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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, December 9, 2022

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

JUDGES ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Judges Act, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[*English*]

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. David Lametti moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise before you today to move third reading of Bill C-9. I am pleased not only because of the importance of this piece of legislation in ensuring that we maintain a robust justice system, but also because of the unanimous support it received at the end of October when we last debated this bill.

[*Translation*]

I thank my esteemed colleagues for their contributions. I am grateful to all those who shared their opinions on this bill, which made it possible to delve deeper into the issues it raises and consider them from every angle. It was really a collaborative effort, and I am proud to have played a role in it.

It is clear from our previous discussions on this bill that, regardless of our political differences, we all share the common goal of protecting the independence of the judicial system. We are supporting that fundamental goal today by implementing a rigorous, tailored process for dealing with disciplinary complaints against judges.

Given the stage Bill C-9 is at in the parliamentary process, I assume that everyone is aware of the context that gave rise to this bill. That context has been very well explained, which helped guide our recent discussions. The merits of the bill have also been debated at length in previous sittings. Nevertheless, I would like to take this opportunity to go over a few key points.

[*English*]

At the outset, it is important to emphasize that the modifications to the judicial conduct process proposed by this bill are substantive and far-reaching. They are not mere adjustments meant to update a process in need of updating.

I will begin with two important elements concerning judicial conduct in general before touching upon the principal areas of reform.

A robust mechanism for governing judicial conduct is critical in upholding public trust in the justice system as a whole. This is so for two closely related reasons. First, the existence of such a regime is essential even where, as in Canada, the judiciary is long established and well respected. Second, protecting judicial independence does not mean insulating judges from the consequences of misconduct. I will briefly cover each point in turn.

The impetus for amendments proposed by Bill C-9 is not a crisis of judicial ethics. It is quite the opposite. Misconduct by judges in Canada is rare. Allegations are thankfully infrequent, with findings of misconduct rarer still. We Canadians are privileged beneficiaries of a truly excellent judiciary, whose quality is widely recognized both at home and abroad. This does not mean that a strong judicial conduct regime is not necessary. It is. Maintaining the solid foundation of public confidence on which the excellence of our judiciary rests requires a robust mechanism for dealing with complaints against judges. Such a mechanism is essential to ensuring continued confidence in both the judiciary itself and the justice system overall. Canadians must be confident that instances of judicial misconduct will be addressed.

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A well-functioning judicial conduct regime therefore remains critical, even when allegations of judicial misconduct are infrequent. Protecting public trust in the administration of justice demands that a mechanism be in place and be ready to respond appropriately to complaints against members of the judiciary as they are made. This is a tangible guarantee of accountability. It helps preserve confidence that allegations are taken seriously, all while respecting principles of procedural fairness.

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

A judicial conduct process that would serve to insulate judges from the consequences of misconduct could be just as harmful to public confidence as the complete absence of a conduct process.

That is why the provisions of Bill C-9 propose a responsive approach seeking to ensure that allegations are addressed as fairly and effectively as possible. The proposed mechanism respects both the people filing the complaint and those who are the subject of the complaint. By providing a legitimate avenue for the careful review of allegations, we have the assurance that there is some oversight over the conduct of judges and that they will be held to account when necessary. At the same time, this promotes confidence in the administration of justice on a broader scale.

It is important to point out that the careful development of a judicial conduct process is not at all incompatible with the fundamental principle of judicial independence, guaranteed under paragraph 11(d) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the provisions on the judiciary in the Constitution Act, 1867. In fact, they go hand in hand.

That being said, we must be careful to strike a delicate balance between these two important considerations. The process we put in place to conscientiously address allegations of judicial misconduct must not contravene the constitutional guarantees that seek to ensure judicial independence.

We can be confident that this bill strikes the right balance. Canadians can trust that their judges are making independent and impartial decisions and, at the same time, they can rest assured that the judges' conduct remains subject to review. Ultimately, this will improve trust in the administration of justice, both with respect to individual judges and on a broader scale.

[*English*]

Let me now provide a brief overview of the legal and constitutional foundations of the judicial conduct process. At its core lies the Canadian Judicial Council, or CJC, the body responsible for receiving, reviewing and investigating complaints against members of the federally appointed judiciary. It works at arm's length from the executive and legislative branches of government.

The Judges Act requires the CJC to submit a report to the Minister of Justice containing a recommendation on whether the judge whose conduct is at issue should be removed from office. It is for the minister to then consider whether to advise cabinet that the matter of the judge's removal should be put to the houses of Parliament. In order for a judge to be removed from office, both the House of Commons and the Senate must vote in favour. If they do

so, a request is made to the Governor General to remove the judge from office.

As I have previously noted, this process requires a counterweight in the form of constitutional protections for judicial independence. One aspect of judicial independence is security of tenure. More specifically, the requirements of security of tenure prevent a judge's removal from office except in cases of proven incapacity or misconduct. As a further safeguard, a hearing is required, at which the judge has an opportunity to be heard and to test and adduce evidence. These imperatives lie at the heart of any judicial conduct process. They are the keys to ensuring all stages of such a process are free from undue influence from the other branches of government.

It follows that any healthy system of justice finds its roots, at least in part, in the framework established to handle allegations of misconduct by its judges. All of us would expect to be treated fairly if we were involved in a matter before the courts. The same requirement for procedural fairness applies to judges in the review of their conduct. While not in and of itself a court process, it must necessarily mirror some of the key elements of court proceedings, namely, fairness throughout while ensuring any resolution is appropriate to its context. The process must function efficiently in terms of both time and resources, producing final outcomes in a timely manner and at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer.

