come under fire for continuing to ship plastic to developing nations. We have seen Canada use loopholes and whatnot to ship plastic through other countries that are not signatories to the Basel Convention, such as the United States.

We finally ratified the plastic waste amendments in December of last year. Right now we need the government to use the Basel Convention not as a backdoor agreement with the United States, but to take action in ratifying the Basel Convention, implementing it and demonstrating the leadership that we need to take.

I talked about some of the things happening in our country. Right now, this legislation has huge gaps. It focuses on areas where not all plastics are banned. All plastics should be banned, unless the plastic is going to an OECD country that can take responsibility instead of dumping plastic onto developing nations.

Right now in my riding, the government is looking at going ahead with implementing a shellfish and geoduck licence. They are loaded with microplastics. When PVC tubes break down, they release toxins and microplastic particles into the environment, and these toxins and microplastic particles permanently contaminate the water where the shellfish are growing and where food is growing. We need to make sure that the government is not just looking at what we are currently doing, but also taking action on industrial uses of plastic.

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We heard testimony from Dr. Sabaa Khan, the director general for Quebec and Atlantic Canada of the David Suzuki Foundation. I will only have the chance to read a short quote because I see I am running out of time. In reference to this legislation, she said:

To effectively prohibit Canadian plastic waste from being dumped in developing countries, Canada should ratify the Basel ban amendment, which would restrict all hazardous waste exports to non-OECD countries. Bill C-204 should further implement the Basel ban amendment according to best international practice. This would require that the bill be amended to explicitly prohibit export of all plastic wastes to non-OECD countries, except those non-hazardous plastic wastes listed under annex IX of the Basel Convention.

We brought forward two amendments at committee and they were both shot down. The Liberal government filibustered at committee, basically reading into testimony statements from industry that were standing against any sort of amendments to this legislation.

Jim Puckett, who is the executive director for the Basel Action Network, said:

What we're getting at here is that the Basel Convention's latest rules, adopted in 2019, divide plastic into three categories: hazardous plastic, plastics for special consideration and non-hazardous plastics. We would like to see those for special consideration—the mixed and dirty, difficult-to-recycle plastics—controlled for all countries but banned to the developing countries. We can accept the final disposal ban that Mr. Davidson is proposing, because that's very little of the trade, actually, and then add the real problem, as the EU has done, and say that we're not going to export that annex II waste anymore to developing countries.

We need to ban shipping all plastics to developing nations.

• (1745)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-204. It was introduced by my very good friend, the member for York—Simcoe.

This legislation is straightforward, in that it would prohibit the export of plastic waste to foreign countries for final disposal purposes. Before I discuss the merits of this bill, let me take this opportunity to commend my friend for York—Simcoe for his leadership in bringing it forward.

From the time the hon. member first arrived in this place, following a by-election in 2019, he has been a consistent champion of responsible environmental stewardship. In that regard he has been a tireless advocate for his riding and the beautiful waters of Lake Simcoe, where he has repeatedly and loudly called on the Liberal government to restore the Lake Simcoe cleanup fund. It had been established by the previous Conservative government and was very successful for the span of 10 years before it was arbitrarily and shamefully disbanded by the Liberal government. Equally, the hon. member has been tireless in championing this bill through the second reading stage, the environment committee and now through the third and final reading stage in the House.

This bill presents a unique opportunity for Canada to take a leadership role in combatting the real global environmental challenge of plastics pollution. It is a targeted bill that, quite appropriately, focuses only on plastics that are exported for final disposal. In that regard, it would not affect plastics that are traded for recycling, for example. Speaking of recycling, this bill would provide an opportunity to expand Canada's domestic recycling capacity, given the fact that only 9% of plastic waste is recycled domestically. It would pro-

vide an opportunity to grow the circular economy in Canada, with all of the economic and environmental benefits.

Unfortunately, Canada has been part of the problem when it comes to global plastics pollution. Each year, Canada exports approximately 90,000 tonnes of plastic waste. Much of this plastic waste is destined for developing countries, particularly in southeast Asia. Most of these countries have incredibly lax to non-existent environmental and waste management standards. As a result, a considerable volume of plastic waste, even waste that is ostensibly sent for the purpose of recycling, ends up being dumped or burned with devastating environmental consequences.

That problem has only been exacerbated since 2017, when China suddenly banned imports of plastic waste. China had handled approximately 50% of the world's plastic waste. As a result, more plastic waste is being diverted to southeast Asian countries that simply do not have the capacity to properly handle all that they are taking in.

In light of this growing global environmental challenge, many countries are stepping up to the plate to take action. Australia, for example, has passed legislation to ban the export of plastic waste. The United Kingdom and the European Union have made similar commitments.

• (1750)

The Basel Convention, which requires parties to the convention to provide for the procedural mechanism of informed consent respecting the import and export of hazardous and other materials, was amended in 2019 to expressly include solid plastic waste.

In addition to that, some 98 Basel parties amended the Basel Convention with a robust ban to prevent the export of plastic waste to non-OECD developing countries: countries that lack the capacity or do not have appropriate environmental and waste management standards.

As other countries take action, it begs the question of what Canada has done under the Liberals to help combat this problem. Very simply, the government has spent a lot of time talking. We saw, for example, the Liberal-controlled Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development issue a report in 2019 that called for ending the export of plastic waste, which is something this bill seeks to enshrine in law.

Then there is the environment minister, who has repeatedly talked about combatting plastic pollution. For all of the talk on the part of the government, its actions often fly in the face of its lofty rhetoric. This, after all, is a government that has dragged its feet when it comes to ratifying the Basel Convention amendments.

Indeed, it was not until literally the eve of second reading debate on Bill C-204 that the Liberals suddenly and coincidentally announced they would accept the Basel amendment relating to informed consent. It is an amendment that does not prohibit the export of plastic waste. It should be noted the Liberals waited 18 months to announce ratification, and only after 186 countries proceeded before Canada.

The Liberals have refused to adopt the much more robust Basel amendment to block the export of plastic waste to non-OECD developing countries, and at every step of the way, the Liberals have worked to obstruct, block and attempt to defeat my friend's bill, Bill C-204.

While the Liberals talk, Bill C-204 would enshrine in law banning the export of plastic waste to all countries, including the United States. It would close a loophole the Liberals negotiated with the United States that would see plastic waste be exported from Canada to the United States and then to developing countries.

In addition, this bill would have the effect of legislating and enshrining in law the Basel Convention amendments respecting plastic waste. Finally, this legislation would provide teeth: It would provide for an enforcement mechanism, namely the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, to hold violators accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

Bill C-204 is an important step for Canada to take to combat the truly global environmental challenge of plastics pollution. Let us get it done. Let us pass Bill C-204.

• (1755)

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their review of and engagement with the bill during previous debates in this House and at committee. We are now engaged in the final hour of debate on Bill C-204. This is our last opportunity to consider the merits and drawbacks of the bill before we vote on whether it should proceed to the Senate.

Many substantive concerns have been raised throughout the study and debate on this bill, including by a number of stakeholders. I urge parliamentarians to consider those concerns carefully before deciding on the fate of this bill. I will reiterate the government does not support this bill.

Despite the time spent debating Bill C-204 in the House and studying it at committee, there continues to be some confusion on the aspects of the existing regime in Canada that controls the export of plastic waste for final disposal and recycling. I will use my time to speak to some of those aspects and also to echo some of the comments made by my colleague, the member for Winnipeg South, during the last debate on this bill.

The Government of Canada ratified the Basel Convention on plastic waste amendments as of January 1, 2021. The amendments have been fully implemented through Canada's Export and Import of Hazardous Waste and Hazardous Recyclable Material Regulations. Plastic waste destined for recycling and for final disposal are captured by this regime. Therefore, all plastic waste, hazardous and non-hazardous, controlled under the Basel Convention is subject to

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domestic controls. This means that controls are already in place to ensure Basel-controlled plastic waste is only exported to Basel parties if the importing party provides its consent. The regime that Canada currently implements to manage its plastic waste exports will be considerably more effective than Bill C-204, which narrowly focuses on plastic waste exports destined for final disposal.

During the last debate on this bill, the member for Repentigny stated she would like some clarification on the Canada-U.S. trade relationship, given the United States is not a signatory to the Basel convention.

Similarly, the sponsor of the bill highlighted that the United States is not a party to the Basel Convention and plastic waste exported from its country is not subject to the same controls and further went on to say that environmental groups believe that Canada's plastic waste exports to the United States exploit a significant loophole in our global obligations on plastic waste that directly contravenes international law.

At that time, my colleague, the member for Winnipeg South, provided clarification on the Canada-U.S. regime for Basel-controlled plastic waste. However, since there is still some confusion about that regime, I will reiterate some of the key points with respect to this arrangement.

It is correct the United States is not a party to the Basel Convention. However, the convention contains a provision prohibiting parties like Canada from trading in Basel-controlled waste with non-parties like the United States in the absence of an agreement or arrangement between these countries. That is exactly why Canada and the United States entered into an arrangement that affirms that non-hazardous plastic waste, subject to the convention, circulating between the two countries, is managed in an environmentally sound manner in both countries as per the agreement both countries have in place and intend to maintain the measures that ensure the environmentally sound management of waste. The arrangement is in accordance with the requirements of the Basel Convention.

In addition, the existing Canada-U.S. agreement applies to hazardous waste, including hazardous plastic waste. This agreement requires prior and informed consent to be provided for shipments of hazardous waste between Canada and the U.S.

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The government is confident that exports of plastic waste from Canada to the United States are undertaken in a manner that fully respects the international regime. Since January 1, 2021, an export permit is required for the export of plastic waste subject to the Basel Convention when the waste is exported to a party to the Basel Convention. The waste is also subject to the permit process when it is defined or considered hazardous under the legislation of the importing country or if its importation is prohibited under the legislation of the importing country. Thus far, only requests for permits to export plastic waste for recycling have been received by Environment and Climate Change Canada. No requests for permits to export plastic waste for its final disposal have been received.

Rest assured the Government of Canada will continue to assess permit requests in light of the Basel amendments, which have been implemented through comprehensive regulations that provide for the environmentally sound management of waste.

I am pleased to highlight that Environment and Climate Change Canada, in close collaboration with the Canada Border Services Agency, participated in Operation DEMETER VI, a successful enforcement operation aimed at tackling the illegal movement of controlled waste, including plastic waste, between countries.

● (1800)

In addition to these actions, Environment and Climate Change Canada work closely with Global Affairs and competent authorities in foreign countries to facilitate the return of controlled plastic waste that were exported without a valid permit and support the work of Canada Border Services Agency agents in this regard.

Finally, predictability is important for a well-functioning regulatory regime. Helpfully, this bill before us would establish a second regime on top of the existing controls that would prohibit the export for final disposal of a subset of plastic waste in Canada. The current regime, which requires the consent of importing countries, is an efficient safeguard that ensures that imports meet domestic requirements of the importing country. As such there is no need to prohibit exports and having two regulatory regimes would create significant operational and implementation challenges. It would likely also be difficult for those under the regulation structure to understand and comply with. The government invests in implementation of international obligations and efforts to increase compliance with a comprehensive set of controls that are already in place for Canada.

In closing, I want to remind colleagues that results will not happen overnight. We are taking the necessary steps along the path, with full implementation of the Basel plastic waste amendments and communication with Canadian stakeholders. On the basis of all this information, I ask parliamentarians to consider the meaningful impact of Bill C-204 on ensuring the environmentally sound management of plastic waste.

The government's position is that it is not necessary and that it, instead, creates considerable confusion.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, I must inform the hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue that he will have roughly eight minutes for his speech in order to allow enough time for a right of reply at the end.

The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, thank you for your generosity. I was not expecting that.

We are debating Bill C-204 introduced by the Conservative member for York—Simcoe in Ontario. I give him my regards. This bill amends the Canadian Environmental Protection Act to prohibit the export of certain types of plastic waste to foreign countries for final disposal.

It is a good start, but there are solutions that we should not dismiss in this debate, including converting non-recyclable waste into biofuel through advanced chemical recycling of products using low-carbon hydroelectricity. Quebec is well placed since it has the necessary hydroelectricity to convert non-recycled waste material into low-carbon second-generation biofuel.

A biofuel plant is being built in Varennes on Montreal's south shore, Recyclage Carbone Varennes, an Enerkem company and an \$875-million project. This plant will process the by-products of composting, waste recovery or recycling, anything that cannot be recycled or composted, to produce a low-carbon second-generation biofuel. In the world of waste management, support from Recyclage Carbone Varennes will be considerable.

Every year, the facility will convert more than 200 tonnes of non-recyclable materials into almost 125 million litres of biofuel. It will generate \$85 million in annual revenues and also create 500 jobs during the facility's construction and provide 100 jobs when operational. I apologize for the advertising, but the company's representatives appeared before the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology when we studied the green economic recovery, and I thought it would be useful to provide this information to the House.

However, to get there, we need to create a competitive market to attract private investment and start up bioenergy projects. An investment tax credit could help provide funding for businesses. At present, foreign markets, especially in Europe and the United States, are more attractive because they have implemented regulations supporting the use of low-carbon second-generation fuels, or green chemical products. It is more profitable for Enerkem to sell its products in California or Europe because there are also relevant regulations that encourage choosing green chemicals, also known as circular chemistry. That is not the case in Canada. We need a regulatory framework and I invite members to think about that.

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Canada should put in place the market conditions necessary to carry out projects that support using biofuel made from low-carbon hydroelectricity. The regulatory framework needs to have indirect obligations. It must ensure that all waste from landfills is recognized through credits. Also, a percentage must be established for circular or organic components, and electricity must be recognized as being carbon-neutral in order to support increased production in Canada. The regulatory framework must recognize innovation and grant credits to industries like Enerkem for diverting waste toward recycling plants, for example, to take into account what would happen if they were not recycled.

Currently, according to life cycle analyses, putting plastic into the ocean is considered acceptable from an environmental viewpoint. It is rather absurd that, in life cycle analyses, there are no credits granted for measures aiming to act differently.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-204, which seeks to prohibit the export of plastic waste for final disposal. We believe plastics exported to be recycled should be properly sorted and labelled and definitely traceable. They should not be used for fuel in foreign countries, nor should they ever end up in the environment.

The Bloc Québécois believes it is fair to prohibit both the export of waste and the production of certain single-use items, but that is not enough. We need to rethink how materials circulate in the economy. Enerkem offers one such solution. Furthermore, Quebec is already ahead of the Canadian provinces, since it has its own model for managing how materials circulate in the economy.

• (1805)

If the federal government wants to do something, it should transfer the money unconditionally to the provinces, which, like Quebec, are already implementing a circular economy strategy and extended producer responsibility. Quebec has proven many times over that it has the skills and methods, in particular through our powerhouse, Hydro-Québec, to recycle waste with a very small carbon footprint.

Bill C-204 is good because the anti-dumping measures complement the proactive steps taken to reduce plastic production and improve waste management. However, the upcoming federal policy banning single-use plastics does not free Canada from the need to take immediate action and stop exporting its plastic waste to developing countries.

Conditions must be put in place in the short and medium terms to ensure that recycling companies in Quebec have ways to recycle their more complex plastic products and to improve the quality of life of recyclable materials.

Furthermore, the member for York—Simcoe says that he wants to keep non-recyclable household plastic waste from becoming hazardous waste in foreign countries. Enerkem is one solution to that problem.

Final disposal implies that the material is not destined for recycling. Canada recycles only 9% of plastic waste. The rest ends up in landfills or in the environment. Canada's plastics economy is primarily linear. Approximately 9% of plastic waste is recycled, 4% is incinerated for energy recovery, 86% ends up in landfill and 1% ends up in the environment. A regulatory framework is needed to

redirect waste, especially plastic, to innovative companies like Enerkem.

Obviously, we have to stop exporting our plastic to the rest of the world. The Basel Convention reminds us that the richest countries have to stop dumping their waste in developing countries. Exporting plastic waste involves a moral responsibility towards nature and towards other peoples and states in the world today who refuse to be our garbage can. Just think of Malaysia. We have to listen to them.

As a final point, I want to remind the House of Quebec's strong action on the circular economy, taking a less linear approach. The waste we produce can also serve as the raw materials for further regulations. Since we have a duty to act here in Parliament, I think we need to make sure we have good regulations so that it costs more to send our waste to landfill. At the same time, we need to create programs that allow us to move forward and promote the circular economy by finding ways to reuse waste materials. In my region, for instance, forestry waste can be used as a fuel source to heat mines.

• (1810)

[English]

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset, I would like to again give my deep appreciation to everyone who has contributed to see Bill C-204 get to where it is today, and this is very exciting.

I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, the Conservative shadow minister for the environment, for his support and assistance.

I am also grateful for the insight and wisdom of my colleagues, including the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, who is always willing to roll up his sleeves to make things happen.

Legends are not born; it takes hard work and dedication. I would like to thank the hon. member for Thornhill, who is going to be sorely missed for his incredible knowledge and commitment to Canadians and to the residents of Thornhill.

We benefited from the contributions of the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka, where, of course, the environment is the economy.

I know each of these members share my passion for the environment, and that was reflected in their remarks.

I would also like to thank the member for Perth—Wellington, who graciously allowed for this bill to come up for debate again at the earliest opportunity. He is a class act.

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I am thankful for the constructive conversations and collaborations I have had with my Conservative colleagues, members of the NDP, the Bloc and the Greens, many of whom seconded this bill. It is a minority Parliament and we will get this done.

Of course, I would also like to acknowledge the many environmental groups, industry organizations and others who have offered their expertise on Bill C-204 and the issues it seeks to address.

Finally, I am very grateful for the continual hard work of my staff, including Patrick Speck, who has worked diligently throughout this whole process. I cannot thank him enough; he is a beauty.

It is an honour to sponsor Bill C-204 and put in the work to get it here. We know more still needs to be done to protect the environment, and I am sure my colleagues in the chamber will want to know I am not done yet.

The Lake Simcoe clean-up fund is still cancelled; raw sewage is still being dumped in our waterways; first nations are still having to fight to get access to clean drinking water; and until Bill C-204 comes into force, Canada is still exporting its plastic waste to foreign countries.

I may not be in my hip waders now, but I can assure members, especially those on the government side, I will keep pushing every day and keep grinding it out to ensure the environment is protected. They can count on that. That is why we are today.

As I have said before, Bill C-204 would strike the right balance. It is clear that we cannot continue to send our plastic waste overseas, where it is devastating our environment. Canada needs to show leadership on this important issue before it is too late.

Many other countries have already taken action on plastic waste exports, but Canada has fallen behind. Sadly, the Liberal government insists that the shameful practice is beneficial despite the harmful impacts it is having on the environment.

Members know that this week is Canadian Environmental Week. Much has been said about the need to protect the environment, but Canadians want to see more than just words. We need action. They want Canada to stop treating the rest of the world like our dumping ground. We must protect our natural environment for future generations without sacrificing the jobs Canadians need today or impacting our ability to properly recycle plastic waste.

It is why Bill C-204 would implement a reasonable prohibition on plastic waste exports intended for final disposal to foreign countries. With the passage of Bill C-204, we can take responsibility for our own plastic waste and ensure it is handled properly, not dumped in the ocean, landfilled or burned in a developing country that just cannot handle it in the right way. This bill would also ensure legitimate environmentally sound plastic recycling could continue and Canadian industry would be supported in their innovative efforts.

It is time to ban the export of non-recyclable plastic waste from Canada to foreign countries. This is one environmental target we can all hit together. Let us put our words into action this Canadian Environmental Week. I urge all members to support Bill C-204.

• (1815)

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded vote or that the motion be adopted on division, I invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Mr. Scot Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, pursuant to an order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 2, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made on Monday, May 31, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 6 under government business.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 6, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

The Chair: Order, please. Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how proceedings will unfold. Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

Pursuant to an order made Monday, May 31, members may divide their time with another member and the Chair will not receive any dilatory motions, quorum calls or requests for unanimous consent.

We will now begin tonight's take-note debate.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this committee take note of the discovery of the remains of 215 children at a former residential school in British Columbia.

[*English*]

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations.

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Children's shoes and moccasins, a teddy bear, flowers, those are what surround the Centennial Flame, just steps away from this House, to honour the indigenous children who never returned home because of the residential school system. Those tiny shoes should not have to be there, because children should never have been taken away to those so-called schools, places where they were separated from their families and their communities, places where they faced terrible loneliness, places where they suffered unthinkable abuse.

Today, some of the children who were found in Kamloops, and who have yet to be found in other places across the country, would have been grandparents or great-grandparents. They would have been elders, knowledge keepers and community leaders. They are not, and that is the fault of Canada.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Our country failed the hundreds of children who are buried near a former residential school in Kamloops. Our country failed their families and the communities from which they were ripped away, and our country failed each child who suffered injustices at these appalling institutions across the country. That is the truth. We cannot close our eyes and pretend it never happened.

[*English*]

What we know is that the discovery in Kamloops is part of a larger tragedy and that from coast to coast to coast, many children forced into the residential school system disappeared without a trace. We know that the harm caused by the legacy of these institutions plays out today in the intergenerational trauma with which so many families must deal. We know that indigenous peoples still face racism, systemic discrimination and unacceptable injustices.

[*Translation*]

To all those who are suffering, I am so sorry that your country let you down. We need to ensure that this sort of systemic failure never happens again. Survivors, families and communities must be the focus of all our efforts to repair the harm caused by residential schools.

[*English*]

Today I renew my pledge to right past wrongs, to support the healing of survivors, families and communities and to walk with them on this difficult reconciliation journey. The residential school system was only one piece of a larger colonial policy designed to erase language and culture and to assimilate indigenous communities so they no longer existed as distinct peoples. We recognize that and we are committed to addressing it.

Earlier today, I spoke with National Chief Perry Bellegarde and Chief Rosanne Casimir of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation. Chief Casimir expressed to me that all Canadians must stand in solidarity and ensure that these tragic stories are never forgotten. As I told her and the national chief, we are here as a partner to move forward on what communities need.

As we continue to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, we have put in place legislation and support for indigenous communities to revitalize and strengthen in-

igenous languages and culture. This is about ensuring that every first nation, Inuit and Métis child grows up proud of who they are.

[*Translation*]

We must not forget the lessons we learned from the residential school system. We need to remember this terrible legacy and strive to do better every day. We are reiterating our commitment to helping the communities find their missing children.

[*English*]

Saying sorry for the tragedies of the past is not enough. It is not enough for the children who died, for the families or for the survivors and communities. Only with our actions can we choose a better path, and that is what our government will always try to do.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his remarks today, and I would like to thank the government for advancing Bill C-8 as part of our collective effort as a Parliament to recognize the trauma in Kamloops and to show swift action for the families. Bill C-8 is an example of that, as are calls to action 71 to 76 in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Can the Prime Minister inform the House of a way that we can all accelerate those provisions, which are intended for providing a road to healing for the missing children and the families affected by those lost in residential schools?

• (1825)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his words and his support in moving forward with the renewed citizenship oath, Bill C-8, which would ensure that we recognize indigenous peoples properly within the core of Canadian citizenship. I also thank him for his commitment to working with us to move forward on fulfilling the calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We moved forward with \$33 million in budget 2019 to help communities across the country with the burial sites associated with residential schools. We need to work with those communities and with indigenous partners to make sure that we are meeting their concerns and getting support to them. However, we will do that together. All parties and all levels of government stand united in wanting to move forward together, as Canadians expect us to.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, on behalf of myself and the Bloc Québécois, I would like to mourn alongside the grieving families and extend my deepest condolences to the Secwépemc nation and all indigenous peoples in Quebec and Canada who are united in their grief and suffering following the gruesome discovery of the children buried in Kamloops.

This situation calls for a historical perspective. We cannot rewrite history, but we can look to the future. Could this be an opportunity to do something more, to revisit the infamous Indian Act and rewrite it from scratch, which is what people want, and also re-think how we dialogue with indigenous communities? Can we take this opportunity to reflect on a nation-to-nation dialogue with indigenous peoples and finally put an end to the Indian Act?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his comments and his question.

We do indeed have to move along the path to reconciliation together. As partners, we have to respect indigenous peoples and listen to what they want, their dreams and their concerns.

Yes, we need a nation-to-nation dialogue. That does not necessarily mean Ottawa will be the one finding solutions. On the contrary, solutions that do not come from indigenous communities themselves are not solutions. That is why we want to get past the Indian Act, which is a colonial relic. However, we have to do it in step with indigenous communities. Many communities are no longer governed by the act, and there will be others. We will work hand in hand with them and follow their lead.

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, it is a privilege to ask a question in the House.

The Prime Minister spoke a lot about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but his government has been slow to act, including on calls to action 71 to 76. Also, in the midst of this debate, the government is fighting St. Anne's Indian Residential School survivors in court. It is a violent act that people who underwent the most genocidal violence still have to prove that violence even today, after the remains of 215 children were found in a mass grave. The government also continues to fight little children against the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruling.

On this very occasion, will the Prime Minister commit to providing communities with whatever they need, so they can take the steps they wish in respect of calls to action 71 to 76?

• (1830)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Chair, as I said, in budget 2019, we put forward millions of dollars for exactly that, and it is something we are working on with the communities. We understand that initiatives like this, given the trauma and hurt these communities have gone through and continue to go through as horrific discoveries are made, require care and support. That is why the communities themselves are leading this process, in rhythm and approach, and why there is support for communities. The federal government will be there with whatever supports they need as we uncover the truth, as we support families and as we get justice for these smallest of victims.

[Translation]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am addressing the House from my home in Toronto, on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. I would like to pay tribute to the indigenous peoples who paddled these waters and whose moccasins walked this land.

First and foremost, I want to say that we are heartbroken for the families and communities affected by the tragic news of last week's discovery of human remains buried on the site of a former residential school in Kamloops.

[English]

We are all profoundly shaken by this horrifying discovery, and our thoughts are with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation people as they mourn and come together to heal and support one another. After decades of work because of a knowing, the Tk'emlúps First Nation has found its missing children.

We will be there to support Tk'emlúps and all communities across Canada affected by missing children, the legacy of residential schools and the intergenerational trauma it inflicted. We are also committed to supporting survivors, their families and communities across Canada to locate, and memorialize through ceremony, the children who died or went missing while attending residential schools.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to find the truth and the painful and lasting impacts of residential schools. In memory of all the children who went missing while attending residential schools, and in support of their grieving families and communities, our government has been working with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to develop and maintain the national residential school student death register and to establish and maintain an online registry of residential school cemeteries, in response to calls to action 72 and 73. Also, through budget 2019, we committed \$33.8 million over three years to support calls to action 74 to 76.

Over the summer and fall of 2020, we hosted a series of 16 virtual engagement sessions, with over 140 participants, which provided a further opportunity for dialogue with a variety of indigenous organizations across the country, such as survivors groups, advocacy organizations, healing and cultural centres, churches and communities, archives and research institutions, provincial and territorial heritage practitioners, knowledge keepers and health support workers. They have been very clear. They want the work to be indigenous-led, community-based, survivor-centric and culturally sensitive. They want support for their research and access to archeological expertise. We learned more about their wishes for appropriate commemoration ceremonies and markers, and reburial in home communities where requested.

I thank all members of the House for the passage of Bill C-5 last Friday, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. This will unlock \$13.8 million in budget 2021 to support more commemoration and the ability to educate all Canadians on the painful legacy of residential schools.

Last Thursday night I was inspired by the resilience of the leadership in B.C. Charlene Belleau, the chair of the First Nations Health Council, said this would be an opportunity for healing and coming together. Kúkpi7 Casimir told me that she was making sure the community was supported and was bringing together the former Kúkpi7s to organize the ceremonies that the communities will need to unlock the healing.

Communities know what they need. We will be there to support their way forward.

I thank the Prime Minister for his heartfelt words when he said that saying sorry is not enough. He is committed to standing with communities as we begin to right these wrongs.

As the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, I want to give my profound apologies to the families and survivors. I promise that we will work together with them to find these lost children.

• (1835)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Chair, I certainly appreciate the minister and her words today.

I would like to raise the experience and some of the words from Upper Nicola Band's Chief Harvey McLeod, whom I have tremendous respect for and who went to the school in question. He has said:

I went back to the two years that I attended. I know that there were incidents happening there because I went through a lot of experiences myself. I know people that just disappeared, and we assumed that they ran away and got away and are at home somewhere, but never did see them again.

We as communities and leadership will find the best way of doing this and taking care of our people. We want to all be on the same page when it comes to having the ceremony to bring our people home.

Would the minister please respond to some of the words from Upper Nicola Band's Chief Harvey McLeod?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, it is an honour for me to respond to that question. Chief Harvey McLeod has taught me a great deal, and I remember conversations with his heartfelt descriptions of the pain that so many in his community endured.

Government Orders

He is absolutely right. The communities know what needs to be done, and our job is to support communities in the way they choose to go forward. It is a partnership, but they know what is needed and we will be there for them.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, *meegwetch*.

In this debate on residential schools, I would like to say that when my sister was at CEGEP, she made a documentary on a residential school that happened to be located on our Anishinabe territory in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Richard Kistabish, my friend Ejinagosi, who was recently appointed a member of the Global Task Force for Making a Decade of Action for Indigenous Languages, said at the time that indigenous people “feel like apples”, meaning that they are red on the outside, but people want them to be white on the inside. These residential schools were designed to assimilate indigenous children, to kill the Indian in the child. Unfortunately, we can see that they also killed them for real.

The minister gave a forward-looking speech, for which I salute her. What measures can she take to commit to sustaining indigenous languages? That may be one way to honour the victims, by making sure indigenous languages are preserved throughout history. What will she commit to doing in that regard?

Meegwetch.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Indigenous languages have almost disappeared because of assimilation policies, as the Prime Minister said. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action are very important to us, especially for protecting indigenous languages.

That is why our government passed Bill C-91, an act respecting indigenous languages, in order to promote and protect indigenous languages. This is very important for all indigenous and first nations languages, including Inuktitut and Michif. This issue is very important to our government, and I thank everyone for their support.

Meegwetch.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, this is a time that is very difficult, for Canadians to face the truth. It is the settler-culture Canadians who have to face the truths that indigenous-culture Canadians have known for a long time.

Government Orders

I find it very sobering and distressing to realize that in 2009 there was a request from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for \$1.5 million to begin the project to find the burial sites of the missing children ripped from their families and never, ever allowed to go home because they had died. We know that it was not this minister's government that turned down that request for \$1.5 million, but why have we delayed so long?

What can the minister tell us about why we delayed so long to provide the funds? Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir had to raise the money within that community to start to find the burial mass grave next to the Kamloops former residential school.

• (1840)

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the question, and I too remember when there were many things the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had asked the previous government for that were declined or that actually ended up in court.

As the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation was set up, we immediately invested \$10 million for that to continue in 2016. That relationship has been very important. They have been directing and supporting the research, the archives and the accessibility for families and communities to actually learn the truth that they had found over those very difficult six years.

There is no question that the missing children project and the working group during the commission did a phenomenal job, which resulted in calls to action 71 to 76. Call to action 71 was about the coroners with the provinces and territories. We are doing calls to action 72 and 73 with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and we have engaged—

The Chair: We will have to leave it there. We are out of time, slightly over.

Resuming debate, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Chair, the residential school system is a dark and painful part of the Canadian story. Tragically, new chapters are still being added to this sad history.

Just days ago, the discovery of a mass grave in Kamloops, containing the remains of 215 schoolchildren, was a heartbreaking reminder of the pain indigenous children, their families and their communities were subjected to through residential schools.

This weekend, my nine-year-old son, Jack, asked me why the flags were at half-mast in Ottawa. I had the difficult task of explaining to my son the terrible news of the graves of children found at the site of a residential school. "Kids are not supposed to die at school, Dad," he told me. Sometimes the moral clarity of a child reminds us of our responsibilities as parliamentarians.

[Translation]

As a father, I am devastated to think that 215 children were buried at their school and lost for decades. As a member of Parliament and leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, I think this tragic discovery is shocking, and we have a duty to heal the wounds from this chapter of our history.

[English]

Yesterday, I wrote the Prime Minister to ask him to take immediate action to address this unspeakable discovery and support the indigenous communities and our country, which is in mourning. I will repeat my request for immediate action here in the House and pledge our full support as an opposition to act swiftly.

First, we have asked the Prime Minister to accelerate the completion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 71 to 76, dealing with missing children, burial sites, identification, commemoration, and to work, step by step, side by side, with families and indigenous communities in this important part of reconciliation. These calls to action should be prioritized immediately.

• (1845)

[Translation]

In addition, in the spirit of reconciliation, we are calling on the Parliament of Canada to pass Bill C-8 to recognize the aboriginal and treaty rights of first nations, Inuit and Métis people. This legislation will incorporate references to the aboriginal and treaty rights of first nations, Inuit and Métis people into the oath of citizenship. Together, we are participating in the reconciliation process.

[English]

Responsible citizenship in this great country of Canada requires us to commit to the ideals of our country: peace, order and good government, equality and opportunity for all. At many points in our history, we have fallen short of these ideals and these values we cherish. This is particularly the case in our collective failures with respect to indigenous Canadians.

Healing is the path forward. Healing is a powerful thing.

Roseann Kiyawasew is 93 years old today, but as a child, she and two siblings attended a residential school in Sturgeon Lake in northern Alberta. It was there that her little brother, Johnny, just 11 at the time, developed what was likely pneumonia. His condition was exacerbated by abuse and he died alone in hospital away from his family with no loved one to hold his hand or to give him comfort.

For more than 70 years, Roseann did not know what happened to her little brother and she lived with the trauma of feeling like she could have somehow done something to keep him safe. That haunted her. Roseann does not believe her parents were ever notified of Johnny's death, nor were they told where his young body was buried. In 2013, through extensive research, Roseann was finally able to locate Johnny's unmarked gravesite in High Prairie, nearly a hundred kilometres from their home.

In his memorial, Johnny's sister shared the following words about him: "You had acquired great strength from our forefathers and wisdom beyond your years. You were always so gentle, kind, caring and helpful. You had developed, through your pain, acceptance, courage, patience, understanding and tolerance."

I have no doubt that Johnny's family was robbed of a boy who would have grown into a compassionate, intelligent man, an important member of their community and someone who could have given this country so much.

Roseann went on in her memorial to Johnny by saying, "Through the years, we often wondered about your final days alone, and the location of your resting place. Now that we have found each other again, perhaps we may begin to heal."

The Kiyawasew family permitted me to share the story of Johnny to be a message of hope to the 215 families who are still waiting to be reunited with their loved ones, that they too may heal.

I also want to speak directly to Roseann from the floor of the House of Commons today. She is now living in a long-term care home in Grimsby, Ontario. I want to say to her, "You did not fail your brother, Roseann. Canada failed Johnny. The trauma you have had to live through and the grace you are showing in sharing your family's story of healing gives me hope that healing is possible for the 215 families of the children found in Kamloops. It also gives me hope that healing and reconciliation are possible for our country."

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

This is not about partisanship or politics. It is about taking a step closer to reconciliation. Every MP and every Canadian has a role to play in reconciliation.

[*English*]

To me, reconciliation means recognizing areas where we have made mistakes or failed to do better. It also means striving to be better. It means learning from when we fall short ourselves in the journey of reconciliation, as I have in the past, but also acknowledging that reconciliation requires more than important but only symbolic gestures. It requires action. It requires restoring trust in the federal government and its institutions. It means building partnerships with indigenous communities for the well-being of all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

We must work together to shed light on this dark chapter of our history. We must acknowledge it, learn from it and make sure that it never happens again. That is my commitment to indigenous Canadians. We must listen and learn, and above all, we must not remain silent when people ask for something as basic and human as simply knowing where their children were buried and being able to commemorate them with respect and dignity.

[*English*]

When I think of those 215 children, I think of the tremendous contributions they might have made had they not been robbed of their futures. I think of the beautiful families they could have raised, and the knowledge-keepers and remarkable Canadians they could have become.

We owe it to each and every one of them to redouble our efforts today toward reconciliation and healing.

Government Orders

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I noticed the member mentioned he would like to see us accelerate the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 71 through 76, but I am wondering about number 57, which is the recommendation on UNDRIP.

Will he ask Conservative senators to support Bill C-15 and do what he can to help us ensure that all indigenous people are guaranteed equal human rights, as every other Canadian is?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, the member knows, or likely should know, that that is guaranteed in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which predates UNDRIP. It is an important document that was started by a former Conservative member of Parliament.

I think all parliamentarians share our commitment to reconciliation, but what we have to do is make sure it is more than just important words, lowering of flags or gestures. These are important in healing, but it is more important to address the underlying unfairness, give certainty to the families, and give the ability, as Roseann and her family had, to heal.

I would ask that member to work with us to move swiftly on calls to action 71 to 76 by Canada Day. Let us have a plan to deliver the true potential of this great country for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Chair, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his speech.

Tonight's debate is very emotional. We all feel it.