These elements are core to the reforms proposed by Bill C-9. While our current judicial conduct regime served us well for many years, helping to create the preconditions needed for the strong justice system we enjoy today, it is now in need of improvement. As I have already stated, this is not change for change's sake, nor is it prompted solely by the need to update a half-century-old process. Fundamental changes in the legal landscape coupled with evolving societal norms have occurred, revealing specific shortcomings to the existing process. These could be addressed through the reforms proposed by Bill C-9.

Bill C-9's proposed amendments target the following key areas: efficiency, accountability and procedural fairness. All three are crucial determinants of public trust and would be met by this bill. An efficient process would optimize both time and financial resources. Timely resolution of matters would help provide certainty to those involved. On a broader scale, timeliness and efficiency would foster confidence in the process functions as it should, with allegations addressed promptly and effectively.

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• (1010)

Currently it is possible for judges to initiate judicial review of CJC decisions at multiple stages. Each of these judicial reviews, begun in the Federal Court, can be appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal and, potentially, to the Supreme Court of Canada. Even if such proceedings are commenced for all of the right reasons, the lifespan of a matter can too easily become stretched out unreasonably. Efficiency is also, of course, related to cost, as timely resolution of allegations helps avoid ballooning costs.

In combination with the possibility of unduly extending proceedings over many years, public confidence in the process can suffer if its costs appear excessive. A key aspect of the new regime proposed by Bill C-9 would be its improved flexibility and responsiveness. It proposes a more refined tool for the resolution of judicial conduct matters not serious enough to warrant removal: a suite of potential sanctions that would allow for the imposition of a sanction that is more contextualized and appropriate for remedying the misconduct in question.

There is only one sanction expressly available under the current regime, and that is removal from office. It is therefore both potentially overbroad and underinclusive. Consider conduct that, while recognized as inappropriate, should warrant something less than overruling judges' constitutionally protected security of tenure.

Even exposure to the required full-scale inquiry without actual removal can cause irreparable damage to a judge's reputation. The CJC has told us it often struggles with the application of these stark either-or alternatives, that is, between recommending the most serious penalty or none at all. In either case the public may perceive injustice.

It is also important to highlight the idea of justice being done, as well as being seen to be done. Public trust in the judiciary relies not only on judges being held accountable, but also on judges being seen to be held accountable. By providing for options other than removal from office, such as participating in an education program or issuing a formal apology, Bill C-9 would provide a more balanced approach that reinforces accountability to Canadians at all levels. It would be an important step forward in continuing to foster the confidence of the public in our justice system.

It is essential to remember that our system of law exists to serve the public. It operates because we have confidence in its legitimacy, trusting in the capacity of its members and mechanisms to administer justice. This is no accident, but rather the result of sustained and concerted efforts over time. Here in Canada we are fortunate to have a strong foundation upon which to build. This requires ongoing attention, however, by ensuring measures are undertaken to safeguard public trust.

Bill C-9, for example, would introduce greater transparency and public participation into the judicial conduct regime. Members of the general public who are neither lawyers nor judges would participate at two crucial stages of the proposed new process.

First, they would be members of review panels charged with determining whether less serious misconduct has occurred and what sanction, short of removal, would be appropriate in the circumstances. Second, a layperson would be a member of full hearing

panels that determine whether serious misconduct warrants a recommendation for removal from office.

These changes would respond to feedback received during extensive consultation across a wide range of groups, members of the public included. Along with accountability to the public, the regime would seek judicial accountability.

Critical to the process's legitimacy is that judges would be held accountable for their behaviour in both fact and public perception. As I have mentioned, the perception that the system operates as it should is equally as important as the fact that it actually does. Expanding the options for addressing instances of inappropriate judicial behaviour would improve both. Consequences tailored to each circumstance could be deployed, meaningfully addressing a wider range of misconduct. This amended framework would also encourage creativity in approaching resolution and sanction, with a view to imposing the most suitable remedy for misconduct that warrants a response short of removal.

The final element relating to accountability is financial. As I noted earlier, the current regime can easily spiral into excessively long and expensive proceedings, undermining public trust. In addition to the reforms I have already discussed in relation to efficiency, Bill C-9 proposes a more stable funding mechanism and new controls for the use of public funds.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

More specifically, funding would come from two sources. Some funding would be drawn from the consolidated revenue fund, while the rest would come from the commissioner for federal judicial affairs' budgetary appropriation, obtained through the regular budget cycle. The consolidated revenue fund would only be used to cover costs that inevitably arise from the requirement to hold public hearings when a complaint reaches a certain stage in the process. These costs are both non-discretionary and unpredictable. The more predictable day-to-day administrative expenses would be paid out of funds obtained by the commissioner for federal judicial affairs as part of the budget cycle.

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Additional safeguards have been put in place with respect to disbursements from the consolidated revenue fund. There is a policy that limits the amount that can be charged by lawyers representing judges who are the subject of a complaint. Bill C-9 also proposes that the commissioner for federal judicial affairs be more involved, both to review other procedural expenses and to work with the Canadian Judicial Council on the five-year review of costs borne by the consolidated revenue fund.

The Canadian judiciary's performance is exemplary in every regard. I am proud of our judges, both past and present, who were and are dedicated to serving their fellow Canadians to the best of their ability. However, despite the high standards to which we hold judges, and which the vast majority of them achieve, misconduct inevitably occurs. As I explained, even though such incidents are rare, having effective mechanisms in place to address them is a crucial determinant to maintaining the public trust.

[*English*]

Just as each individual allegation of misconduct presents an opportunity to bolster public confidence in the judiciary, so too does this bill. We have the unique privilege of taking concrete action toward strengthening the administration of justice. I was heartened by our collaboration earlier in the process, particularly at committee, that has enabled Bill C-9 to arrive at the stage where it is today. Let us continue in that spirit and send this bill on for consideration by our colleagues in the other place.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister and I concur with his comments.

I support the bill. However, this bill is cold comfort to my constituents, Mike and Dianne Ilesic, whose son Brian was murdered by a co-worker. That co-worker shot Brian and three other co-workers point-blank in the back of the head. That killer was the first person to have a consecutive parole ineligibility period imposed on him by a trial judge.

Mike and Dianne were absolutely devastated with the Supreme Court's decision in the spring to strike down that law. They were even more disappointed with the minister's response, which was to say that he respected the decision and would not take any further steps to respond to it or fill the void left as a result of the court decision.

Respectfully, what can the minister say to Mike and Dianne?

• (1020)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his support on this particular bill. It is important that we move on this bill expeditiously. I appreciate the support he has given personally, as well as the support his party has given, at all stages of this bill. I thank my critic as well, the member for Fundy Royal.

I would say to Mike and Dianne that the eligibility for parole that the Supreme Court has imposed in the Bissonnette case is not automatic. It does not mean that the person convicted in this case will be granted parole. It merely means that the consecutive life sentences stand, but there will be a possibility of parole after a fairly long period of time.

It was an unequivocal Supreme Court decision. The court clearly said, in a unanimous decision, that parole ineligibility could not stand. I have never rejected the possibility of acting. I am always open to good ideas, as the hon. member knows and has known throughout my period as the Minister of Justice. I will continue to reflect on that case.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech. I always enjoy hearing him speak.

He went on at length about how Bill C-9 will maintain the public trust, and he also talked about the separation of powers among the legislative, executive and judicial branches, which is just as important and is also maintained in Bill C-9.

However, if there is one thing that makes us question that balance upon which the public trust relies, it is the judicial appointment process that precedes the potential removal of a judge from office, which one hopes would be a very infrequent occurrence.

I would like the minister to comment on the possibility of revising the appointment process to make it as non-partisan and transparent as possible, thereby bolstering public confidence in the judicial system.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question.

In 2016, we established a non-partisan and transparent judicial appointment process that ensures exemplary quality and greater diversity among judges across Canada, including in Quebec. I can tell this House that the Barreau du Québec and Quebec lawyers are very pleased with the quality and diversity of the individuals appointed to the Quebec Superior Court.

We have already appointed 10 judges to the Quebec Superior Court this year, and we still have nine vacancies. The process is ongoing as we continue to fill these positions. I hope to have good news very soon.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his remarks on what I think is an important bill.

There is an obvious tension, always, between the independence of judges and the right of the public to have transparency about the conduct of judges. In this bill, it is very clear that we are going to make a significant improvement over the current situation, in which neither the complainants nor the judges complained about are served well. I wonder if the minister thinks that with this bill, we have finally reached the right balance between the independence of judges and the rights of those who may have complaints about judges.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his work at committee and with respect to collaboration on justice issues generally. We have a very high degree of collaboration among all the parties in the House, and I am very proud of that fact.

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I think we have reached the right balance here. I point out to the hon. member that the substance of this process was elaborated on by the Canadian Judicial Council, which is led by the Right Hon. Richard Wagner, who is the Chief Justice of Canada, and chief justices across Canada, in collaboration with superior court judges across Canada. I think there is an important developmental part of the bill that was undertaken by the judiciary.

We had a high-profile case of judicial misconduct over the past number of years in which dilatory tactics were used, and it ended up costing the taxpayer time and money. The people who suffered the most during that process were the judges. They felt that their reputation was being impugned by the actions of one of their members. Therefore, they had a very strong incentive to participate in the process and to elaborate on a process that they believed was fair.

Then the bill came here and there were good recommendations at committee. There were not many, but they were important ones. Therefore, we have taken on our role responsibly to work with justices, maintaining independence on each side and coming up with a process that will serve Canadians. That is ultimately what both the judiciary and parliamentarians do.

• (1025)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Justice would be aware that at the justice committee, Conservative members put forward a common-sense motion. It was a proposal to amend Bill C-9 to include an automatic right of appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal, not the trial court, and that was rejected by the other members of the committee. They argued that the Supreme Court of Canada is already there for appeals. However, we know that is only a faint hope, because it is unlikely that any case coming out of the CJC will ever make it to the Supreme Court of Canada. I would like his comments on that.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, indeed, this is probably one of the reasons we are here.

I mentioned the case of Justice Girouard over the past number of years, in which there were a number of judicial reviews to the Federal Court and appeals to the Federal Court of Appeal from those judicial reviews. It ended up ballooning the process in terms of cost and rendering the process much more complex, and it took years.

I know that serious discussions were undertaken by the CJC and the chief justice discussing the mechanism, and appeals to the Federal Court were considered. What the judges came up with was a transparent process to hear and provide for appeals within the system in a linear fashion with, finally, the possibility of seeking leave to appeal to the Supreme Court.

I think the hon. member is correct to say that leave to appeal to the court is not meant to be frequently obtained, but there has been a sufficient degree of attention paid within the linear system of vetting, hearing and rehearing cases so that there is a sufficient degree of protection put in the system for someone to challenge a first ruling and move from there. We have built a good balance that maintains efficiency and—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There is time for one last question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to get back to the issue of public confidence in the judicial system. The minister made reference to those high-profile cases where a judge is being judged by the public, if I can put it that way, because of a particular ruling and questions of doubt are planted.