The hon. member told us that he is a father. As an aunt and status of women critic, my thoughts obviously go out to the mothers of these 215 children. What is sadder still is that we know that this is just the tip of the iceberg. That is what prominent representatives of indigenous communities, including Ghislain Picard and Mich le Audette, have said. In Quebec, more bodies of children who were taken from their mothers could be discovered.

On behalf of all those women who have been harmed, and knowing that indigenous women are still suffering a lot today, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls issued its final report. One of the recommendations in the report was to implement Bill C-15 and sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This is important.

The Leader of the Opposition said that concrete action is required. Ensuring that Bill C-15 moves forward is one such action.

Will his party finally recognize that it is important to sign this international declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples?

Government Orders

• (1855)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

All first nations issues are important, including economic reconciliation. I read Bill C-15, an act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Some indigenous people and indigenous leaders from various nations, including some in Quebec, have questions about a small part of this bill.

Today I talked about calls to action 71 to 76. We must make these a priority, for the sake of the grieving families.

Now is not the time to play politics. Now is the time to take action for families and indigenous people across the country. I started studying this issue long before I entered politics because it was important to me. That is why I mentioned my son Jack. It is important to have a serious debate about a serious matter. The residential schools were a national shame.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Chair, elders across Canada have been very clear. There can be no healing without justice.

I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition, who has referred to residential schools as a place of higher learning, could answer why, when he was in government as a member of cabinet, their Conservative government denied the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's request of \$1.5 million to research mass burial sites.

We know, as the survivors have told us again and again, that there are many children lost, buried without a marked grave, and their families are still searching. That government did not support that \$1.5 million, which would have helped us to not be in the position we are in today.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, on these occasions it is important for us to not only show support to the families and communities suffering but to also debate and educate Canadians, including the member from the New Democratic Party, on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, including the ones I am citing today. I would much have preferred for her to talk about partnering on them than be mistaken in her timeline with respect to a request from 2009. I do not think she was in this place. I was not in this place.

I want action. We have a Prime Minister who is very good at announcing things and saying words, but not good at delivering. The first nations on Vancouver Island deserve someone who is going to push for action, not to talk about 2009.

Therefore, I would be happy to work with her leader and her party on moving on calls to action 71 to 76 and, in the process, learning about how the apology, the lawsuit settlement by the last Conservative government, was a step. There are many more steps in the journey of healing required, but we need a much more serious and thoughtful approach from all parties.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Chair, I certainly appreciate hearing my leader share the story of Roseann. Hearing that single story was heartbreaking. I can

only imagine that the 215 other stories, at very least, would be unimaginable.

I bring up again first nations from my riding. This is Upper Nicola Chief Harvey McLeod. He said:

We always knew that this was happening there, but it was in our own minds, we had no proof other than our own experience. We hear really horrific stories about what happened and dealing with our people that had passed on....

It's going to take a lot of strength to walk with our people while they remember the hurt and pain from that school. And it will be so much better when we're all united, working together to ensure we're there for our citizens.

Could the leader of the official opposition please comment on how to proceed to work together on reconciliation and coming to terms with this great trauma?

• (1900)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, that is why I brought the story of Roseann Kiyawasew to the floor of the Commons today. As Chief McLeod from the member's riding highlighted, it is about walking together on a journey of healing.

Roseann's journey to find where her little brother was buried took 70 years. That was 70 years of trauma and pain, feeling that she did not do enough, when it was the federal government that had failed her and her brother. In speaking with Chief Casimir today in Kamloops, and speaking with my colleague, the MP for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, I know this journey is an important one.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action on missing children provide us a map for that journey. That is why I wrote to the Prime Minister yesterday on calls to action 71 to 76. That is why I am disappointed by the Bloc and the NDP. Rather than doing the real work of getting on that journey with Chief McLeod and with indigenous families, we see announcements with no plan, and we see partisanship when there is an opportunity to actually heal. Let us make the journey together.

[*Translation*]

We must work together for indigenous Canadians.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Opposition told my colleague that we should not respond with political arguments, yet that is what he just did by bringing up his plans for the future.

I will ask the question again. We are participating in a debate on the rights of indigenous peoples, which we buried with the residential schools. I will remind members that these rights were buried, and there is nothing more morbid in the current circumstances.

My question is about the rights of indigenous peoples, and it is very simple: Why did the Leader of the Opposition vote against Bill C-15, which would recognize the rights of indigenous peoples?

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question.

Government Orders

Ironically, I was just talking yesterday with a few indigenous mayors and leaders from Abitibi—Témiscamingue. It was an important conversation for me as a new leader with a new approach as well as extensive experience in the private sector.

There would be many opportunities for economic reconciliation if we had a plan and a serious partnership with indigenous peoples. Thousands of indigenous leaders have reasonable questions about the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I am more familiar with the file than my colleague is, and I am prepared to work for the well-being of indigenous people across the country.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Chair, I think that kind of attitude needs to be dropped right now. I know this may shock some people, and there are even people in my own entourage who do not like it when I say things like this, but that attitude of thinking that you know better than others and know what is best for them, it is so very white.

We are talking about 215 children buried in an unmarked grave, over a period of nearly a century. The cause of death is unknown, their ages are mere estimates, their names are generally unknown and their parents are also unknown.

That is the tragedy, and it is terrible. Beyond words, Parliaments, upholstered chairs and plush carpeting, that is the tragedy of this kind of attitude, an unbelievably arrogant colonial attitude from people occupying the territory by force and claiming superiority.

I am an anthropologist by training. It can be awesome, and it can be awful. It can be awful because, in an allegedly scientific framework, anthropologists claim to know their subject better than the subject knows themselves. As a result, the anthropologists think they are in a better position to decide matters for the subject than the subject themselves. However, it is a construct, beyond the desire to create a science out of finding differences captivating and enriching, somewhere between the extremes of vile prejudice and naked idealization. True acceptance is the mutual enrichment we gain from our differences. It serves no purpose whatsoever, all these years later, for parents to experience something that should never happen. A parent should never outlive their child. It makes no sense. It goes against the natural order.

Like some other members have mentioned, this past weekend, I too had issues with my children. I have several kids. You are a parent for life, except when your children are taken away. These children were locked away, uprooted, hidden, in order to be acculturated and robbed of their collective identity as members of a nation who have their own perspective and relationship to the Earth and to nature. They do not see it through the lens of appropriation. They do not experience the idea of nation as we do. Rather, they experience it in a relationship that is fundamentally and rightfully different.

Then someone came along and, allegedly without malice, but with immense interest, thought that it would be better to strip children of their identity, erase who they are and, perhaps worst of all, take away their relationship with their parents, under conditions so horrific that a staggering number of them would die before reaching adulthood, very likely from mistreatment and neglect, all in the name of religion, all supposedly for their benefit.

• (1905)

We are still reckoning with this history. Politics will come into it eventually, but today I am still coming to grips with the realization, because this day is forcing us to face facts. Before we can do any political analysis, which in some ways is fairly simple, we must deal with the constant agony of knowing that, by God, we did this.

It is not just 215 children near Kamloops. It is potentially thousands of children, because they came from nations whose land was being appropriated, and the white colonizer despised and envied them at the same time.

After all these years of suspecting this, it is now increasingly clear. We are starting to see the light, or better yet, we know that we could see the light. We can get to the bottom of this. Beyond the commissions, the analyses, the words, the commemorations, or before all that, there needs to be knowledge without complacency. The first step is to acquire that knowledge.

We learned that a technology that is used on construction sites, but is also used quite regularly in archeology and anthropology, helped pinpoint the location of this sad discovery in a rather simple way. It is true that this could be done elsewhere, and it can be done everywhere. There are no pleasant surprises in store, but the pain must not be used as an excuse to spare us from the need to get to the bottom of this matter.

That will take resources, but, honestly, I will say quickly that I do not care. It will definitely take some money, and the first nations will obviously not be asked to pay for it. The federal government needs to pay for that. It will take science, knowledge and the ability to use those technologies, so we will need the help of institutions, research centres and universities. To avoid any temptation, it will inevitably take quick, immediate, strong, unequivocal and lasting action to protect the sites. We have a duty to bring to light the truth.

We need to be aware of the worst parts of history, not so that we can brood about them but so that we can come to accept a profound loss, become aware of a former denial of dignity and remember that every first nation is one that has often been disenfranchised and humiliated. The government purported to be helping them while making them disappear. That was also said of French Canadians back in the day, but we are still here.

Beyond apologizing, what should we do? I do not know. Perhaps even the first nations do not really know yet either.

However, we must not tell them that we know what is good for them. When we talk about Bill C-15, we are talking about their initiative. We must not tell them that we are going to look into this. No. We need to listen. We need to focus on, receive and accept their requests and recommendations.

This morning, I was saying that there is no culture in the world that does not consider its children to be its most precious asset. It is therefore with humility, without self-pity and in the spirit of sincere friendship that we can perhaps admit that this is becoming political, if, and only if, the word “political” is used in its most noble sense, that of serving, taking action and correcting wrongs.

The first nations are kindred nations and friends on the same continent and, let us not forget, on one earth.

Government Orders

• (1910)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly for his moving speech, which attests to his sensitivity. Having met with indigenous communities in my region together with my colleague, I can say that he has a great deal of empathy.

As he does not necessarily wish to speak about political actions, I will instead speak of a concept cherished by indigenous peoples, that of restorative justice. What can we do at this time to support the bereavement process in these communities?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, I thank my esteemed colleague.

Is there justice that is not restorative? Despite all the uncertainty, when wrongdoing is committed, when the tragedy takes place, when the crime is committed, reparation consists of admitting what happened, listening, and mitigating the impact, the pain and the tragedy.

Once again, in this case, reparation does not come from claiming to know better than first nations what is good for them and their children, but comes from what the first nations want.

• (1915)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his truly moving speech. I would like to ask him if he agrees that it is time to recognize that Canada committed a genocide against indigenous peoples.

Does he agree that the federal government must do everything possible to search all grounds of former residential schools across the country, as first nations in my riding and across Canada are calling for? Does he agree that we must reveal the truth about this genocide before we can even think about reconciliation?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, as I said in my remarks, the first step is of course to acquire knowledge. It seems cold and awful, but that means identifying the sites, analyzing them and using technology to search them virtually. That data will have to be compiled, just like the data on missing and murdered women, to document what happened so we can acknowledge it and reflect on what we did.

The point is not to take responsibility on a daily basis for something that happened years ago, but we do have to at least accept our shared historical responsibility for it. Naturally, resources will have to be deployed and the sites will have to be protected.

As for the notion of genocide, I am wary of getting into a semantic debate over words. I am not afraid of the word “genocide”, and I have no problem saying “cultural genocide” if there is a desire for acculturation. However, I will leave it to first nations to choose the term we should use.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his heartfelt comments this evening.

I would like to ask him about the TRC recommendations. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission gave us 94 calls to action that attribute specific actions, depending on the level of government and toward different civil society organizations.

Would the Bloc support us in ensuring that all these calls to action, which are the purview of the federal government, are passed and that we work together to ensure we are on this path toward reconciliation? Could we count on his support to move forward?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, I am not sure how to approach this. Am I in a frame of mind to say or hear that, under the circumstances, we would be required to say that there is something now and that we need to do this? No, I am not there. I am still in shock and need to absorb it.

Any recommendation that is sanctioned in a healthy and legitimate way by first nations is worthy of consideration. However, should the government not take a step back, eat humble pie and recognize that there is a major new variable in the picture?

It has just been revealed that there will be thousands of children's bodies discovered after the 14 recommendations. We could end up with 125.

Should we not first humbly acknowledge that and recognize that we may not even have gone far enough in the analysis or recommendations that were made?

• (1920)

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the leader of the Bloc for his important and heartfelt speech.

We know that in Quebec, Bill 79 is currently being studied by the National Assembly. Indigenous chiefs are asking that all sites in Quebec be secured. It is important to know that Quebec's history is not necessarily noble either when it comes to first nations. Of course, history teaches us about all sorts of things that happened many years ago, including residential schools.

I would like to know if the leader of the Bloc supports the requests made by indigenous leaders to include in Bill 79 the securing of all sites so that these same searches can eventually be done.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, I choose to refrain from interfering in the Quebec National Assembly's work, including their choices, hypotheses or proposed legislation, since I think Parliament interferes far too much in Quebec's jurisdictions.

We are talking about a demand made by one nation to another nation that would require resources, which I referred to earlier, to create a kind of sordid inventory of the abuse inflicted on thousands of children. It is believed that this abuse also occurred in Quebec, as these religious communities arrogantly took over, often resorting to abuse instead of the compassion and responsibility they were meant to have shown.

Government Orders

Therefore, in principle, I think that these demands should be considered.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Chair, we have spoken a lot in the House lately about the impacts of systemic racism, particularly against indigenous peoples. Joyce Echaquan is an example of how systemic racism resulted in death, the same as the deaths that resulted from the genocide against indigenous children at residential schools.

I wonder if my hon. colleague acknowledges that what happened in residential schools, and what is currently being perpetrated against indigenous peoples is systemic racism.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Mr. Chair, regardless of what some colleagues who were present in the House and on the screen may say, in June 2020, I acknowledged the existence of systemic racism. On multiple occasions thereafter, I denounced the extreme and often focused politicization of the term. If it is a concept describing how institutions, rather than individuals, throughout history have systematically, which could be extrapolated to “systemically”, discriminated against communities like the first nations, who were here long before us and from whose perspective we are the migrants, the invaders, the colonizers, if that is what it means, then I do not have a shadow of a doubt that it exists.

It was when the term “systemic racism” was transposed and turned into a political weapon against the Quebec nation, which may not share certain points of view on Canadian multiculturalism, that I took exception to the glorification of the term for political purposes. This term should instead convey a message and a duty of compassion.

I acknowledged it in 2020, and I still acknowledge it today.

● (1925)

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my hon. colleague for Winnipeg Centre.

[*Translation*]

The discovery last week of 215 children buried on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School is a sad reminder of Canada's genocidal actions against indigenous peoples. First nations, survivors, elders, leaders, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and others are calling for action to confront this history and help bring about closure. Families and communities are discussing this important issue, and now the House is doing so as well.

I have asked the Prime Minister repeatedly if he will stop fighting indigenous children and residential school survivors in court. He refuses to say he will. He refuses to say that he will stop making indigenous families and residential school survivors suffer. That is not reconciliation. True reconciliation means taking real action to end the injustice against indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

We reeled in horror at the discovery of 215 indigenous children found buried at that former residential school. Canadians across the country were horrified by what had happened to these children. As a nation, we saw people around the country hold memorials to reflect on what this horror means.

What it means very clearly is that these residential schools were not schools. They were institutions designed to eradicate and eliminate indigenous people. They were institutions designed to perpetrate a genocide.

I spoke with Chief Rosanne Casimir, an indigenous leader representing the community at the heart of this, and she told me about the pain her community feels right now. This is not a surprise. There are many examples of indigenous children being killed and dying at residential schools, but the uncovering of this site opened up wounds and requires healing.

Chief Rosanne Casimir reminded me of the importance of the community, the need for the community to heal and the importance of the federal government supporting that healing.

I want to point out very clearly that, while we are reeling from this loss and this horrible discovery, we have to also acknowledge that injustice continues to happen. The Prime Minister and the Liberal government are, at this very moment, fighting indigenous kids in court despite multiple Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decisions. Despite multiple orders from the Human Rights Tribunal, the government is fighting these kids in court. The Liberal government is fighting survivors of residential schools in court right now.

The Liberal government is failing so badly in putting in place the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry's calls for justice that indigenous women's groups are saying they are going to have to come up with their own plan to implement them.

Today in this take-note debate, I want us to move beyond the nice words and symbolic gestures the Liberal government makes again and again. We need concrete action.

What does that look like? It stops the legal battles. It stops fighting indigenous kids in court. It stops fighting Human Rights Tribunal decisions. It stops fighting survivors of residential schools in court.

We are calling on the federal government to work with indigenous nations to put in place funding for further investigations, and we are calling on an acceleration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. We want real action. That is what justice demands.

● (1930)

It is not good enough to say that we are sharing condolences. We demand action to put right injustice and to fight for a future that is based on human rights, respect for treaty rights, respect for justice and respect for the inherent dignity of indigenous people.

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Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, survivors, families and communities were shaken once again by the discovery of 215 children in unmarked graves in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc at the Kamloops Indian Residential School: the largest school in the Indian Affairs residential school system.

I want to extend my sympathies to the community, survivors and families. I lift you up today and every day.

Unfortunately, this tragedy is not the first time we have discovered the remains of little children around these schools. Acts of genocide were more the norm and not the exception. According to the TRC, at least 40% to 60% of children who attended these schools died. Sometimes, according to Mary-Ellen Kelm, it was as a result of having been purposely exposed to infections such as TB, spreading the disease through the school population. Former TRC commissioner Murray Sinclair has said that he believes the death count could be much higher due to the schools' poor burial records.

These are the sacred lives of children exposed to acts of genocide, often to never return home. Families were left without answers about where their loved ones were, like at Brandon Residential School. The bodies of more than 50 children were discovered on the institution's grounds in 2019. It is now being used as a private campground, and survivors and impacted family members, including Jennifer Rattray, are working to find closure, as she stated in a CBC interview today. She said:

The families and communities whose children were lost while attending these schools have questions that deserve answers. The children buried at these sites must have their identities restored and their stories told. They will never be forgotten.

Can members imagine having to ask permission to honour the remains of children who perished as a result of genocide?

The fact is that genocide against indigenous people is so normalized that it actually needs to be discussed. Even in death, our children are disrespected and disregarded. Families, survivors and communities need closure, and the spirits of our lost children need to be nurtured. They need to be put to rest. They need peace.

We need to act now. At the very least, we need to heed the 94 calls to action and support them with adequate funding, including calls to action 71 to 76. We need to fund nations so they can complete their own radar ground searches at all Indian residential school sites. This is supported by the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, Long Plain First Nation, Pimicikamak Cree Nation, AFN and so many others.

We need to block off all residential school sites immediately as active crime scenes so that indigenous nations, survivors and families can decide how they want to proceed in their searches for their loved ones. These should be treated like crime scenes, according to Chief Dennis Meeches from Long Plain First Nation.

We must stop fighting residential school survivors, including those from St. Anne's, and provide emergency and ongoing support for survivors, families and communities who continue to deal with this trauma as a result of the residential school system.

We need to recognize what happened as a genocide, not as a cultural genocide. It meets the criteria of genocide under the UN Genocide Convention.

We need this government and all members of Parliament to support us in bringing our children home. Please allow us to have that justice, to get that closure and bring our children home.

• (1935)

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for her passion and advocacy, not only today, but on Bill C-15 and her unwavering commitment to UNDRIP. It is an amazing honour to be able to ask a fellow indigenous person questions in the House when dealing with indigenous people in the House of Commons.

We have heard of sad and tragic events like this for generations within our indigenous communities, and only now are we beginning to see the evidence of what the TRC called “cultural genocide”, but you speak of as “genocide”.

Can you elaborate a bit more on what you believe the difference in those definitions is and what your thoughts are around the difference in terms?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would like to remind hon. members to speak through the Chair.

The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Chair, there is no category for cultural genocide. Genocide is genocide. We cannot classify genocide. It falls under the UN Genocide Convention. Forcefully removing children from one group to another group, I would say, meets all the criteria that classify a genocide, although some argue with that. If we want to reconcile in this country then we need to own the truth. We cannot continue to minimize the truth. What happened and continues to happen against indigenous people is genocide, full stop.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to share with the member and the House that I have heard and seen posts from many people in my constituency who have been deeply moved by these events. These are people from all across the political spectrum and people who do not even normally follow the news that much. This has really struck a chord with people in my community and across the country.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made many recommendations. When dealing with the issues that have come up in the last few days, recommendations 71 to 76 specifically around missing children and burial information have been cited.

Government Orders

I would like to hear a bit more from the member about the specific policies related to those recommendations she thinks the House could move on. Which are within the domain of government regulation, and which ones might require legislative action within the House?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Chair, I would like to correct something the member said. They are not recommendations: they are calls to action, which are very different.

The TRC laid out a very clear path forward based in law. It mentions the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples over 15 times as the framework for reconciliation. Bill C-15, which we have been debating in the House, will be up for a third and final reading. I hope the member, if he is worried about law, supports Bill C-15 to ensure that indigenous peoples are afforded, at the very least, the minimum human rights that should be given to all peoples, and that continue not to be respected for indigenous peoples.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Given the topic we are discussing, I have no desire to ask her a political question. Instead, I want to ask her a philosophical question.

During the recent crisis we went through, my leader talked about having a nation-to-nation discussion. Right now, however, one nation is staggering under the weight of the history it carries on its back, while the other nation has its head down, eyes lowered in shame.

Does my colleague hope that one day, these two nations be able to stand tall and proudly look each other in the eye?

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam Chair, in order to function nation to nation, at the very least we have to respect each other's human rights. Right now, this very day, the government continues to fight against the human rights of indigenous people on a daily basis. Our human rights are up for debate. It is about respect. If we do not build respect in truth while upholding our Constitution, which includes aboriginal rights and title and which includes international conventions that support and lift up human rights, it will be difficult to develop a respectful nation-to-nation relationship.

● (1940)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. I want to acknowledge that tonight we are having a debate that is extremely emotional. We are all doing the best we can, as we hold the burden of these beautiful children in our hearts. However, I want to note that the leader of the NDP stood and gave a speech. Hands were up, but no questions were asked of our leader. I wonder if we could return—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I apologize, but the hands came up after I had called the next speaker. I was looking at the screen in front of me. I am sorry, but that is what happened. It is what we saw on the floor of the House.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. My hand was up but I was never called.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We did not have time. I had to go to the alternate parties. When a member from the NDP speaks, I have to go to the government side. Then I go to the official opposition side and the second opposition. Therefore, I did not have time to go to the member, and I apologize. It was just a question of—

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq: Madam Chair, you did not go to anyone, though.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. For the purpose of this discussion, if we are splitting time within our party and the first speaker does not have anybody recognized, does that question period time not get allotted to the second speaker, given that we are sharing the slot? Should we not have additional time set for, at the very least, the member for Winnipeg Centre to have the remainder of this round completed?

I understood that if we are splitting time within our party—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I will try to deal with the points of order as they come.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, I rise on a point of order. I know we are keen to get back to the debates, so the simplest way to resolve this would be to propose unanimous consent to revert to questions and comments for the leader of the NDP. We can do anything by unanimous consent. I think there were good intentions all around, but if there is unanimous consent to do those five minutes of questions now, that would allow us to proceed.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: We cannot have unanimous consent during a take-note debate. However, I am in the hands of the House, so if the House agrees that we give the hon. leader of the NDP five minutes of questions and comments, I will proceed that way.

Since everybody agrees, we will go to questions and comments for the hon. leader of the NDP.

The hon. member for Nunavut.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Madam Chair, when listening to hon. members, we are all thinking heavily about what they are talking about. We are talking about 215 children and babies, but we are also talking about 215 parents. We are talking about communities. We are talking about generations that have been affected.

Who knows how many more children's bodies would be found if we searched every single site. This is not a discovery, but confirmation. Indigenous people have been talking about bodies buried at these school sites for decades, not just at these known sites either but other sites that are not considered residential schools and clearly should be. This is asked for explicitly in the TRC calls to action.

At the pace the government is going, roughly two calls to action per year, we will not be finished until 2062. The Prime Minister will be 91 by then.

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Could the member speak to the lethargic pace of the action on the TRC calls to action and what it means to have these actions delayed for indigenous peoples and indigenous communities across the country?

• (1945)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Madam Chair, we often hear the saying, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” With respect to the calls to action, 12 of 94 have been accomplished. This is an absolute denial of justice. We need to take this moment now, when we are feeling horror, sadness and pain at the discovery of these young children in this grave, and do something for justice.

Let us use this moment, in honour of those lives that were lost, to fight for justice now. We cannot bring those lives back, but we certainly can fight for justice now. We can implement the calls to action. Words are not good enough. We need actions, we need to implement justice and we need to do it now.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, the government has indicated that \$33.8 million have been made available with respect to calls to action 71 to 76, but \$27.1 million still remains, so it is mostly unspent.

If we want to facilitate moving forward on those calls to action, does the member have any awareness as to what the problem is? Has the process become encumbered? Clearly some financial resources have been set aside for that purpose.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, the question comes down to why are the calls to action not being implemented. The only answer I can think of is because of a lack of political will. The government has had a majority. It has had the power to do so.

At this point, as leader of the New Democratic Party, I am committed to any legislation that would bring forward any steps to implement the calls to action. I am ready to make that happen. The only thing I see with respect to a barrier in bringing in the calls to action is that the Liberal government does not want to do its job. That is the sad reality.

We are committed to make it happen. We are ready and willing to pass any legislation required. We need to see the government do more than just talk about it, but actually implement the changes required to put in place justice, to bring forward justice.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Chair, this was not surprising at all. As horrific as the news is, anybody who has been paying attention has known about this for a long time.

My question relates to another set of institutions that were across the country. We had one right here in Nanaimo, the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. I have done a film. I have interviewed elders about experimental medication, experimental dental practices, experimental medical practices. This was on a former Department of National Defence site, which the Snuneymuxw First Nation is wanting to get back. It and has been delayed for 20 years. Crown Indigenous Relations needs to get this land turned over to Snuneymuxw First Nation as soon as possible.

What does the hon. member think about having documentation from these Indian hospitals released so this can be examined as

well? It was not only residential schools; the Indian hospital system has an appalling and horrific track record.

• (1950)

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Madam Chair, the member has raised another issue. There are countless examples, systemic in nature, of the clear steps taken by Canada, by the Canadian government, to oppress, to eliminate and exterminate indigenous people. There is no other way to put it. Those are the facts. That is what we see in evidence.

We need to expose the injustice. We need to work toward remedying the injustice that can be remedied now. We need to support indigenous communities in the pursuit of the truth and of discovering additional sites. We need to work in partnership with indigenous communities that want to uncover other information about the harms suffered. We need to work in collaboration with indigenous communities to expose every and all systemic abuse that was perpetrated toward indigenous people.

Hon. Dan Vandal (Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Indigenous Services. I also want to acknowledge that I am speaking to the House from my office in Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, in the city of Winnipeg, homeland of the Métis nation, Treaty 1 territory, a city that is now home to many Inuit.

The discovery of the remains of 215 children, 215 young lives tragically lost is a reminder of the consequences of colonialism for indigenous people and their communities. We must never forget the victims. We must never forget the children who were sent to these schools, those who came home and those who never did.

Still today, too many Canadians lack awareness about the tragedy of the residential school system and the systemic way indigenous children were taken from their families in the attempt to “kill the Indian in the child.” Children were forcibly taken from their homes with the aim of destroying indigenous people’s spirituality and individual cultures.

Residential schooling followed a unique trajectory in the north. By the 1950s, there were six residential schools and one hostel north of the 60 parallel. In the 1950s, Inuit children began attending these institutions in large numbers. The tremendous distances that children had to travel to school meant that very often these children were separated from their parents not for weeks, not for months but literally for years.

The establishment of these schools and what were termed “small hostels” in over a dozen communities in the eastern Arctic contributed to a dramatic transformation of the Inuit economy and way of life. Many Inuit parents decided to settle in the communities where their children attended school on a year-round basis, so they could remain close to their kids.

Generations of Canadians have not known the truth of residential school systems. It is important that the House and Canadians not only call this historic, in the past; it is an ongoing situation and many people suffer intergenerational trauma. Families were destroyed. Children never came home. To call this historic actually diminishes the pain and the suffering faced by indigenous people today throughout Canada.

During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission testimony, thousands of survivors came out of the shadows to share their heartbreaking residential school experiences. Cast aside and shunned from the public view for far too long, these stories came into the light. We must honour the survivors who are able to tell their stories. We must certainly honour those who will never get that chance.

I continue to think of survivors, my friends, my community, the families of those who have never returned, as they learned of this heartbreaking news. Canada will provide, must provide the needed resources to support them on their healing journey. In the coming months, our government will be working with survivors, with their families, communities and other partners to locate, identify and memorialize the missing children in their burial places.

For a long time, Canada's Arctic and northern residents, especially indigenous peoples, have not had the same services, the same opportunities, the same standards of living as those enjoyed by other Canadians. There are long-standing inequalities in transportation, communication, employment, housing and education.

Reconciliation must be a collective journey. Together, we must create a new path forward with dignity in a true spirit of reconciliation.

• (1955)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, again, I appreciate my colleague's speech. We are all rocked by the tragic and horrific discovery of 215 children in the mass burial.

I know that for calls to action 71 to 76, there were significant dollars allocated for moving forward. There is, I believe, about \$27 million remaining. Would the minister commit to supporting Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc in the forensic work that needs to be done, and making sure that the dollars flow in a timely way so that the people can move forward on this important path?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, since we were elected in 2015, our government has invested over \$30 billion of new money in infrastructure, in education, in health and in boil water advisories. I do not have a lot of that detail, but I believe it is already started. If it is not already started, it is something that we need to complete and I hope the member from British Columbia can offer her support to that initiative as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like his thoughts on the fact that money was announced in past budgets for certain Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action, including calls to action 72 to 78. The \$33 million

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that was announced did not actually materialize. It was not earmarked so that it could be spent.

I would like to know if we constantly need to have a new crisis just to realize the importance of what needs to be done. Do we ultimately need a crisis every time just to get us do the right thing?

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for her question.

I can assure the House that reconciliation is our government's number one goal. Since we were elected in 2015, we have invested more than \$30 billion in education, infrastructure and health care, in partnership with indigenous, Métis, Inuit and first nations communities.

This has been a priority for our government from the beginning, not just since last week. We are working in partnership with indigenous nations, and collaboration is important. It is all the more important today, after last week's discovery.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, I wonder if the minister and my friend across the way would agree with me that what happened in residential school is a genocide as defined under the UN Genocide Convention, which states:

...acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Does my friend and the minister agree that what happened in residential school was, in fact, a genocide, not a cultural one, to which there is no definition under the convention, but genocide?

• (2000)

Hon. Dan Vandal: Madam Chair, that is a very important question from my friend from Winnipeg. From the very beginning of Canada's birth, Canada has had a racist policy toward indigenous people or Indians, as they were called in 1867.

The first policy objective was to civilize the savage, because indigenous people were deemed to be uncivilized; so to civilize was the first policy objective.

The second policy objective was to Christianize indigenous people because they did not have their own spirituality; it was totally devalued.

The third policy objective was to assimilate, to rid the Indian in the citizen. Complete assimilation was the policy.

What we have today is a direct result of those racist policies, which were adopted in 1867.

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Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Chair, Adrian Reynold George, Agnes Michou, Ambrose Alexander, Annie Frank, Annie Lucy Andrew, Arcelle William, Archie Oxime, Bobby Joseph Bell, Caroline Harris, Christine Jacob, Christine Josephine Joy Joseph, Christine Jules, Clarina Matthew, Eileen Joseph, Florence Morgan, Francis Alec, Francis Maximin, Francis Moses, Frederick Lecamp, George Michel, George Petel, George Purdaby, Gertrude James, Gladys Chapman, Henry Lulu, Josephine Louie, John Lecamp, Julienne Sharon Dennis, Kathleen Mitchel, Leonard Major, Leslie Lewis, Louise Seymour, Lucine Whimpin, Marguerite Fallardeau, Mary Anne Souelle, Mary Francois, Minnie Spy, Nellie Fallardeau, Pearl Joe, Peter Michael Purdaby, Ronald Frezie, Rose Adrian, Rose Marie Adolph, Sandra Seymour, Shirley Link, Sophie George, Sophie Petel, Theophile Dick Billy, Violet William, Willard Frank William, Willie Joseph. These are some of the children known to have been lost at the Kamloops residential school between 1900 and 1971.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, with the guidance of survivors, elders and knowledge-keepers, developed a memorial register to honour the children who never returned home. Thanks to their continued work, we can remember the children stolen and taken to residential schools knowing that there are still more children to be found.

At the site of the former Kamloops residential school, and all over the country, last Thursday's news is just the tip of the iceberg. As set forth in the volumes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, this number is in the thousands. Indigenous communities, families and friends are hurting, emotions are high and the pain is real. For indigenous people, this may not be a surprise. It does not make it less of a shock—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: My apologies to the hon. minister.
[Translation]

There seems to be a problem with the interpretation. The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I am sorry to interrupt the minister, but we are unable to hear the interpretation.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Can we try and see if it is working now?

[Translation]

The problem seems to be resolved.

[English]

The hon. minister.

• (2005)

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, emotions are high and the pain is very real. For indigenous people, this may not be a surprise, but it does not make it less of a shock or less painful. Anyone who frequented residential schools and survived has a story about someone who died or disappeared. More often than not, they were not believed. This truth is painful and must be told. We cannot talk about reconciliation without truth, and true healing cannot begin or continue without the truth.

As we have learned from the calls to action, we must continue with the indigenous communities at the forefront in our duty to help their search for the truth by supporting communities wishing to survey suspected sites in their communities. We must make space for indigenous voices.

I had the opportunity to speak to Kukpi7 Casimir Thursday evening and expressed my support and the full support of the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the B.C. First Nations Health Authority, with whatever they need in the coming days as they decide how to move forward to honour and commemorate these children.

I encourage all Canadians to read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report and its calls to action. I was going to ask people to talk to their children, but they should listen to their children, about residential schools and why the country is mourning. They are learning about it in school. Anyone my age probably has not.

Please understand that many indigenous people across the country are grieving right now. We must all support the communities in mourning in their search for truth to ensure the entire truth is known. We cannot and must not look away.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his very thoughtful comments today and for the work he has been doing in the last week on this.

My conversations with indigenous leaders in my riding have identified for me the need for further education and the need to inform people of all ages about the history of Canada and residential schools.

Can the minister inform this House of the specific plans and commitments the government will make to further educate people of all ages about the reality of the history of our country and residential schools?

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, it is key to whatever we are doing as a country that it is not just politicians talking about it. Everyone needs to talk about it.

My daughter, on Monday, chased me out with her computer as I was leaving and started telling me about what they were talking about just then, which was the drama and the find in Kamloops. It is what inspired me to say those words. I certainly did not learn it in school. There is so much work to be done in this country.

The member for Cape Breton—Canso spent a good part of his career, as a Mi'kmaq man, fighting for treaty education. We do not do enough of it. The federal government has a role to play in this.

Obviously, education is in the purview of the provincial governments, and there has been some great progress made, but it needs to continue. This search for the truth, this path on reconciliation, which is long and painful, not linear or obvious, is one that has to go through continued efforts to educate and make investments in education.

It should be a very important reflection again as to how far we need to go when it is indigenous people, and it is not on their shoulders to have to educate us. That knowledge is welcome, but we should be educating ourselves and the burden should not be on their shoulders. It is up to everyone. I said that with some hope at the end of my words that we do need to listen to our children, because I have realized in the last few days they know a little more than us.

• (2010)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, the government unfortunately likes to brag about setting aside money to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action.

In 2019, the government announced \$33.8 million over three years to implement calls to action 72 to 79. However, that money was not budgeted in the main estimates for the three following years.

My question is simple. Where did that money go?

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, I thank the member so much for her very relevant question.

I do not think this is the time to boast about all of the financial and political capital this government has invested in indigenous communities. What we need to remember is that we will be there for the communities by responding to calls to action 71 to 76, knowing that call to action 71 talks about provincial coroners and the key role the provinces play when criminal investigations are needed.

We have a very difficult road ahead of us. We are talking about crime scenes, sites that will now be sacred. We will need to do this painstaking work while ensuring that indigenous communities are at the forefront.

Many people have asked me about the role of the federal government. The federal government's role is to make room for indigenous communities. We will be there to provide financial support, so there is no need to worry about that. However, the substance also depends on the form, and the form, which is an issue so critical to indigenous relations, dictates that first nations, Inuit and Métis peoples must be at the forefront.

[*English*]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Chair, first nations across our region and the country are grieving, reliving unspeakable trauma and they are angry. It is time for Canada and Canadians to accept the reality this is genocide, genocide against indigenous people. These were not schools. They were detention centres, they were torture chambers and now we know more about the mass graves, the mass murder.

First nations are demanding action. Pimicikamak Cree Nation has reached out to the Prime Minister, calling on the government to support the search of the grounds of the residential school imposed on them for decades. First nations are calling for searches, for support and for truth.

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The minister talked to us about talking to our kids about residential schools. What about talking to our Prime Minister, talking to our ministers and hearing from them what they will do concretely to achieve justice and acknowledge this genocide done against indigenous peoples? What will they do to—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: The hon. minister.

Hon. Marc Miller: Madam Chair, indigenous communities should know that we will be there for them now in their period of grieving and healing, and that we are deploying mental health supports. My thoughts are squarely with the communities. Many of them had their kids stolen and taken to the residential school in Kamloops. We will be there for them.

We have been asked to give them space, and we will give them that space. FNHA is there to help communities across the country that want to go on that very painful and difficult path, as they consult their own community members who are grieving their relatives who never came home. We will be there to support them, but it will be according to their terms and not the federal government's terms.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be splitting my time.

Tonight we have heard some very difficult and heartfelt speeches. We heard a common theme from the Prime Minister and many others and it is about listening to the communities.