When I look at the legislation, one aspect is important to recognize: We assist in ensuring public confidence in the system when we put in the checks we are putting in today. Could the minister provide his thoughts on the—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like a very brief answer from the hon. minister.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, at the outset, if there is a doubt about a ruling, there is an appeal process. When there is a substantive question, one can go to appeal.

What we are talking about here is when a judge perhaps makes a remark or is engaged in an activity that impugns the conduct of the judiciary. One of the main things we have done here is allow for disciplinary action to be taken in minor cases with concomitant consequences.

• (1030)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-9, an act to amend the Judges Act. Before I do that, I would like to seek the unanimous consent of the House to split my time with the member for Langley—Aldergrove.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, this legislation would reform the process by which the Canadian Judicial Council undertakes reviews of complaints brought against judges for alleged misconduct. The judicial complaints review process was established more than 50 years ago, in 1971. It has a number of problems in that it can be timely, cumbersome and costly. These problems have been publicly recognized by the Canadian Judicial Council, which consists of 41 members, including all chief justices and associate chief justices of federally appointed courts. For years, there have been calls to reform the process.

The process, as it currently stands, can involve up to three layers of judicial review: the Federal Court of Canada, the Federal Court of Appeal and, upon leave being granted, the Supreme Court of Canada. That process can take years and, in some cases, even as long as a decade. This bill seeks to address that by streamlining the process, although, I would submit, it does so somewhat imperfectly from the standpoint of ensuring procedural fairness. Nonetheless, the process the government has come up with is supportable, notwithstanding some shortcomings that Conservatives raised at committee.

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The bill also seeks to enhance transparency by requiring that the Canadian Judicial Council, in its annual reports, to publish the number of complaints and how those complaints were resolved.

The bill would enhance accountability. Under the current process, where a judge's misconduct is not at a level that would warrant their removal from office, such cases can be settled behind closed doors with really very little transparency. This bill would change that by providing for mandatory sanctions. Those sanctions could range from requiring the judge to issue an apology to requiring the judge to undertake counselling or professional development training with regard for the nature of the misconduct and circumstances of the case.

The bill, on the whole, would protect the independence of the judiciary, which is vital to our democracy and integral to the rule of law, which is something that, unfortunately from time to time, the current government has not respected. In addition, with some imperfections, the bill would maintain procedural fairness, both from the standpoint of the complainant as well as for a judge whose conduct is being questioned by way of a complaint.

It is good that this bill has been brought forward. It is a bill that is the product of consultations that took place in 2016, the substance of which have been incorporated into this bill, on which there is generally consensus. However, I will say that it did take the Liberals five years after those consultations ended to get around to introducing a bill. Moreover, when the government finally got around to introducing a bill in May 2021, it went nowhere because of the Prime Minister, who called a completely unnecessary and opportunistic election. Following the unnecessary election, the Liberals reintroduced the bill in the Senate last November and then suddenly decided one month later to pull the bill from the Senate.

• (1035)

The Liberals then reintroduced the bill, Bill C-9, last December in the House and proceeded to let it languish for months on end. For six months, they sat on their hands only to finally bring it up for debate at second reading in June, just before the House rose for the summer, and here we are at Christmas still dealing with the bill.

I highlight the process to underscore how dysfunctional the Liberal government is. Here, we have a bill around which there is general consensus, and it has taken the Liberals three bills to proceed. While the bill would enhance public confidence in the judicial system, and judges are central to that system, the same cannot be said more broadly about public confidence in our justice system, as a result of the policies of the Liberal government, policies and actions for which the government gets a failing grade.

For the Liberals, it is always about the criminals and never about the victims. This, after all, is a government that allowed the position of victims ombudsman to be left vacant for nine months. Finally, in September, the Liberals got around to filling that vacancy. It was not the first time they left that position vacant, the federal advocate for victims, the ombudsman. They left the position vacant for nearly a year in 2017 and 2018. By contrast, when it came to the prisoners ombudsman, when that position became vacant, the Liberals saw fit to fill it the very next day.

That is quite a contrast. When it comes to an ombudsman for prisoners, the vacancy was filled the next day. When it comes to the ombudsman for the rights of victims, the government has presided over leaving that critical position vacant for nearly two years out of the seven years it has been in office.

This is a government that just passed Bill C-5, the do-no-time, soft-on-crime bill, as it has come to be known, which eliminates mandatory jail time for serious firearms offences and for serious drug offences, including trafficking and production of schedule 1 drugs such as cocaine, fentanyl and crystal meth. This is at a time when we have an opioids crisis. When 21 Canadians a day are dying as a result of that, the government's priority is to let those who put that poison on our streets serve their sentence at home, instead of behind bars where they belong.

That is a government that has failed to engage in that dialogue, which is so critical between Parliament and the courts. The minister failed to respond to the Supreme Court's decision to strike down the very reasonable and just law passed by the previous Harper government to give judges the discretion to apply consecutive parole ineligibility periods for mass murderers, including the mass murderer responsible for the murder of my constituent Brian Ilesic. His parents, Mike and Dianne, are very deeply troubled by the inaction of the minister, and I am glad that today he at least acknowledged he was open to reviewing that decision. That is the first time he has said that.

In closing, I will just say that the bill is a supportable bill, but it is cold comfort for victims and their families who, time and again, have been abandoned by the government.

• (1040)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one cannot help but recognize, in many of the spins the Conservatives like to put, as though they are tough on crime, is that they seem to want to marginalize the true value of our judicial system, in particular, our judges. They do that by saying they do not have confidence in judges, and therefore, they need to not only support the minimum sentences of today, along with the many problems that are a part of that, but also would like to see additional minimum sentences.

Does the member not believe that judges are in a better position to be able to give a disposition, rather than instituting or putting on them minimum sentences in every situation?

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, the courts have not struck down minimum sentences across the board. Mandatory jail times have always been a part of our Criminal Code, or have been for many decades, and continue to be. In fact, none of the provisions, I believe, in Bill C-5 were struck down by the courts, certainly not by the Supreme Court.

It was a choice made by the government to remove those mandatory jail times because, for the government, it is always about putting the rights of criminals ahead of those of victims. The Liberals provided little rationale on why they picked those specific provisions, which involve serious firearms offences and serious drug offences.

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[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his speech.

I had the opportunity to speak at second reading of this bill, and I listened to the speeches given by my other colleagues.

One point that kept coming up from the Conservative side was about protecting victims. It was pointed out that, in the review process, victims' views were perhaps not sufficiently taken into account in cases where a sanction was warranted, but not necessarily removal.

However, an amendment adopted in committee would allow for victims to at least be notified of the reasons why their complaints were not successful.

Does my colleague think this is a step in the right direction? Could Bill C-9 not have done a little more to protect victims?

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, yes, I believe that amendment is an improvement to the bill.

Any time there is an opportunity to have input from the victim, it is a step in the right direction. That is important, and we must continue to do work to ensure that victims are heard throughout our court process and, in this instance, a judicial complaints process.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is hard for me to thank the member for his speech, which was essentially a long recitation of the Conservative's commitment to tough-on-crime policies, which have clearly failed. However, my real disappointment with his speech is that we have done some work in this Parliament, particularly on the study on the rights of victims where parties have worked together to try and improve the justice system.

My question is about the bill and confidence in the judicial system. I wonder whether the Conservatives actually believe that the justice system and judges, in particular, have to look more like the face of Canada for the public to have confidence in that system.

• (1045)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, to answer the member's question directly, yes, I agree with him.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am here to talk about Bill C-9, an act to amend the Judges Act.

In the end, the Michel Girouard case was not even about whether Justice Girouard had purchased cocaine from his former client, a known drug dealer. The Canadian Judicial Council panel hearing the case found that there was not enough evidence on a balance of probability to find that the judge had been dealing in drugs.

There was a video recording, which, unfortunately for him, captured an exchange between him and his client, with money going one way and a package going the other. The judge said that exchange was not about drugs; it was about pornography. Clearly, this judge had a bad habit or maybe two bad habits, but I am willing to concede to the panel's finding that there was no drug dealing. In the

end, it was the cover-up that torpedoed this judge's short time on the bench.

The panel's report reads, “[He] deliberately and intentionally attempted to conceal the truth during the hearing.” After that, they recommended his removal. However, Judge Michel Girouard of the Quebec Superior Court was a very good judge. He was certainly a very smart judge. He was a very competent lawyer too. He had a good track record as trial counsel, and he knew his way through the legal court system probably better than anybody did. He used the experience he attained during his career as a lawyer to his full advantage.

Here is a short history. In 2010, he was appointed to the court. In 2012, there was a complaint launched against him relating to drug dealing. In 2014, the Canadian Judicial Council undertook a full investigation, and at the end of that, it recommended his removal to the minister of justice at the time.

I will give a brief explanation of how the Canadian Judicial Council works.

It is a body of judges that is appointed pursuant to the provisions of the Judges Act to review judges' complaints against judges. This is judges judging judges. The idea behind the structure, as with all administrative bodies, is to take specialized cases out of the regular court system. The idea is to be more fair, more transparent and more efficient.

Generally, this works, but it can be abused, as it was in the Girouard case. That case was dragged through the Canadian Judicial Council appeal processes and then through the court system under judicial review procedures. All of these tools were available to Justice Girouard under the governing legislation, the Judges Act, which we are reviewing today. Along the way, he found some courts that were actually sympathetic to his position. The case went back and forth, and it finally ended up at the doors of the Supreme Court of Canada in 2019, which refused to hear the appeal.

The end of the story is that Justice Girouard resigned, mercifully for all of us, but not until after eight years of dragging the case through the court system while he had full pay, even though he did not have to show up for work. His pension also accrued during that time.

Although the Supreme Court of Canada decided not to hear this case, the chief justice had this to say, not specifically about this case but generally: “If the judge has to be removed, he has to be removed quickly and without too much cost to society. We need reforms. Parliament should find a way to make sure that these matters don't drag for too long and aren't too expensive.”

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That is why we are here today to review Bill C-9, an act to amend the Judges Act. I do not want to leave the impression that Bill C-9 is Parliament's response to the Girouard case. It is not. I took up that case only because it is high profile and a good example. It illustrates why reform is necessary.

● (1050)

The Canadian Judicial Council is busy with many files. It oversees the work of almost 1,200 federally appointed judges. The vast majority of those judges are very competent, fair, judicious, respectful of the people who appear before them and respected by their profession and in their communities. The CJC's judicial conduct oversight role is part of its general mandate to keep the judicial system efficient, uniform and accountable, and in large part, it does that work effectively.

I do not want to get into the details of Bill C-9; we do not have time for that. A general overview is that it expedites the inquiry process and simplifies it, while also keeping it fair to judges. It also aims to secure the public's confidence in our court system. Importantly, it keeps cases out of the court system.