We have a short time frame for speaking tonight, so I thought the most important thing I could do tonight would be to share with the House and Canadians what the communities are saying, what their message is and what their requests are. In a conversation with Kukpi7 Casimir today, we talked about what I should say on her behalf and her community's behalf. She also has an official news release, and this is a direct quote:

As the last logs go on our sacred fire, I want to extend my heartfelt gratitude for the outpouring of support to our community. Thank you for helping us bring to light such hard truths that came from the preliminary findings regarding the unmarked burial sites of Kamloops Indian Residential School students so that we may begin the process of honouring the lost loved ones who are in our caretaking. We love, honour, and respect these children, their families, and communities.

To the Prime Minister of Canada and all federal parties, we acknowledge your gestures, but as a community who is burdened with the legacy of a federally mandated Indian Residential School, Canada must face ownership and accountability to Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc as well as all communities and families.

We have heard from many survivors from our own community and beyond. They are finally being heard after so many years of silence and disbelief about the deaths of children in the residential schools. No words are sufficient to express the comfort and love we wish to extend to survivors and intergenerational survivors. We see you, we love you, and we believe you. We are thankful to the many who are working hard with us to ensure supports are there as you come to terms with these latest findings as well as your own truths and traumas.

For further important context, we also direct everyone's attention to the report, "Where are the children buried?", by Dr. Scott Hamilton, which states:

This report addresses the question where deceased Indian Residential School...students are buried. This is difficult to answer because of the varying circumstances of death and burial, coupled with the generally sparse information about Residential School cemeteries. It requires a historic understanding of school operations that contextualizes the patterns underlying death and burial.

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Chief Casimir further stated:

We ask all Canadians to reacquire themselves with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report and Calls to Action – upholding the heavy lifting already done by the survivors, intergenerational survivors, and the TRC. In addition, to show your solidarity, we encourage you to wear an orange shirt and start conversations with your neighbours....

She also had many specific requests to respect the jurisdiction, including their cultural laws and traditions. She said that they must be respected and that they must be in control of all aspects of the next step. She talked about calls to action 71 to 76 and how critical they are.

The AFN has only seen moderate progress on this particular report card. The calls to action are really important and there has been moderate progress. We also heard that there have only been a few million dollars spent out of the \$33 million that has been put aside.

I do not think any Canadian has not been terribly ashamed, which is an important word to use. There are 215 innocent children in unmarked burial sites at one residential school, and there were 139 schools. This is a shame and a failure. It is our burden to carry, and we must start to ease the heavy load that has been carried by indigenous people for far too long.

• (2015)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her heartfelt comments and also her strong leadership over the past several days. I want to extend my condolences on behalf of my constituents to hers on this tragic loss and this enormous pain that her community is undergoing.

I know the member has been involved in this issue for many years. I would like to ask her about the importance of self-determination and ensuring that all of us respect the right of individual communities and nations to determine, as communities try to grapple with this, what needs to be done and what the role of the federal government ought to be to ensure they can pay respect to their children in a way that is very sensitive and in line with local practices.

• (2020)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, this community made the very specific request that they needed to be in charge of this process. They needed their cultural traditions and laws respected, and they had to determine the path forward. The government needed to be there as a partner, in terms of support.

Clearly, I think we all recognize that sometimes governments get overly bureaucratic with how they proceed with moving forward. We have to be sensitive, and we have to take the lead from the communities. This community is providing enormous leadership, and they have an enormous burden in terms of taking care of these lost children. We need to support them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her speech. I also want to remind the House that the horrific discovery was made in her riding. I therefore offer her and her constituents

my deepest sympathies as a member of Parliament. I had the opportunity to visit Kamloops last summer, and I could really feel all the symbolism and importance of indigenous peoples in the city and in the region.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the importance of discussing the rights of indigenous peoples on a nation-to-nation basis and showing up ready to have a genuine exchange and listen to first nations, without giving the impression that we know what they need better than they do. What does she think of that new tone?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, the Tk'eml ps te Secw pemc have been leaders for many, many years in terms of how they have moved forward. To be quite frank, the federal government has gotten in the way of their progress, whether that has been economic or in other ways.

We do need to, as we have said tonight, make it real. Let us respect the jurisdiction. Let us provide the support they need. We are very proud of something called the Kamloops amendment. We are very proud of the work at the First Nations Taxation Commission, the economic development they have done, and the partnerships they have made in terms of how we move forward together. We need to continue that and really stay out of their way, but be supportive in terms of what needs to be done.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, once the largest residential school in Canada, was operated by the Catholic Church from 1893 to 1969.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo referred to the TRC's calls to action. In referencing call to action 74, which calls on the government to work with churches and aboriginal communities to inform the families, it has been widely reported that indigenous leaders and advocates are calling on the Roman Catholic Church to apologize and take responsibility for the atrocities committed against the children, families and communities by the residential school system.

Will this member join these indigenous leaders and many others, including myself, in calling on the Roman Catholic Church to finally and formally apologize for its role in the residential school system in Canada?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, it was about three years ago that Parliament passed a motion asking for a papal apology and, much to our disappointment, that has not happened. We know that there have been other apologies that have been given.

I do join my colleague in calling for this apology. It is part of the healing. It is part of the closure, and it is another important call to action.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Madam Chair, I rise this evening not as the critic for Crown—indigenous relations, not as a member of Parliament, but as a father horrified by the tragic discovery in Kamloops of the 215 children buried and forgotten at a residential school in Tk'emlúps territory. I want to acknowledge the deep sadness and grief that all indigenous peoples and survivors of residential schools are experiencing at this time and wish to express my deepest sympathies to the first nation itself, and those surrounding indigenous communities who are sharing in this tragedy.

A new page is being written on the dark shameful narrative that is the Canadian residential school legacy, a legacy that has had a profoundly lasting and damaging impact on indigenous families, culture, heritage and language. While communities and families grapple with this unthinkable revelation, it is time for all of us to come together and aid in the healing process.

This must be more than just words. I cannot blame indigenous leaders and communities who are listening to us tonight, wondering if our sentiments are just that, just words. It is time to act, and that time was actually long ago. That includes all governments, not just this one. We need to put the resources in place to protect, honour and identify these children, and to find and bring home all the lost children throughout Canada.

Last night, the Conservative Party sent a letter to the government, respectfully recommending that the following actions be taken.

First, the development of a comprehensive plan to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 71 through 76 by July 1 of this year. The time for action is now.

Second, to put in place enough funding to investigate all former residential schools in Canada where unmarked graves exist, including the site where 215 children have already been discovered. I understand that only three of the 160 acres have been checked at the Kamloops location and the ramifications of that are too dreadful to even contemplate.

Third, ensure that proper resources are allocated for communities to commemorate and honour any individuals discovered through the investigation, according to the wishes of their next of kin. This must be done in consultation with the leadership of indigenous communities, to safeguard their wishes and to protect cultural practices.

Last, we must never forget what happened here. We call on the government to develop a detailed and thorough set of resources to educate Canadians of all ages of this tragic history of residential schools in Canada. I am sure all sides of this place will have recommendations, and I am sure the government will also table its actions and what it intends to move forward with. I look forward to seeing those details. As I mentioned, I offer my sincere assistance to the government in this regard.

Following the historic apology to residential schools, their students, their families and communities for Canada's role in the operation of the schools by former prime minister Stephen Harper, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada began the hard work and dedication of building public awareness about residential

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schools and to bring forward 94 recommendations to all levels of government, public and private institutions, and religious organizations. The goal of the commission's findings were to foster reconciliation, understanding and respect. The final report of the TRC helped to explain this dark chapter in Canadian history and the calls to action addressed the legacy of residential schools and advanced the process of reconciliation.

I thank the commission for its very hard work, but the torch has been passed. We need to address the outstanding recommendations in that report. They need to be addressed quickly so that we can move forward on the road to true reconciliation with Canada's indigenous peoples.

Manny Jules, the former chief of that first nation and survivor of the Kamloops residential school, said recently that everyone knew there were children buried on that site. He even went on to say that those children were also in unmarked graves in other places across Canada. He is demanding action, not just words. Indigenous people want action, not words, to find these lost children.

● (2025)

I implore the government to take action right now to fund and support the investigation of all residential schools in Canada, and bring those children home.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank my friend across the way for his speech and for his work on this file.

The member talked about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Earlier tonight, the Leader of the Opposition was asked about call to action 43, which calls on the federal government to adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I think all of us in the House can agree that we cannot pick and choose from the recommendations which ones we should implement. I am wondering if the member opposite would work with his Conservative colleagues in the Senate to ensure that this legislation does get passed, and gets passed quickly.

● (2030)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, I appreciate the question from my friend from Oakville North—Burlington.

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Conservatives have said many times that they support reconciliation, including financial reconciliation. They also support the spirit of UNDRIP. What happened at the committee process with Bill C-15 was that the opposition parties were amplifying the voices of first nations leaders themselves. They were the ones who showed up at committee expressing concerns in regard to that bill, specifically about free, prior and informed consent and exactly what that means, not just for industry but for the way of life as well, the certainty that it provides.

Again, these were not just voices of Conservative Party members; these were the voices of the indigenous communities themselves, trying to get their voices to the government. That is what we were trying to do.

As I have said many times, we support reconciliation. We support the spirit of UNDRIP. We were looking to amplify the voices of those on the ground and those first nations communities concerned about Bill C-15.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank the member for his very empathetic presentation. We can feel the weight of his experience, and we can see that he is offering solutions and recommendations, for which I am particularly grateful to him.

I would like to ask him how we can help this community mourn these children and what actions we can take, while, of course, fully respecting indigenous traditions.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, I thank my friend for that very meaningful question.

As my friend from Kamloops mentioned in her speech, listening to those people on the ground, listening to the communities and following their direction on how to proceed, that is what the communities need. The government owes that to them. That is how we are going to at least start to move forward with this.

The federal government needs to work as a partner, but also listen to and take action on the recommendations and the suggestions it is hearing from the first nations community.

Ms. Mumilaaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Madam Chair, as the member was speaking, although he did say some nice words, I could not help but reconcile words and action. The irony, the complete irony of hearing heartfelt speeches from Conservatives—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Apologies, I have to interrupt the hon. member. We need the hon. member to put on her headset for the interpretation. We will stop the clock. We will have to go to another questioner.

The hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, I just want to comment on something that another member said earlier, noting that the residential school in Kamloops had been run by a Catholic entity.

Obviously for those of us who are Catholic, it is deeply painful to see the way in which the principles of our church, the values of

our church, were betrayed by people who abused children in that context.

I also want to put on the record that Pope Benedict, the last pope, did apologize in 2009 to indigenous leaders. I know there is a request for a pope to apologize on Canadian soil, and that has not happened yet. Of course, the pope has not been to Canada since the TRC made that request. I suspect the issue would be addressed in the future, in a papal visit.

However, it is important to put on the record that this apology has been put forward by the pope, as well as all the Catholic entities involved, and that all of us, people of faith and legislators, need to do all we can to work together to promote reconciliation.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, I do agree that we all have to work together on reconciliation. I do not think anyone believes this was anything but a very dark time in Canadian history and not something any of us could be proud of.

I did stand in support of that motion in the previous Parliament to ask that the Catholic Church apologize for its role in the residential schools in Canada, and that was something I was pleased to support because it was long overdue.

• (2035)

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Yukon.

I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking from the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation from my home in Oakville.

My thoughts are with all indigenous families as they mourn. Like all Canadians, I am devastated by the horrifying news from British Columbia, where the remains of 215 children buried at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School were discovered. This is not news to indigenous peoples in Canada. My friend, the member for Northwest Territories, shared with me that there is a mission graveyard in his small community. Half of those buried there are children from the local residential school.

Many years ago, the Catholic Church removed the crosses, dug up the priests, nuns and brothers and moved them to a new graveyard. Then it plowed over the old cemetery and grew potatoes there. In the early 1900s, the community, working with elders, hired specialists to locate the bodies of the children buried there, re-claimed their names, remembered their ages and erected a monument. I am ashamed to say that I did not know this story, and I suspect that most Canadians do not know these stories.

Families deserve closure. Our government is committed to supporting survivors, the families as well as communities, to locate and memorialize children who were killed because they were forced to attend residential schools.

We invite indigenous communities to seek federal support, which is available, to conduct radar scans on other residential school sites to confirm if lost children are buried there.

The history of residential schools was not taught when I was a student. When I was first elected, I held a public screening of the documentary *We Were Children*. A former MP attended and said he wished he had known this history when he served in Parliament in the 1980s.

Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1910, said of residential schools, "It is readily acknowledged that Indian children...die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this alone does not justify a change in the policy of this Department, which is being geared towards the final solution of our Indian Problem."

This month during #IndigenousReads, I am encouraging my community to read *21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act* by Bob Joseph. It is important to confront our past to learn what is true in order to move forward on the path of reconciliation.

Near my home, the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School operated in Brantford from 1828 to 1970. It served as a school for first nations children from Six Nations, as well as other communities throughout Ontario and Quebec. Just today, Six Nations of the Grand River has asked the federal government to help it search its grounds.

The Save the Evidence project from the Woodland Cultural Centre is working to restore the former Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School into a historical site and educational resource. Projects like this that are indigenous-led are vital for educating the public about our past and for understanding the realities of indigenous peoples in Canada.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made 94 calls to action. If Canadians have not already read them, they should do so. Calls 71 to 76 deal with the missing children and burial information.

One of the honorary witnesses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a friend of mine who survived the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. We have talked about what Canada can do as we implement the recommendations of the TRC. Call to action 81 calls for a residential schools national monument in Ottawa to honour survivors and all children who were lost to their families and communities.

Now is the time to take action on this. Our government has worked to build a more equitable relationship with indigenous peoples based on partnership and honesty. We have introduced legislation to establish a national day for truth and reconciliation, to amend the oath of citizenship and to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We are working with indigenous leadership and communities to implement legislation that affirms and recognizes indigenous peoples' jurisdiction over child and family services to reduce the number of indigenous children in care. We are committed to continuing to take action to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance reconciliation across Canada.

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I pray for the stolen little souls and I mourn their loss.

● (2040)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Chair, I have been listening to the debate, and what I feel is shame. We have been talking about this for years. We have the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which spent years criss-crossing Canada, gathering testimony from thousands of people who said that what happened at residential schools in Canada over the past 150 years was a scandal. Here we are again this evening talking about various possibilities.

I did not like the fact that my colleague said Canadians would have to read the report. It is not up to Canadians to read the report. It is up to the Government of Canada. The government is the one that has to implement the action plan and provide the resources to make that happen. That is what it has to do.

I have a simple question for my colleague. Does she acknowledge that the way indigenous individuals and indigenous children were treated in residential schools over a period of 150 years was a bona fide genocide?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Chair, with all due respect to my colleague, Canadians do need to read the report. As well, I would say that of the 76 calls to action that are under federal or joint federal responsibility, 80% of them are either finished or under way.

However, it is not only government that needs to read that report. All Canadians need to read the report, and all Canadians need to be aware of the what the member talked about, the shame of what has happened. I completely agree with him on that.

As I said in my speech, Canadians are surprised by what was found in Kamloops, but indigenous peoples were not.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Chair, the parliamentary secretary spoke about closure and the need for closure. In the wake of this horrific situation, we also, of course, need to honour the children. However, in order to move forward on closure and to honour the children and the lives that have been lost, we must also accept, acknowledge and admit that this was genocide.

Will the member call this a genocide, and not a cultural genocide, but genocide as defined by the UN genocide convention?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Chair, several years ago, I was in Rwanda and visited the museum that documented the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and I saw pictures of children on the wall who had been massacred during that genocide.

Over the weekend, the faces of those children came back to me as I thought of those 215 children in our country of Canada. I kept asking myself how humanity could continue to treat children like garbage and feel that they were disposable.

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Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, to my hon. colleague and parliamentary secretary, it is a hard thing to acknowledge as settler culture Canadians that our entire society has been built on dispossessing indigenous peoples of their lands. The residential school system was part of the institutionalized racism and genocide to break down the culture, the societies and civilizations that were here before European settlers.

I am wondering if the hon. member would return to the question, and I know it is a tough question, that was just asked by the member for Vancouver East. Can we admit that we are the beneficiaries of a genocide?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Madam Chair, when we think about how our country was founded, we see it was founded on racism, and it was founded on colonialism. As a result, indigenous peoples not only had to deal with this 150 years ago but also continue to deal with it today. We see systemic racism in policing. We see systemic racism in our health care system in Canada. Often we look south of the border and seem to think that we are better than people who live in the United States, and we are not.

The racism and colonialism that continues to exist in Canada is unacceptable. All Canadians have to take responsibility for that, and all of us have to take action to make sure that we end the racism and colonialism that continues to exist today.

• (2045)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency), Lib.): Madam Chair, I come to you from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

I want to start with a statement I made on social media.

The magnitude of this horrific tragedy initially left me numb. So many children were lost and so many families are grieving. So many emotions of heartbreak are breaking out again. Even if it were only one child, for that family it would be an infinite lifetime of sorrow.

As I was at a memorial of shoes with Angus Sidney, and on a walk yesterday, I and many others imagined what would happen if this were our own children. How could any parent bear such an incalculable pain?

At yesterday's event, after chief after chief expressed their deep sorrow, it was uplifting to hear them, led by Doris Bill, talk about a path forward and reconciliation. Nothing can undo these devastating events, but we in the Government of Canada, under whose authority residential schools were created and maintained, need to do everything in our power to bring these children, and those yet to be found, home to their families.

As well, ongoing support for indigenous-created healing is paramount. The highest priority must be given to continuing to work intensively with families of victims, with indigenous women's groups such as those in Yukon leading the country, and with other indigenous leaders and organizations across Canada to bring all the TRC calls to action to fruition. We can all continually work with

those whose hearts are not yet in the same place as the hearts of the many who yesterday attended the Yukon gathering founded in love.

I want to now go over what, in this brief time of a couple of days, at least some of my constituents are asking for or demanding. Almost everyone who contacted me wanted to make sure that all the sites of residential schools in Canada would be searched for all potential graves. They understand that this needs to be indigenous-led. It needs to be as the families want and it needs to be culturally appropriate. They want all the calls to action of the TRC, the parts the federal government is responsible for, to be fully implemented, especially numbers 74 to 76 related to this event.

Investigations must occur and there must be accountability. They want Canadians to educate themselves and acknowledge these dark times in our history. One person said it is not a dark chapter of history, but a foundation of the unjust way that Canada was peopled. They want St. Anne's Indian Residential School survivors and those damaged by insufficient child welfare to be fully funded.