The council's recommendation to the Minister of Justice will be the final decision, except in the case of an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada. That is a faint hope because most applications for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court are turned down, as in the Girouard case. It did not make the cut. Most cases coming out of the Canadian Judicial Council, I am sure, would not make the cut to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Not everyone is going to be happy with that. In the Girouard case, for example, which made it to the federal trial court in its long and winding history of eight years, the judge had something to say in response to the Canadian Judicial Council's arguments that only the council had any jurisdiction over the oversight of judges and that the Federal Court had no jurisdiction at all. This is what the federal trial judge said:

It is undeniable that a report recommending the removal of a judge has a serious impact on that judge, professionally and personally, and on his or her family. It is inconceivable that a single body, with no independent supervision and beyond the reach of all judicial review, may decide a person's fate on its own.

If the judge who wrote that paragraph were sitting here today, he would be voting against Bill C-9.

At committee, as stated earlier in debate with the Minister of Justice, the Conservative members of the justice committee put forward a common-sense motion to amend Bill C-9 to allow for an automatic right of appeal to the Federal Court of Appeal. This is not to a trial court, where things could get bogged down, but directly to the Federal Court of Appeal. Unfortunately, the other members of the committee voted against that.

All that said, despite that flaw, which I think is significant, this legislation is good and sound. It stands in line with other judicial reform legislation of recent years and we support it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the issues I have raised is confidence in the judicial system, in particular the public's confidence. I think it adds value to

public confidence when we get legislation like this that is supported unanimously in the House.

My understanding is that the Conservative Party will be voting in favour of the legislation. Can the member provide his thoughts on the importance of having legislation of this nature, which reinforces public confidence in the independence of the judiciary?

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, of course, judicial independence is extremely important. It goes to the core of our society and our judicial system, and the public must have confidence in the judicial system.

I think we can celebrate that Canada's judges are highly professional, highly ethical and very considerate of the people who appear before them. They are highly regarded by the community as well. There is a lot to celebrate. Bill C-9 brings that a step further to expedite the system for reviewing judges' behaviour.

● (1055)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his interesting speech. The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-9, just as he does. The legal community has called for it and we commend this bill.

I would like to ask my colleague about the judicial appointment process. We know about the "Liberalist" scandal of the past few years. The government used its party's membership list to appoint judges. The government has said that it is no longer using the list, but the judicial appointment process still falls primarily to the government.

Does my hon. colleague agree with my party's position that there should be an all-party committee with greater transparency to appoint judges in order to increase trust in the process?

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, I completely agree that the appointment of judges must be non-partisan altogether, whether or not that is done through a multi-party body that oversees the appointment of judges. I would take it a step further and say that politicians should not be involved in it at all. It should just be done on a very non-partisan basis, based on the lawyer's ability to be a good judge.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, one thing Canadians feel strongly about is the independence of the judiciary. In the United States, we see the overtly political Supreme Court creating political discord because of a lack of confidence in its decisions.

Rona Ambrose, the former Conservative member who was a very strong voice for women and justice in the House, talked about the need for mandatory training. There have been a few cases of judges who made really disturbing decisions based on sexual assault and the treatment of women.

Does my hon. colleague agree with Ms. Ambrose's position that we need to make sure the judges adjudicating these cases have a good understanding of victims' rights and women's rights in terms of sexual violence?

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Madam Speaker, we voted in favour of Bill C-3 in the previous Parliament, which originated as a private member's bill from the Hon. Rona Ambrose. I completely support it. I know there was some debate about whether Parliament telling judges they must get educated interfered with their independence. I do not think it did. Judges, like everybody, should be fully educated and informed on the topics they have to address.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate, which will only last 90 seconds.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank you. I was not sure whether you were going to give me a few seconds to start my speech, which I will be pleased to continue after question period.

Since the end of this parliamentary period and the holidays are approaching, I want to take a few moments to recognize a few people. We will, of course, recognize those who work with us in the House in the coming week, but I want to take this opportunity to thank the members of my team, which is something that we perhaps do not do often enough. The work of an MP is only as good as the work of those who support them in their riding office. I therefore want to thank Dave, Diane and Hugo, as well as our new recruits, Philippe-Olivier and Huguette, for their great work, unwavering support and top-notch service.

That being said, Bill C-9, which is before us today, seems to have almost unanimous support. I had the pleasure of rising to speak to this bill last June. Generally speaking, the questions asked in the House as part of the debate were not so much about the bill itself as they were about the broader aspects of the justice system review, which shows that the bill's content is not very controversial.

In fact, the bill—

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I think it would be a good idea to stop there and resume debate after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SEASON'S GREETINGS

Mr. Terry Sheehan (Sault Ste. Marie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to wish everyone in my riding of Sault Ste. Marie a holi-

Statements by Members

day season filled with joy, a heart with love and a life with blessings.

As we continue to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, let us embrace the beautiful traditions this year that bring us together around the table with our family, our friends and our loved ones.

I give a special holiday greeting, as well, to our Canadian Armed Forces members and their families who serve in Canada and overseas, and I thank them for their sacrifices, which keep us safe and protect our way of life.

Let us also continue our resolve and hope and support for the people of Ukraine and Iran, and many other people in the world who are in conflict.

Let all our voices call out for peace on earth and goodwill to all.

Again, I wish a merry Christmas and a very healthy, happy and prosperous new year to everyone in Canada.

* * *

GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government continues to make Canada's credibility around the world a joke. It continues to dishonour our commitment to NATO funding, to our indigenous peoples and even to the United Nations.

The international Great Lakes Fishery Commission is now on the razor's edge of collapsing, with our American friends walking away, fed up with our continued failure to honour our word.

What does the government say to our American partners who have written us on this critical issue, such as members of Congress Dingell, Joyce, Kaptur, Huizenga and Grothman, as well as Senators Stabenow, Portman, Smith, Brown, Durbin, Klobuchar, Casey, Duckworth, Peters and Chuck Schumer, all reminding us of our commitment?

We call upon the government to direct existing payments, already budgeted to the international commission, through Global Affairs Canada and not through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which continues to mismanage this critical file.

If our word is not good, what good are we?

*Statements by Members***COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I met His Grace Bishop Boulos, the bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church and other community leaders. I am glad to hear that changes are happening in Egypt and that its president, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, has transformed the previously established state policies and positively altered the relationship between the state and the church.

I understand that he is the first president to physically visit the Coptic capital and has commissioned construction of the Cathedral of Nativity in Egypt's new administrative capital.

I am told that the bureaucratic challenges that limited the construction and renovation of Coptic churches have now been lifted. It is good to hear that the Copts are living through a period of peace, tranquility and equality under the current leadership in Egypt.

I wish everyone a merry Christmas and a very happy and prosperous 2023.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, more than three years ago the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls published its report, with over 230 calls for justice. Since then, from the government, there have been lots of pretty words but no action on the scale required, showing utter disrespect for the thousands of victims.

Where is the indigenous-led housing that is needed? Where are the shelters for indigenous women fleeing from violence? The tragic reality of Canada today is that tonight, close to 1,000 indigenous and non-indigenous women and children will be left outside, without access to shelters or services.

The horrific revelation of the deaths of four indigenous women in Winnipeg, murdered by a predator, shows once again that the government has failed to act on the scale that is required to keep indigenous women and girls safe.

To the families of Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran, Rebecca Contois and the victim elders and the community have named Bufalo Woman, we are devastated that this has happened to their loved ones. We will fight to honour their memories.

* * *

*[Translation]***ANNUAL CHILDREN'S FUNDRAISER WITH DR. BUREAU**

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to speak about the annual children's fundraiser with Dr. Bureau of the Gatineau Social Pediatric Center, which will be ongoing until January 15, 2023.

The funds collected will support quality care and services for extremely vulnerable children. In the past few years, the Gatineau Social Pediatric Center has developed many innovative projects with various community partners to support families and children in a stimulating and caring environment.

The children's fundraiser with Dr. Bureau is made possible by its passionate and engaged team, the board of directors and many volunteers.

For that reason, my colleagues and I want to express our appreciation for their invaluable contribution to our region's youth.

* * *

● (1105)

*[English]***BILL DOWSON AND BOB MCKINLEY**

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to offer tribute to two men from Huron County who left us recently.

Bill Dowson passed on November 9. He spent over 30 years in public service, first in Stanley Township and then as the first mayor of the Municipality of Bluewater and the warden of Huron County.

Bob McKinley passed on October 16. He served here in the House of Commons from 1965 to 1980 as a Progressive Conservative member of Parliament and the chief opposition whip. Bob was a friend and mentor for almost 20 years.

I would like to thank Bill and Bob for their years of service to our community. Huron County has lost two great public servants and two great guys.

* * *

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier this year, when Londoner Wayne Dunn was honoured by the Governor General for his contributions to volunteerism, it came as no surprise to residents of our community.

For 23 years, Wayne and the organizing committee of the Business Cares Food Drive have done extraordinary work in getting businesses together so food drives could be organized for the community, specifically in support of the London Food Bank. Just last year, almost 600,000 pounds of food was contributed. Obviously, the need is great again this year, and the work has begun. On December 1, this year's campaign began.

In addition to supporting the food bank, the contributions also support local soup kitchens, school breakfast programs and drop-in programs carried out by the community. It is a wonderful thing to see. It is an example of volunteerism in action in our community and the generosity of businesses.

I thank Wayne very much for all he has done for London.

* * *

SALVATION ARMY

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last weekend I had the honour of volunteering with the Salvation Army Christmas Kettle Campaign outside the Langley Superstore.

Statements by Members

The kettle campaign is one of Canada's largest and most recognizable charitable events during the Christmas season. The funds raised stay in the community in which they are donated and are used to support local Salvation Army programs for people in need.

This was not the first time I volunteered with the Salvation Army. The Gateway of Hope, a ministry within the Salvation Army itself, filled backpacks for kids in need this fall as part of its family services program. In the end, between 800 and 900 families received help from this campaign.

I would like to personally thank the individuals at the Gateway of Hope who provide these important services in Cloverdale—Langley City. Dan Donkers is the volunteer coordinator who manages the kettle campaign. Cristina Schneider is the residential services manager. She works with the local shelter and manages the emergency weather alerts. Andrea Voss is the family services coordinator. She helped organize the backpack campaign and also offers the community volunteer income tax program.

There are many people to thank for the services the Salvation Army provides, and I wish each of them a very merry Christmas.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MARIE-PHILIP POULIN

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week, a panel of Canadian sports journalists chose the winner of the Northern Star Award, which is given annually to Canada's athlete of the year. This year, this prestigious award goes to Beauce's own Marie-Philip Poulin, who proudly wore the letter "C" at the last Olympic Games and, along with her entire team, brought home gold for women's hockey.

She is now one of four legendary Quebec hockey players to have won this award, along with Guy Lafleur, Mario Lemieux and Maurice Richard. Also this week, Ms. Poulin became the very first member of the women's hockey team to be inducted into the hall of fame at Boston University, where she played with the Terriers for four years.