They have said that there need to be big closure ceremonies, clean water and other good conditions, as well as a national day of mourning. One person provided me a list of some terrible, specific, horrible crimes on specific children. The individuals have not been held to account, and it makes healing under those conditions difficult, if possible at all.

In our small city of Whitehorse, we had a spontaneous memorial set up on the steps of the Catholic church where over 400 pairs of children's shoes just appeared. At the invitation of Angus Sidney, I slept on those steps all night with him to honour those young lives that ended all too soon. The next day, there was a walk of thousands of Yukoners taking these shoes to display around a sacred fire that continues to burn right now. The procession was silent except for the heartbeat of the drums. At the fire, a number of chiefs spoke of tragedy and of sadness, but also of true leaders, of a path forward and of reconciliation.

Because this deplorable part of our history was not taught for the longest time in our schools, only after this tragic episode are many Canadians finding out about these devastating deaths. I commend all those across the country who have organized these events. I commend all indigenous leaders, and the tens of thousands of Canadians who turned up at the sad ceremonies across the country, for opening their hearts to the difficult steps we all must take to try to achieve reconciliation that will bring peace to all and a path forward together.

Marsi.

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● (2050)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Yukon for his intervention. It is clear that he cares deeply about this evening's debate, which I hope will spur action and progress. I hope this evening will be as constructive as possible, so that we can undertake a nation-to-nation dialogue with indigenous peoples and communities with the utmost respect.

The budget allocated \$33.8 million to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 71 to 78. Unfortunately, that money does not appear to have made it to where it is needed.

Just as I am talking about re-establishing dialogue, we are learning that the Native Women's Association of Canada has lost confidence in the federal government and has decided to implement the recommendations of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls itself.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks. Can we change our approach? Can we take action? Can we get the money to where it is needed? Can we implement the recommendations of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls?

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Madam Chair, the member said something I was really glad to hear, which is that this night should be for constructive debate on how we can move forward in a positive way and deal with such a tragic situation. The healing requires not a short time but, for some, a lifetime. She also made the very important point that it needs to be a discussion with indigenous people because they have to be led.

I understand that it takes time to go to the various sites and uncover potential graves. Everything has to be done after consultation with the families. They want it done in a culturally sensitive way and in discussion with indigenous people. That is why I think some of the \$33 million related to calls to action 74 to 76 has not been finished. It is making sure it is done in the right way, but I have every confidence that the funding necessary to complete all these actions, many of the actions I outlined and in the TRC recommendations, will be forthcoming as it is needed.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, my colleague is an experienced parliamentarian. Will he commit tonight to doing everything he can to make sure that as communities, whether Tk'eml ps or the other 139 or 138 communities, are ready to move forward, the dollars flow in a way that is responsive and does not get bogged down in bureaucratic red tape? In some cases, the communities are ready to move forward.

Does he commit tonight to doing what he can to facilitate things moving forward?

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Madam Chair, that the money moves forward as quickly as possible without bureaucratic hang-ups is very important. A role politicians have to take when they have a priority is to make sure it moves forward. We, as parliamentarians, have a way of working that a lot of Canadians do not know about, which is inside caucuses. This is where a lot of the work gets done in Parlia-

ment and we can move things forward. I certainly have the priority, as she seems to from her question, of getting these things done and getting a number of actions done, such as those I mentioned in my speech and such as a number the TRC recommendations. Repatriating the bodies of the children, finding the ones who have not yet been found and providing the healing necessary should all be done without any holdup and as quickly as possible as the ministers direct their departments.

● (2055)

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desneth —Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Chair, tonight I will be sharing my time with the member for Kenora.

Normally, whether in person or virtually, I would talk about what an honour it is to rise in the House and speak on a topic. However, tonight it is not easy to speak on the horrific discovery of 215 children found buried at a former residential school in Kamloops, as the reality is indescribable.

This discovery is a sombre reminder that so much more work needs to be done to address the devastating and harmful effects that residential schools had, and still have on many survivors today. All Canadians must stop and reflect on what the truth is of our history as a country.

For far too long, Canada has ignored our own collective secrets hidden within the history of this country. The recent news from Kamloops brings that reality to the surface. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2008, one of the outcomes of that process was the need to deal with the very first aspect: the truth. There is an old adage that the truth hurts. It unfortunately rang very true these past few days.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to spend some time with two vice-chiefs of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council: Vice-Chief Lawrence McIntyre and Vice-Chief Richard Derocher, both residential school survivors. In fact, Vice-Chief Lawrence McIntyre is a third-generation residential school survivor.

We had a long conversation about many topics and issues that are happening in Northern Saskatchewan, in my riding and across our country. A story that Vice-Chief Derocher shared with us that day resonated with me at the time, and with the events of this past week, I have continued to reflect upon it.

He told of how Orange Shirt Day has been an important educational tool for people to learn about the residential school system. He explained how one of the best ways to combat racism is through education, and that when we come together and see and treat each other as people, we recognize that our similarities far outweigh our differences.

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Vice-Chief Derocher then told a story about how he happened to be in Saskatoon on Orange Shirt Day last September. As he made his way about the city that afternoon, he said it brought tears to his eyes as he saw people all around on the streets, walking on the sidewalks and going in and out of stores and buildings, wearing the colour orange. What he saw that day was a collective recognition of a wrong. It was a powerful statement that we are beginning to see movement in the right direction.

I also thought of the Vice-Chief's story last week when I heard about the online comments directed toward Ethan Bear. As an avid hockey fan, it was disheartening for me to see a young man who is a role model for so many young people have to endure what he did in the aftermath of the Edmonton Oilers' playoff loss. It is sad that there are still people in this world who resort to such bitterness and cruelty.

However, I could not help but notice it was also an opportunity for voices of support, of the majority, to come out in waves and drown out the voices of the uneducated. We can all take inspiration from the strength of character and the class that Ethan showed in his response to dealing with a situation he did not deserve. As a former hockey coach, I would take a team full of Ethan Bears.

These stories highlight the need for more and continued education on the truth: It is a truth that all Canadians must collectively share until we get this right. We may be moving in the right direction at times, but a more concerted effort is needed.

Yesterday, the leader of the official opposition sent a letter to the Prime Minister with recommendations that need urgent action. The first is to develop a comprehensive plan to implement TRC calls to action 71 through 76 by July 1, 2021. The second is to fund investigations at all former residential schools in Canada where unmarked graves may exist, including the site where 215 children have already been discovered. Third is to ensure that proper resources are allocated for communities to reinter, commemorate and honour any individuals discovered through this investigation according to the wishes of their families. Finally, fourth is to develop a detailed and thorough set of resources to educate Canadians of all ages on the tragic history of residential schools.

Let me end by saying that the truth is not easy. It requires courage and vulnerability. For those of us who have been tasked with an opportunity for leadership, it will take some humility and a desire to change an approach that has not been good enough.

● (2100)

Partisanship, by its very nature, is in direct opposition to the meaning of reconciliation. Canada needs us to be better.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Chair, I truly want to thank my colleague for his very emotional and very moving speech. I would like his comments on the following.

This evening, all our eyes and our attention are turned to this horrifying story that has just been uncovered, but we need to take action all year long. For instance, we must take action when we debate the budget that covers so many things.

My colleague was talking about courage and humility in his speech. I would like him to talk about what we can do to remember that it takes this kind of courage and humility not only on evenings like this, but all the time.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, earlier on I asked a question, and I talked about the need for people of all ages to have education on this very important topic. In response to my colleague's thoughtful question, I suggest that this has to become more about listening to each other. It has to become about allowing people to tell their story and listening with sincerity and honesty. It has to be about individual responsibility. It has to be about honest, authentic and real relationship building with people who are different from us, who look different from us, who act different from us and who have a different culture from us. We have to listen, and we have to find a way to respect one another.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Madam Chair, I think we all agree that the residential school system was a piece of a larger colonial policy that existed in this country for a very long time. My fear, like many others', is that indigenous children are still not recognized, treated and held to the same standard as all other children in society. That is a big and very sad statement.

What would the member's commitment be to Canadians, to indigenous children and to their families? What does he see as the next steps forward that we have to take as a country?

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, in my speech I referred to Vice-Chief Derocher, and I had a conversation with him yesterday. He shared with me his honest desire to see all of us as the same. We are all just people; we are all just God's creation. I think a huge step for us in addressing this issue will be to not see each other as different, but to see each other, whatever one's belief system is, as created beings who are the same, as human beings who are all created equally to thrive and to have purpose in the lives we live. I could not have said it better than Vice-Chief Derocher did.

● (2105)

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Chair, my hon. colleague spoke a lot about courage and truth, and today I tried to seek courage and truth from the government, but it refused to answer.

I am wondering if my colleague would agree that what happened in residential schools was a genocide. According to the UN convention on genocide, it means:

acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Would my colleague please show courage, speak truth and call this what it is: a genocide?

Government Orders

Mr. Gary Vidal: Madam Chair, I am a relatively new MP, and one thing I have learned is that partisanship, language and some of the particulars that we like to talk about in the Ottawa bubble do not matter to the people on the ground. When I talk to indigenous leaders and indigenous people on the ground in my riding of Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River and in my community, they say they want us to work toward finding solutions to some of the challenges.

The events of this week are a bit of a watershed moment, because they have created an opportunity for us to really look inside ourselves and see what we believe about some of these things. Our individual responsibility to listen, to build relationships and to respect our neighbours and friends who are different from us has become way more important than the partisanship and the specific language around the issue.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Madam Chair, when a mass grave containing the remains of 215 school children was discovered in Kamloops, it sent major shock waves throughout the nation. However, for many indigenous people, although the discovery opened tremendously deep wounds, it was not a surprise. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, at least 3,200 children died while attending residential schools. As I understand, that is one in every 50 students.

The mass grave in Kamloops is not the only site in Canada interring the remains of indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their families. This is Canada's national shame, and it is the incomprehensible and unfortunate reality that has impacted families across the country.

Survivors of residential schools remember the horrors of being taken from their parents and being removed from their communities and their cultures. Tragically, many of these survivors remember friends dying from diseases such as tuberculosis or because of negligence—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but we seem to have an issue with his Internet connection.

We will try again. Please proceed.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Chair, my apologies for that.

As I was saying, many of these children who were victims of abuse fled the schools and died alone as they tried desperately to get back to their parents. Many know the story of Chanie Wenjack, a young Ojibway boy from Martin Falls who, at the age of 12, attempted to escape from a residential school in Kenora. He tragically succumbed to the conditions and died in his attempt to get back home.

The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation states that over 70 indigenous youth died while at residential schools in the Kenora area. We also know that many families were treated with contempt in their time of grief. Parents of these young victims were routinely denied information about how their children died and were not able to reclaim their bodies to say a proper goodbye.

For the reasons I have highlighted and many others, residential school survivors and their descendants continue to live with the trauma of their experiences. Canada's Parliament needs to show our

commitment to reconciliation. As I understand it, the government is currently deliberating on what next steps should be taken.

Yesterday, the Leader of the Opposition respectfully submitted recommendations for some of the actions the government could take to assist communities in this time of sorrow. We recommend developing a comprehensive plan to implement TRC calls to action 71 to 76 by July 1; funding the investigation at all former residential schools in Canada where unmarked graves may exist, including the site in Kamloops; ensuring that proper resources are allocated for communities to reinter, commemorate and honour any individuals discovered, according to their wishes; and developing a detailed set of resources to educate Canadians of all ages on the tragic history of residential schools.

I note that the aspect of education is one that I believe is greatly important. I am the youngest member of Parliament, and I am likely one of the few who did learn a bit about residential schools during my education. However, it was not until I was nearing the end of high school that I truly began to learn some of the horrors and some of the true history that had gone on.

I remember feeling a sense of shame and a sense of embarrassment, for lack of a better word, that even though so many of these horrific incidents occurred just down the street from where I lived and grew up, I had no idea about them until I was nearing the end of high school. That is completely unacceptable, and I believe that is why we need to continue to have a stronger focus on education for all Canadians, especially young Canadians.

I know my time is drawing to a close, so I will just say that it is my hope that the government gives sincere consideration to the proposals that our party has outlined. I look forward to seeing what other actions it may take. It is tremendously important that all of us in this chamber work together on this issue and work across partisan lines.

● (2110)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I very firmly believe that this absolutely cannot be a partisan issue. Constituents of mine have been reaching out to me extensively about what has transpired regarding the discovery of the mass grave and what it means going forward.

It seems quite obvious to me that it is not just Kamloops and Kenora. There are about 139 different sites around the country. Does the member think we could achieve unanimous consent on moving quickly to have forensic investigations done at all of these sites? Then we could have some transparency and accountability for the number of unmarked graves and burial sites that exist around this country, and at least provide some sense of transparency and accountability to indigenous people on this land.

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Chair, I certainly do not want to speak for any other members of the chamber or for other parties, but I do believe that this is the action we need to take. We have to have that transparent process.

Government Orders

I appreciate the comments from the parliamentary secretary, and I certainly hope that through this debate we can continue to move forward with more concrete action and have all parties on board for that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Chair, I very much appreciated my colleague's touching testimony. I would like him to know that I too feel ashamed.

In a debate like this, words matter. Earlier I asked a Liberal member a question, but she did not provide a clear answer.

The first paragraph of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission states that this policy was meant to cause indigenous peoples to cease to exist as distinct political and cultural entities. It also states that the establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as cultural genocide.

I would like to know if my colleague agrees with the first recommendation of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

• (2115)

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Chair, I certainly agree with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's finding that this most certainly did constitute a cultural genocide. I know there has been much discussion about this today in the chamber, and I certainly agree with the member on that.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Madam Chair, as the member was speaking, and he said some nice things, I could not help but try to reconcile the words and actions. The irony of hearing heartfelt speeches from the Conservatives is their own proven track record of providing less than the basics for indigenous peoples across Canada.

Indigenous peoples do not want their shame, guilt or even, to an extent, the thoughts and prayers of non-indigenous peoples. What indigenous peoples are calling for throughout the country is action and for this to be treated for what it is. It is a crime. What we are seeing is history. It is one of the biggest crimes to happen in Canada.

That member and his party recently voted in the House against the UN declaration. That is a party that deepens the cuts to indigenous services and has for the programs that have been so desperately needed in past years.

Does the member, and, more broadly, the Conservatives, believe that we should implement each and every single TRC call to action and if so, how does he suggest we go about doing that before I am 69 years old?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Madam Chair, I think I speak for all members in the House in saying we will certainly miss the member's voice in the chamber and we wish her well in whatever she will be doing next.

There are quite a few things to address in the member's question.

Yes, we have to implement all the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations. When it comes down to it, the government has to decide whether, at the end of the day, it supports the commission or it does not. I certainly hope it will support it.

I will touch on UNDRIP, as the member mentioned it. At the INAN committee through the study of that bill, we heard a number of concerns from many indigenous organizations and indigenous people. They suggested a number of amendments that they would like to see. However, our party, in an attempt to bring forward those amendments and suggestions, as I recall correctly, every single one those amendments—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I apologize to the hon. member, but we are way over time now.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Beaches—East York.

By now, Canadians are deeply saddened and disturbed with the recent discovery in Kamloops of the bodies of 215 children at the Indian residential school.

I have spoken in the House before about the TRC findings that one in 25 children who went to these schools did not come home. In comparison, one in 26 soldiers who served in World War II did not come home. World War II lasted six years, whereas many Indian residential schools lasted more than 40 years.

Tragically, we now see the evidence. We now have heard the proof of what the TRC has stated, what authors like Isabelle Knockwood wrote in her book *Out of the Depths* about the residential school in Shubenacadie. Tragically, we are hearing the information now in our heads. Many of us are now feeling it in our hearts as well. It is within our hands to take action with the head, the heart and the hands.

I have spent most of my adult life teaching, researching and presenting on the horrors of Indian residential schools, as a professor at Cape Breton University, as a treaty education lead for Nova Scotia and now as an MP in the House of Commons.

The TRC's calls to action are a blueprint for moving forward in the country. While we have supported and passed in the House two pieces of legislation, it is important that we reflect and work with all levels of government to do more. Many are in our hands within the federal government to change. I am willing to work with everyone to find solutions to move forward.

However, many of the calls to action speak to law societies, law schools, faith denominations; municipal and provincial governments. I would like to stress that we need to work with our provinces and our municipal governments, all people, especially around calls to action 10 and 62 that talk about the increased need for education in Canada and for us to understand, for every Canadian, every grade and every school to understand, what happened in the residential schools. I invite all parliamentarians, provincial premiers and departments of education to not hide the dark chapters of our country. Let us learn from them.

It is also important for all those speaking their language today, practising their culture today through songs, dances and ceremonies to be supported by all levels of government.

For all those indigenous peoples practising their culture, teaching their languages and promoting their languages, I thank to them today. Let us not let this debate be in vain. Let the words we speak tonight build on a better future that supports, protects and promotes indigenous peoples in all our ridings.

After speaking to my elders and leaders within the Mi'kmaq communities that I represent, they advised me that the strongest way that I, as an indigenous member of Parliament, could bring honour to those lives that were taken and for all those survivors was to show that the very language and culture that was once threatened with cultural genocide is now being shared, promoted and spoken within the House of Commons.

[Member spoke in Mi'kmaq and provided the following text:]

Msit Nokumaq

Ke'skmnaq kaqewistuan

Pasi'k ketu Tlimuloq

Kejutuek tan telji olai'utkik Kikmnaqi'k

Kejutuek tan telji olo'ta'snik mijuajijk aq pukolkik mu apajitakik

Aq nutaq me' msit Kapalnukw, akatmnew tan teluwi'tmi'tij kisikuk L'joqotukemkewey kis na reconciliation.

Nasik tan anki'tetmanek tal kis miawalkik telji pukolkik tan weni'k Wejitajik residential schools

Amujpa kinawa'ta'qik msit wen wula wenji'kkuom, ujit msit tan weji'tasnik aq olaitkik

mu kespu'tuwu'wek, me' elmotiek, me' mimaju'lltiek, me' lnuistikw, me lnu'tasltikw.

Keji'tu mu na naqmasi'anuk tan wejitaik, Nasik pipanmlnoq siawi lnuitasimk, siawi lnuistinoq aq mu iajpu awantasu tan weni'n aq tan wejitaik.

Aq Nekmey, teli siawi'ta'tisnuk elmiknek, mawi apoqnmaltinej

Kisi Api'jatisnu'kw Taqu'we' entu'kpnek

Msit Nokmaq

[Member provided the following translation:]

Government Orders

All my relations, before I conclude my thoughts today, I just want to tell everyone that we understand how mistreated our indigenous families have been. We understand how mistreated our children were and how so many did not come home.

We need all of government to take a look at how we can restore the balance to our communities or what is often referred to as “reconciliation”.

However, when I thought of how we could best honour our survivors of residential schools, I have to say to all the members of our House of Commons, on behalf of all who went and were mistreated, they were not successful. We are still here, we are resilient, we still speak our languages and we practise our culture.

I know it has been difficult, with what we have been through, however I am asking indigenous people to keep their culture strong, to keep speaking their languages, and to never forget who they are as an indigenous person and what we have been through.

That is how we flourish and survive moving forward by working together. We can bring back some of what was lost, all my relations.

[English]

• (2120)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Chair, I particularly appreciate the message that is sent by having members of Parliament have the ability to speak in indigenous languages in the House. It demonstrates that in spite of the horrors of the past and the continuing challenges indigenous people face, indigenous cultures are there, are preserving and are continuing, including through languages.

I want to comment on some of the discussion around Bill C-15. It is obviously not the focus of tonight's debate, but it has come up many times.

The reality is that there are diverse opinions within indigenous communities about Bill C-15. We certainly hear in western Canada that some indigenous communities are concerned about development. Some indigenous communities are also very supportive of development, including in the resource sector, and want to have in place policies that allow them to proceed with development. They and are concerned about the impact of Bill C-15 in that context.

I wonder if the member would agree that when it comes to issues like development policy frameworks in Bill C-15, it is important to listen to the diversity of indigenous voices to ensure there is robust consultation and that we protect the rights of those communities who want to participate in resource development as well as the views of those who have a different point of view.

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments, but I have to disagree with his entire premise.

Government Orders

UNDRIP, which is what Bill C-15 was based on, was the most comprehensive document that had nation states and indigenous peoples at the table for more than 40 years to create consensus, including Assembly of First Nations, ITK, MNC. Every single indigenous organization and government supported Bill C-15.

The fearmongering that the Conservatives try to put out there by saying that indigenous people do not believe in growth and development is wrong. We believe in growth and development, but we ensure that development is sustainable for the next seven generations.

• (2125)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last night I joined Tseshaht and community members to share grief and to honour the lost souls that were stolen at the Indian residential school in Tk'emlúps, and to stand with the Tk'emlúps people.

We were next to the Alberni Residential School and the people requested I deliver their message that they had heard false promises a lot and that they needed action now. If the government and the churches can build these horrible places, they can build healing places to take their spots. They made it very clear that they needed action, not more words. They do not want to be known as the place that had a residential school that caused harm. They want a place where they can reclaim their power.

Tseshaht did not ask for the Indian residential school to be put in their backyard. Does my colleague agree that they should not have to pay to tear it down or to build a health and wellness centre to help survivors heal from the abuse they suffered in that school?

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the principles of what the member has said. One of the things I feel indigenous people have found strength in is returning to their languages and to their cultures. Whatever buildings exist, those are just structures. The real power is within themselves, within their language, within their spirituality and within practices and ceremonies that our ancestors passed down for years.

One of the most important things, moving forward, is that we make the proper investments and the proper actions within all of us who have the ability to do so to move forward so indigenous people in the future have those abilities to move forward with the strength and resilience they have had for the last 150 years.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Sydney—Victoria for his speech. Indigenous languages are so beautiful and poetic. They are a treasure, and I hope we can work to better protect them.

I would like to hear what my colleague thinks about what one of my Conservative colleagues said about Bill C-15. This bill would have been a great way to open a dialogue with indigenous communities in order to prevent crises, rather than creating them. I am referring here mainly to the rail crisis with the Wet'suwet'en last year.

How can Bill C-15 be a good way to talk nation to nation with indigenous peoples to prevent future crises?

[*English*]

Mr. Jaime Battiste: Mr. Speaker, I have stated in the House that Bill C-15 helps us turn the chapter on the horrible legacy that has been left to us by the Indian Act. Bill C-15, UNDRIP and all the recommendations within UNDRIP, helps us get past what colonial governments thought about how we should govern ourselves. It gives us the ability to look at what indigenous people have put forward over 40 years, working with nation states. It was endorsed by so many indigenous organizations across Canada as the way forward.

I really feel that with the passage, and hopefully royal assent, of Bill C-15, we will get to that new chapter in indigenous and Crown relations.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one month from now, we will celebrate Canada and the peace and prosperity we enjoy, and the remains of 215 indigenous kids as young as three were just found in unmarked graves at a so-called school that existed to eliminate indigenous people as indigenous people.

We, as Canadians, are often seen as champions of human rights around the world. Our charter has served as a model for other countries, and the remains of 215 indigenous kids at the Kamloops residential school are also a story of thousands of children stolen from their families and sent to unmarked graves across our country.

Millions of people from around the world have sought freedom in Canada and pursued safety in our multicultural society, and thousands of indigenous kids are buried in unmarked graves, abused, persecuted, murdered, all sanctioned by the state.

It is unthinkable, but known. When I first read the news, I knew it was known, but I still could not process it. I wrote to my constituents "at a loss for words when it comes to our shameful history", and in place of my own, I shared the words of AFN National Chief, Perry Bellegarde, who wrote, "...while it is not new to find graves at former residential schools, it's always crushing to have that chapter's wounds exposed."

Having found my words again with some effort, these four come to mind: This is our Canada. The question we face is what we will do about it.

At a minimum, we need to support a full investigation on every residential school site across Canada to ensure dignity for victims and proper accountability. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission wrote that, "The most basic of questions about missing children—Who died? Why did they die? Where are they buried?—has never been addressed or comprehensively documented by the Canadian government."

Government Orders

Our government has been working with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation to document and previously committed almost \$34 million, but it is the beginning not the end of that process. More than that, we need a renewed and more ambitious commitment to meet the TRC's calls to action.

Since 2015, we have seen considerable, albeit incomplete, action to meet those calls. It is easy to point to symbols and say that it is only words, but lifting almost 70% of long-term water advisories, legislating indigenous languages protection with associated funding, child welfare legislation with associated funding, legislating the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and billions of federal funds invested in indigenous communities for housing, health and more, are not symbols.

My criticism is a different one. When the remains of 215 indigenous kids are discovered in Canada, when thousands more remain undiscovered, are we doing enough? As much as we have done, the answer is no.

I am fortunate in this position, as are all members, to meet people we would otherwise never have the opportunity to meet and to learn from people who enter our orbit who otherwise never would. For me, I have had the opportunity to learn about intergenerational trauma from constituent Tanya Talaga. I have also had the opportunity, because of our shared animal advocacy, to be closer to former senator, Murray Sinclair, than I otherwise would.

Having engaged in conversation with Senator Sinclair about what more we can do in our last conversation on the subject before his departure from the Senate, he pointed to the government's response to the COVID crisis, and he said to look at the scale of effort that was brought to bear in response to the COVID crisis. It is incredible. It is necessary, and it has been incredible. He then asked whether we would have had that same scale of crisis if it were only indigenous people affected. I do not think the answer is yes. I think that is a truth we have to turn our minds to, and we have to do better.

I think our government has done a lot, but we have to do better.

● (2130)

Mr. Garnett Genus (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his very thought-provoking comments.

I would ask the member to reflect a bit more on this question of how we think about Canada and how we think about Canada Day in light of these revelations, which are unsurprising for some, but maybe new to others.

In the history of many nations, there are horrific atrocities that have been undertaken, and it can be hard to think about how we relate to our country in the midst of these events. I suppose one thing we can recognize as a country is the continuing struggle for reconciliation, and how that is very much a part of the Canadian identity. There have been horrific mistakes, and part of our identity has become to try to confront them, to apologize for them and to move forward. Those efforts are important, and they are still relatively unique in the world in terms of how nations respond to these kinds of events.

I wonder if the member could reflect, as we approach Canada Day, on what he will be thinking about in terms of what it means to be Canadian in light of these challenges and also these efforts that we are undertaking together.

● (2135)

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, it will not be the first time I have turned my mind to this on Canada Day, but I will say, and I expect I will say a month from now, that I am proud of Canada and to be Canadian, but I am not proud of all of Canada, and I am certainly not proud of all of our history. In fact, I am ashamed of this part of our history. The only way that we can be as proud of Canada as we ought to be going forward is to do better and to reconcile with that history.

That is what we all need to collectively work together to do across parties, across provinces and as Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize the message of our colleague from Beaches—East York. In this Parliament, he is probably the best example of a member who is progressive and who advocates for what he believes in. He is perhaps even a little bit forward-thinking in the way he plays his role.

In his speech, he said several times that we could be doing more. I would like to know what he proposes that we do. How can we do more in our relationship with indigenous peoples? What initiatives should we implement in order to move toward nation-to-nation reconciliation?

[*English*]

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, there are many things, but I will highlight two.

First, many indigenous people no longer live on reserve. Here in Beaches—East York, I represent an urban riding, and I think we need to do much more for our urban indigenous population. When I look at my own riding and the leadership of TASSC and the leadership of Lindsay Kretschmer and more, another woman who has entered my orbit, who I have been lucky to learn from, I think we need to do much more for urban indigenous people as a matter of reconciliation. I think we need to do much more, as it relates to ending poverty in the country for all people, including those who are indigenous.

The second thing I will say is in relation to child welfare. We are on the right path in this regard, and we need to heavily work with provinces, because this is not only within federal jurisdiction. I am very concerned that we will wake up in the future and look back and see the number of indigenous people who have been removed from their families, and we are living through that in 2021, and we will say in the future we are ashamed of that history. We are living through that today.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am trying to get to the truth here, and nobody is telling me the truth tonight.

Government Orders

Is what happened in residential schools genocide, which, according to the UN convention on genocide, seeks “to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: Killing members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; Forcibly transferring children of the group to another”?

I just want the truth this evening.

Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her passion on this among other subjects. A number of different acts constitute genocide. She has listed off a number of them. Let me say that the intent to destroy an ethnic or racial group through forcibly transferring children of the group to another group constitutes genocide, and yes, I think, in my view, this was genocide.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding borders Kamloops and many of my constituents or their relatives are buried and are among the 215, so my heart tonight is with the Secwépemc, St’at’imc, Nlaka’pamux, likely some Stó:lo and Tsilhqot’in first nations, which were all likely impacted by this horrific tragedy.

Yesterday afternoon, I was at Heritage Park. It is a beautiful park in Mission, British Columbia. It overlooks the Fraser River and on to the Cascade Mountains and Mount Baker. I was doing a staff meeting there. Heritage Park is adjacent to St. Mary’s former residential school, the last one in Canada to close, in the 1990s.

There is a pathway from the parking lot near where I was that goes all the way to St. Mary’s. When I was sitting there, a group of individuals came up. They were wearing orange and they were in ceremonial dress. I was thinking about this speech. I went over and introduced myself. We had a lengthy conversation and I found out that the matriarch of the family, who had gone to St. Mary’s to pay homage to her brethren lost in Kamloops, was part of three generations of their family who had gone to that school and had suffered at the hands of the church and the federal government.

I told them that I am not equipped to speak properly on their behalf and asked if they could spend some time with me and tell me a couple of messages that, as my constituents, they would want me to bring on their behalf to the people’s House of Commons. They made two very specific points.

First, they said we need better education. Children today still do not know enough. We are not teaching enough about the atrocities that took place in Canada, and we can do better. They said they are pleased to see so many people finally paying attention to this issue that has been stuck in their hearts their entire life, but more needs to be done, both in our textbooks and in the areas in which we live.

They pointed out to me in that moment that right where I was sitting, and I have been in this park over a hundred times in my lifetime, that was the dormitory where their father, her former husband, had been abused. Right now it is literally one of the happiest places in Mission. It is surrounded by a beautiful garden. People come there to take pictures for their weddings. I passed that so many times and even as a member of Parliament, I was not aware that it

was where their father had been abused. We can do better on the education. I take their words to heart and I share them today.

The second point they raised with me was about labour training. Tonight we have heard a lot about all the money the government is spending, but they said that a lot of the young men who want to get a job, provide for their family and have a purposeful career are held back by some of the trauma they faced either through their parents who were in the residential schools or themselves, because, as I mentioned, the school closed in the 1990s. They said the federal government needs to ensure that cultural training and cultural healing are a part of the funding we give to first nations to ensure that they can empower their own people with federal funds to do a better job to help the people.

With my final minute, I do not have all the words that are needed to represent my constituents tonight. I need to do a better job as a member of Parliament to reconcile with all of the first nations I represent. On behalf of my riding, I am so sorry that this happened and I share in the grief, the despair and the trauma that has re-emerged in so many of my constituents who are suffering today.

● (2140)

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks this evening. Like most who have spoken tonight, we are all experiencing the real hurt and pain of the incident that has been unfolding in this country, and especially in British Columbia.

We also know that today indigenous Canadians are still affected by the legacy of what has happened. We know that intergenerational trauma continues for so many families in this country that have been affected.

Recently we introduced UNDRIP: the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is something indigenous people have asked for for 40 years in this country. How can you say today that you are working towards reconciliation? How can you say that we are on a journey of healing, and how can you say that we are moving forward with indigenous people in this country and not support UNDRIP?

● (2145)

The Speaker: Before I go to the hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, I just want to remind everyone to place their questions through the Speaker and not directly.

The hon. member for Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon.

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Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Labrador for her question, but I will say that all of the things she said I said were not necessarily things I actually said in the first place.

I support the goals and aspirations of UNDRIP. As the member for Kenora outlined earlier in his testimony, during committee there were a number of first nations that had issues with free, prior and informed consent, and that were looking for legal clarity on that matter. However, the government was not open to any amendments to the bill from the Conservative Party.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

As he mentioned, this evening we are reflecting, apologizing and making amends, but we will have to get back to taking action. Indeed, we may have dragged our feet a little in the past. If we had not been so slow to act, we might not be here today, discussing the Kamloops residential school or even this entire issue. We might not be in a position where, when a tragic event happens, we must spring into action to try to make up for lost time.

I would simply like to ask my colleague the following question. Once the time for grieving and reflection is over, what does he think is the first thing we must do?

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, the one thing that has come forward from my indigenous constituents from this tragedy is that they want funding to conduct investigations of all of the residential schools in Canada, to determine where other lost souls may lie and to give them proper burials according to first nations tradition and culture.

That is one thing we could do for first nations: We could make sure that the government fully funds all the resources needed to commemorate and honour these individuals, as well.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member is looking into the situation in his riding. I would tell him that anybody who has been speaking to indigenous people and learning about residential schools would not be surprised at all to hear this horrific news. Anybody who has been listening knows that children went missing, that children never returned from these schools, and that this was a horrific act of genocide inflicted by the Government of Canada.

Does the hon. member think we should have all of these sites secured? He mentioned that he was at a former residential school site. Should all of these sites be secured? Should the government be paying for ground-penetrating radar at all of these sites? Should all of the documentation related to children who died at these sites be released by the federal government, all levels of other governments and churches?

Mr. Brad Vis: Mr. Speaker, those are actually reasonable requests. As I previously mentioned, we need to fund any investigative work taking place at former residential schools. The Government of Canada should be paying for that.

Again, at the end of the day, this is a crime against humanity. There were 215 lives lost. In my opinion, that number is actually

much larger: We just have not discovered them yet. The federal government should get to the bottom of this. Every child matters. My constituents are grieving right now. They deserve action.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have really struggled to come up with the appropriate words for this speech.

I want to ask my colleagues if they believe us now. Can they hear us now? As it has been said, for those who have been listening, this should come as no surprise. Survivors and families have been telling their stories for so long, and the news of the remains of the 215 children found in a mass grave at the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation site of the former residential school does not come as a surprise to those of us who have been listening.

As a father of four, this rips my heart out. It impacts my family, as my wife and children are Tsilhqot'in, from the Esdilagh First Nation. It also impacts the friends I grew up with. I grew up in the community of Williams Lake, and St. Joseph's Mission was just down the road. We played there.

I have spoken so many times in the House about this, and I have implored us, as parliamentarians, to put aside our partisan ways and focus on the issues that matter. I have talked about reconciliation being just a buzzword. Politicians stand up, dab at fake tears and say they are truly committed, yet we have boil water advisories throughout our nation and suicide epidemics in our first nation communities that go unchecked.

The residential school program was set up to drive the native out of over 150,000 first nations, Inuit and Métis children. Thousands did not come home. Imagine being a parent and knowing this. I ask my colleagues if they now understand some of the challenges we see within our first nation communities. There is a lot of "this government did this" and "that government did that." It is enough. The blame goes to all of us, including or current Parliament.

Apparently there has been an awakening, and Canadians are rightfully angry. Imagine the burden, trauma, grief and anger of the survivors and the families of the lost and missing who have tried to share their stories. Imagine the grief and the trauma of Phyllis Webstad, the founder of Orange Shirt Day, who has heard and gathered these stories and has been such a groundbreaker on this.

They have carried this for so long. As a nation, we must stand together with these families and communities. We must bring these children home. We must bring closure to the families. Only then can the healing process begin.

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We must lift them up, hold them in our hearts and never ever forget the over 150,000 children who went through the residential school program and the thousands who did not come home. There are over 139 residential school sites, and I will tell members this: The pain is going to continue, because we are only just awakening to the tragedy, the crime, that so many have been trying to tell through their stories for so long.

• (2150)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am hearing a lot about this from my constituents and I am participating in the debate tonight to reflect some of their views. They have asked me to speak about two points. One relates directly to what the member just raised: How do we ensure that those oral histories that are too often discounted by western democracies and Eurocentric approaches are heard and listened to in an institutional way, in a way that they are constantly validated?

The second is: What role does he feel we need to attach on the accountability side to the churches that were involved with these residential schools, in this case the Catholic church, which stands alone among some of the other Canadian denominations, for not taking full ownership and responsibility for what has taken place?

• (2155)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, we have to understand our past. We currently live in a cancel culture. We want to erase all of this, tear down statues and erase the past. What we need to do is remember our past. Without our past, we do not know where we have been. Without our past, we have no idea of who we are today. Without our past, we do not know where we are going. Without our past, we cannot ensure that this never ever happens again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly moved by the answer my colleague from Cariboo—Prince George just gave regarding the importance of knowing our past, living it and feeling it.

We must now take action. How far should this urgent need for reconciliation take us? What actions must we take with respect to first nations to negotiate nation-to-nation recognition?

[*English*]

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I have been saying for so long that we spend billions of dollars trying to recognize and understand other countries' cultures, how to do business with them and how to walk among them when we have failed to do that here at home with our own people. We need to do more. We need to listen to our elders. We need to walk with them and understand the process of grieving that is taking place. It is only going to get worse as we move forward. This is going to reopen deep scars and wounds and we need to be there for them, as leaders and Canadians as one nation.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Tseshah Chief waamiis Ken Watts reminded me that first nations and indigenous leaders believed that the Prime Minister and the Liberal government would implement all 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. So far, they have only im-

plemented five. We heard from my colleague from Nunavut, the youngest member in this House, that she will be 69 years old at the pace of the government in implementing the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action.

We know many elders and survivors. I think of my good friend Barney Williams, who attended the school in Tk'emlúps. He is 81. It is important that we implement these calls to action while these survivors are alive so they can begin the healing process with their families.

Can my colleague speak about the importance of that and of providing the necessary resources and information to Tk'emlúps so that we can surround them with the important work and give the communities the necessary tools for their healing?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, what we need to do is put aside our partisan swords. We need to be there for our first nations. This recovery has to be directed by the first nations and what we can do as leaders within our communities. As I have challenged my colleagues before, we need to understand, sit with them, learn from them and listen. We have to walk with them at their pace. This is going to be a long process and, more than ever, we have to be united as one as we walk together. We have to stand with them shoulder to shoulder, grieve with them, hold them in our hearts and lift them up.

Mr. Michael McLeod (Northwest Territories, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I appreciate the time I have to speak tonight, and I am glad another prolonged Standing Committee on Finance meeting ended in time for me to do so.

I ran for the member of Parliament position to help my constituents. Unapologetically, and with everything I do here, my goal is to try to improve their lives and those of their children. Those are my marching orders.

Indigenous constituents make up 50% of the population in the Northwest Territories, and the Northwest Territories has the highest per capita number of residential school survivors, and “survivor” is the accurate term. Those who came home from many of these schools are literally survivors, as has been so shockingly illustrated this past week by the discovery of all those children, those babies in Kamloops.

I am not surprised many Canadians are shocked. However, I am not shocked and neither are many indigenous families. In my hometown of Fort Providence, I can visit a small fenced-in area on the edge of the community that has a monument with the names of 161 children who died at the Sacred Heart Mission school.

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In the 1920s, the mission decided to dig up all the priests, nuns and brothers who were buried there and move them to a new gravesite. Then they plowed the graveyard over, over all the bodies that were buried there, over my relatives and the children who were buried there. If our elders had not carried the information forward and convinced our leadership in the 1990s to do some research and find this grave, this would have been all forgotten.

The devastation of these so-called schools has lived through generations. Unfortunately, this devastation has survived as well. In the Northwest Territories, we top many of Canada's lists: addiction rates, suicide rates, crime rates and housing needs. My efforts here in this House have often targeted getting more housing, increasing indigenous policing and accessing more mental health funding.

I have also been advocating for more attention and resources to conclude land claims and self-government. As well as decreasing this constant and large socioeconomic gap between indigenous people and other Canadians, which needs to be a priority, there also needs to be certainty over land rights and empowerment of indigenous people through self-government.

I can see how the government has supported Canada's effort and attention, and the billions of dollars in additional funding to indigenous governments, indigenous organizations and programs that have been created over the five years. Should there be more? I think so. Should it be faster? I think so.

While we are all mourning the children from Kamloops, let us not make it an empty exercise. Let us move faster in fulfilling the important work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Let us focus on reducing and eliminating systemic racism that exists, and that we see in policing and health care, for example.

To the members of the loyal opposition, while posting thoughts on the recent tragedy before us along with pictures of teddy bears, let us not continue to vote against legislation like UNDRIP. Let us work together to support indigenous people in Canada. Let us not continue to make comments on residential schools that are both inaccurate and insensitive.

Let us work together and not obstruct our attempts to heal and to help and to empower indigenous people, who are still surviving this generational harm that goes by the name of residential schools. Please, let us all focus on helping our constituents.

• (2200)

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to give my condolences on behalf of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex to the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo and the people there. I was very troubled to hear about these 215 children who were found. It hit close to home for me.

On the weekend, I had an opportunity to visit a memorial at one of the first nations in my community, Kettle and Stony Point first nation. One of my great uncles is indigenous, and three of his siblings went to one of these residential schools. It is very heartbreaking to hear some of the stories of the abuse, how the moms, dads, brothers and sisters missed the children while they were away, and to hear some of the horrific things that happened there. I want to give my sympathies to all of those who had to endure that at these residential schools.

Could the member comment on what the government will do to look into other areas and other schools, where there may potentially be gravesites of children, more innocent lives that were lost? How we can look for similar burial sites at these former residential schools and how it will that affect those communities?

• (2205)

Mr. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I spent my whole life living in a community where there was a residential school. Everybody in my family attended residential school. I attended residential school.

For many years, the people in authority were telling us that it was for our own good, that this was to improve our lives. I always thought that if this was for my own good, I would hate to see what they would do if it was not for my own good. I always questioned when somebody would do anything, when would the government step up. It has only been since this government was elected in 2015, that we started making some movement on accepting and moving forward with Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations.

There is a strategy in place. When we did the ground penetrating radar exercises to check all the grave sites around our community, the government paid for it. In the recommendations, it is very clear that all the sites need to be checked, and that should be at the expense of the government. The government has put us in this position along with the churches, and it has responsibility to work through the recommendations.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have spent the last few days reaching out to folks in my community. So many survivors and descendants of survivors have been re-traumatized. They have broken down and are struggling to deal with pain and grief.

One of the people I communicated with was Steven Crowchild, an incredible leader and human being, who told me about his friend who lived with her mother. She was going to put a teddy bear and orange shirt on the front steps to honour the babies who were lost. Her mother, who was a residential school survivor, was triggered and was fearful. She thought that having that orange shirt would get them attacked in their own home.

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There is a legacy of genocide that still lives on today in the cycles of addiction and loss. The Canadian government still chooses to underfund children, fight children in court, fight residential school survivors and so many other examples of ongoing injustice.

Is this horrendous history and are our current failures a genocide? Will the member call this what it is? Will he call this a genocide?

Mr. Michael McLeod: Mr. Speaker, the definition of genocide has, since its outset, been debated on many stages at the world level. When I look at the terminology and when I look at the boxes that define genocide, I think we check all almost every box. I certainly will not hesitate to say that this was genocide. We still have a long way to go.

My focus is not to debate whether it was genocide, however. It is time to move forward. It is not time to have more hearings. It is not time to set up more panels. It is not time to discuss whether this clearly fits in that box of genocide. It is time to move forward. It is time to take action. We have to start moving and get all the TRC recommendations done. We have to work on reducing the socio-economic gap between indigenous people and other Canadians. We have to work at eliminating the systemic racism.

There is a lot of work to be done. I have been waiting for a long time to get this going. We have some momentum now, and I want to see it keep going.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I begin by acknowledging that I am on the territory of WSÁNEĆ people and I speak in SENĆOŦEN and raise my hands to you.

[Member spoke in SENĆOŦEN]

[English]

I particularly raise my hands today to one of my dearest friends, a constituent who is also my MLA. I am not using my words tonight. I am using his words. Adam Olsen is a member of Tsartlip First Nation. He spoke these words yesterday in the British Columbia legislature:

We know that if these children were not indigenous but rather European that we would not have been slow to act... Deep down, we know that in our society it's just a fact... Some children matter less.

We know underneath the shiny, happy facade of Canada...there lurks a grotesque and shameful past. For 30 years, my relatives have been sharing their experiences from these despicable institutions. For 30 years, their stories have been hushed. Our relatives have been told that [Canada and] Canadians...don't want to hear their stories. They have been told to stop lying. They've been told to stop embellishing.

There was a statement from this institution that noted the unimaginable proportions of this tragedy. This is an incredibly unfortunate characterization of the situation that we carry. For Indigenous People, the story is not shocking, nor is it unimaginable. This is the trauma our families have carried for generations....

As we continue to grapple with missing and murdered indigenous women and children, hanging red dresses in recognition of our current reality, what is uncovered in Kamloops [reminds us] that this storyline is not new. It has been in the imagination—indeed in the nightmares—of our relatives for the past 130 years. It is the terror that our ancestors have lived with.

The only reason to call it unimaginable would be because these institutions, these Crown governments...and the people that populated these chambers in the past either haven't been listening to our stories or they've cared less. It is a reality in our country that some children have mattered less. These are both terrible considerations.

There is nothing to imagine for those who have been paying attention. Our Elders and our families have been sharing the grim details of their experiences in residential schools for decades. That is the record of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

You don't have to imagine it. You just have to believe it and care enough to act with the urgency that you would if it was your child that didn't return home from school. It's your kids going to school, not coming home, not being there when their parents are there to pick them up....

Duncan Campbell Scott, deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932, is often associated with saying, "Kill the Indian, save the man"....

Residential schools were a critical tool in the process of "kill the Indian," in Scott's words. Deliberately breaking up families by forcing children to residential schools was a tool to expedite the process of dispossessing Indigenous Peoples of their lands and resources....

There have always been stories in our families of our relatives that didn't come home, the children that died and were buried there with little or no notification to the families....

I wish I could say that indigenous children are no longer forcibly removed from their communities. However, I can't. I wish I could say that indigenous people were not dramatically overrepresented in fatalities at the hands of police, the criminal justice system, homelessness, suicide, addictions and drug poisoning, all statistics you don't want to be overrepresented in....

We must stop referring to what we know like we didn't know it. We must stop pretending it was better than it was. We must stop acting like we came by this wealth through honest means because we did not. This land and the resources this Crown government depends on came from the dispossession of indigenous people. For decades, this provincial government [and I will insert federal] has benefited from the lands and resources that were secured through residential schools and other disgraceful policies.

● (2210)

I'm so grateful for the incredible public response to this tragedy facing our relatives in Kamloops and the Interior. I'm grateful for the demands from our family and friends and neighbours...ensuring government responds as if it were our child that didn't come home from school.

This is indeed a heavy burden, but it's one we can all make lighter if we carry it together. HÍSWŪŪE SIAM.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I understand there has been some discussion and that because of the way time has gone tonight, some members who prepared speeches may not have a chance to give them. I think you will find a desire among all parties for us to extend the take-note debate by 15 minutes to accommodate those members.

● (2215)

The Speaker: We cannot ask for unanimous consent. However, if it is okay with members, the two members left can make their statements without any questions. We will go over our time, but if that is acceptable, members will be able to get their thoughts out and we can go from there.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on the same point of order.

We have spoken with the upcoming speakers and they have agreed to forgo the period for questions and comments after their speech if the others will as well.

[*English*]

Ms. Yvonne Jones: Mr. Speaker, I rise on the same point of order. I am not sure if my name is on the list, but when I was looking to speak earlier in the evening, the slots had all been filled. If we are going to add time, I would like the opportunity to speak to the motion.

The Speaker: This is very heavy for all of us and not easy to deal with. I think it is only fair that we allow the hon. member for Labrador to speak. We will be here for a little extra time tonight, but what we will do is hear from the next two members and add the hon. member for Labrador. Had she made it into the slots, she probably would have been in the next one.

It is an important topic, and this is the decision I am making. Hopefully everyone is in accord with it.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Manicouagan.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am at a loss for words once again this evening. I cannot express how much it pains me to talk about residential schools.

It pains me as a mother, because I think of all those who lost their children. I think of all of the families and nations that carry the heavy burden of the past. It pains me to think that for decades and centuries, in British North America and then Canada, there were attempts to literally erase the peoples who had lived here for thousands of years.

It pains me to think of all of those men, women and children, dead or alive, who had to suffer to allow for Canada's plans to expand its dominion from coast to coast, engaging in a cultural genocide to kill the Indian in the child, which resulted in killing the child in the Indian.

However, it pains me even more to know that, over the course of my years here in Parliament, I have been asking myself the following question: Why do we keep talking about these horrors year after year without ever making any progress?

I must admit, I cannot even imagine how painful and frustrating it must be for the families of the victims of residential schools and for the communities themselves, while we, here in the House, entered politics to change things. We are not seeing things change, and neither are they. Things are not changing quickly enough.

I know that today, at this time, this is a solemn moment, and we do not want to politicize the matter before us, and rightly so. However, for things to move forward, it is my duty, as a member of the opposition, to ask the right questions.

Let us first establish some facts.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has counted 3,200 residential school students who died. Today, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation estimates that number to be closer to 4,118. Even so, the most recent evidence suggests that

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these numbers could be much higher and might soon reach 6,000 dead.

This morning, in an article published in *The Globe and Mail*, former senator and Truth and Reconciliation commissioner Murray Sinclair estimated that the number could be higher still, suggesting that up to 15,000 children could have died in the residential schools.

Six years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report was released, it seems that the more we know, the less we know. What happened to bring us to this point?

Obviously, we need to shine a light on this, including on the financial role of the federal government and the degree of collaboration between the church and the federal government. As we know, Canada funded the religious orders that ran the residential schools with a per-child allowance.

When the allowance was suspended, did the government keep a record of the children who had died? How is it that the federal government subsidized their education without knowing that information? Did the church keep records on the children in order to collect those subsidies?

We need to take a closer look at these issues. They need to be addressed urgently because families need to know. It is an essential condition for them to grieve and to heal.

In closing, we also need to shed light on addressing the commission's calls to action 72 to 78. Of the \$33.8 million allocated in budget 2019, \$27.1 million still remains to be spent. We need to shed light on the past. We also need to shed light on this. Our duty to remember is at stake here, as well as our duty to honour indigenous peoples.

My heart goes out to the communities in Kamloops and all the communities on the north coast of Quebec and Canada.

[*Member spoke in Innu*]

• (2220)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sorrow and a heavy heart that I rise this evening to speak to the tragic discovery that was made in Kamloops, British Columbia. My thoughts go out to all these children who, instead of having a happy life running in the fields, are now lying in those fields in silence and darkness. My thoughts go out to the families. My thoughts go out to all the indigenous nations. They have my sympathies.

People across Canada and Quebec have cried, and understandably so, over the fate of these children who died in despicable conditions far from home, far from their mothers, far from their families and far from their nations.

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This discovery should not have happened. This should not have been a discovery because the facts we are being confronted with are not unknown. We have known them since at least the tabling of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Would we rather say that we should know these facts? However, memories are faulty. We forget. Forgetting speaks volumes about how the memory was perceived. It speaks volumes about the way the ugliness of the past contrasts with the whitewashed version we prefer to see.

The history of residential schools is one of horror, and last week's tragic discovery should be a reminder, a reminder that we must take action. We cannot change the past, but we can remember, document, interpret, archive and commemorate it.

This is essential work if we want to progress toward reconciliation. We need to do this work to achieve true healing. If we do not do this work, families that want to find out what happened to those who died will never be able to. Even if it hurts, indigenous families and nations need to know. To get to the historical truth and do what is right for indigenous peoples, we have to shine a light on the past. Like it or not, the Kamloops discovery will not be the only one. There have to be more.

Six years ago, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission formulated many calls to action to ensure that we do not lose sight of the past. The recommendations that come to mind are 71 to 78. The sorrow we all feel right now must serve as a reminder that we need to implement them faster, and that responsibility rests first and foremost with the government. The time to act is now.

[Member spoke in Inuktitut]

● (2225)

[English]

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues in the House of Commons this evening for the opportunity to speak to this motion.

As a proud Inuk woman of Labrador, the daughter of a mother of residential school, when we hear these stories through generations, we are always reminded, each and every day, of the trauma that they have endured and of the legacy that it has left behind.

What we are dealing with today is a horrible reality. It is a horrible reality of our past that has been uncovered. It has been revealed and unearthed that in Kamloops, 215 innocent children lie in a mass grave. This is not only devastating; it is heartbreaking. It is an act against humanity. On that, I think we all agree. It is an act against children who had no voice. They were alone. They were scared. They were silenced. They were isolated. They were robbed of life, and they were buried with the same horror that they endured in society.

Yesterday, I stood in my riding next to two very strong moms, Jodie Ashini and Thea Penashue of the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation, along with Chief Eugene Hart, surrounded by so many children, so many moms and so many dads. I stood surrounded by survivors and victims of residential schools, surrounded by love and affection for each other, and surrounded by tears, so many tears.

On behalf of all of them, on behalf of all the people of Labrador, I want to extend our love and support to those many families who are suffering this evening in this country, those many indigenous families who are feeling the loss, the void and the heartache of what has happened.

I think we can all agree on several things, and that is there is much work to do in advancing not just the rights of indigenous people in this country, but also upholding the rights of innocent indigenous children as well. We have talked so much about the harm that has been caused by the legacies of residential schools and the trauma that comes with it. However, we also know that, as we sit here this evening and we speak, indigenous people still face racism. We still face unacceptable injustices, which are happening in many of our communities across the country.

I know that, one by one, we have pledged our support to make a difference. We have pledged to ensure that we can restore the language and culture, that we can restore, once again, the proud legacy of indigenous people. It is a long road, and one that has to be shaped and led by indigenous people themselves.

Like every ill act, there has to be accountability. I am sure that many share my belief that more accountability needs to come to bear. I really believe that the Catholic Church has yet to redeem itself, in any way, in recognizing what has happened at the hands of their institutions. That is unacceptable.

While we pledge our support that, as the Government of Canada, we will continue to move forward to bridge that gap for indigenous people in this country, we need to do it with the support of all parliamentarians of all provinces and all territories. That means that when we have legislation such as UNDRIP, we have to be able to stand up and support it. That is part of reconciliation in this country. That is part of bridging that gap with indigenous people.

Every day I wake up not knowing what I am going to hear next. I woke up today in a very small populated riding to find out two very young beautiful people died by suicide last night, in my riding. One was first nations and one was Inuit. This has to stop. The healing is not happening in the way it should be. It is happening, but it is slow. How do we get it to move faster? How do we bridge that gap more?

● (2230)

How do we ensure that every child has the opportunity to wake up in a warm home with a full belly? That is where we need to focus. It is as basic as those things in many cases.

Reconciliation with indigenous people and recognizing that every child does matter is not difficult. It really is not, but we need to do it faster. We need to move at a more rapid rate than we have.

Government Orders

That includes us as a government, but it includes indigenous leadership as well. It includes all of us working together to make sure these things happen. These are times of critical advancement for indigenous people. Let us not lose this. Let us not bury this so we have to wait 10 more years for this to become a priority in the country.

I am so proud of what our government has done to help indigenous people. I have seen more indigenous children get support in my riding in the last five years than I have seen in the 15 years before. I have seen more houses built in communities across my riding for indigenous families than I have seen in 15 years before.

I have seen more investments into food banks, into social support. We have revamped the social welfare system and the child

welfare system in this country to support indigenous communities and indigenous people, but there is still a lot more to do, a lot more to do.

The Speaker: It being 10:30 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, the committee will now rise.

(Government Business No. 6 reported)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:30 p.m.)

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