Marie-Philip Poulin continues to be an inspiration for young and old alike, not only in Beauce, but across the country. She proves day after day that passion and hard work can lead to greatness.

Congratulations once again to our beloved number 29. To Beauce, she will always be number one.

Bravo, Marie-Philip Poulin.

* * *

[*English*]

REMEMBRANCE PROJECT IN BLOOR WEST VILLAGE

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to salute two teachers in my community of Parkdale—High Park, Katy Whitfield and Ian DaSilva.

During Remembrance Week they conceived a simple goal: making national sacrifice locally relatable. The project that emerged is called "They Walked These Streets".

On two lawns in Bloor West Village, Katy and Ian mounted signs dedicated to the Canadian men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in both world wars. The signs captured the names of these military heroes, where they served and where they passed. The information also lists where these soldiers lived and which local school they attended, and in that, Canadian soldiers became instantly relatable to generations of my constituents. Schoolchildren would pass by and exclaim, "She went to my school," or "He lived on my street." Seniors would visit and pay homage to relatives who served.

There are 235 soldiers' stories depicted this year, and over 1,000 neighbours visited to learn and pay their respects. I thank Katy and Ian for helping this important history come alive in our community. We will indeed remember them.

* * *

● (1110)

HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, Montrealer Sarah Kazemi, national wrestling champion Navid Afkari, 176 people including 55 Canadians on flight 752, Kurdish Iranian Mahsa Amini, and so many more have been killed by a murderous regime. Now Mohsen Shekari has been executed, in the first execution by hanging, for simply participating in recent protests in Iran, for simply exercising his universal and fundamental human right to free speech.

The people of Iran have been brave and tenacious in standing up to an oppressive autocratic regime. Canadians, too, have stood up in solidarity with the people of Iran. It is now time for this government to stand up with the people of Iran.

The government came to office promising to re-establish diplomatic ties and reopen Canada's embassy in Tehran, and while it has backed off those promises, it has still not done what our allies have done and what the House has insisted the government do, which is to list the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week's interest rate hike means that the prime rate of Canada's chartered banks is 6.45%, the highest in 22 years.

Statements by Members

Half of Canadian homeowners with a mortgage are worried they will not be able to afford their own home when their mortgage comes up for renewal. A typical homebuyer from five years ago, renewing a \$400,000 mortgage, can expect their payments to go up by \$400 or \$500 a month or more when they renew, and new buyers, at today's rates and prices, have all but given up hope.

Canadians already face higher prices from Liberal tax increases on gas, groceries and home heating. They cannot afford higher mortgage payments too. The Liberals justified their out-of-control spending and borrowing since 2015 by saying that interest rates would never go up, but they were wrong. Liberal spending and borrowing drove up the cost of credit, and now Canadians have to pay more for their mortgages, and their kids are saddled with a legacy of Liberal debt.

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NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN OTTAWA

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on December 7, which also marks 101 years of women MPs in Canada, I had the honour to attend the Equal Voice fundraising gala.

People gathered from across the country to recognize and celebrate women who have made a significant impact in politics. Since 2001, Equal Voice has been advocating for equal representation of women in Canada's Parliament, focusing on equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility.

I truly want to recognize the leadership of Equal Voice in advancing women's participation in the political arena.

[*Translation*]

Yesterday, December 8, I also had the pleasure of attending a breakfast hosted by the Cooperative Council of Ontario to mark the official opening of their new offices, which are located not far from us here at Parliament. It was truly a great opportunity to discuss, in the presence of important stakeholders, how valuable they are to our community.

I would like to thank the Regroupement des gens d'affaires de la capitale nationale for their collaboration and partnership.

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PHIL EDMONSTON

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, many people believe that the first NDP MP in Quebec was the former NDP leader, Thomas Mulcair. While Tom won an impressive victory in the 2007 byelection in Outremont and was subsequently re-elected three times, he was not the first. Phil Edmonston was the first.

Phil won the 1990 byelection in Chambly with 67% of the votes. His background leading up to that was an unusual one. Born in Washington, he decided to immigrate to Montreal. He was a keen francophile, and initially worked as a writer and journalist.

He founded the Automobile Protection Association. As a tireless consumer rights advocate, he was involved in a number of battles to

defend individuals against big corporations. For years, he published *Lemon-Aid*, a new and used car buying guide.

Sadly, Phil Edmonston left us a few days ago. He was an architect of Quebec's social democratic movement, an American who found a home here, in French, and who dedicated his life to standing up for others.

He will not soon be forgotten. We salute him. Our thoughts are with his family and friends.

* * *

● (1115)

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION AND DIGNITY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE AND OF THE PREVENTION OF THIS CRIME

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, December 9 is the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. More importantly, it is an opportunity to resolve once again, as parliamentarians, to do everything we can to stop this heinous crime.

December 9 is also a day to remember the Uighur genocide. Just yesterday, I reminded the House that nearly two million Uighur and Turkic Muslims are currently imprisoned. These men, women and children have been abducted, raped and tortured, while others have been callously murdered.

I cannot stress this enough. As I stand before my colleagues in the House, the most horrific crime a government can perpetrate against its own people is taking place: genocide.

It is hard to hear that word. It is an unbelievably brutal crime, one that the Government of Canada stubbornly refuses to name. That is why, once again, I rise before my colleagues to stand up for human rights but, more importantly, as a matter of principle and justice. It is high time that justice prevailed for my Uighur friends.

* * *

[*English*]

FIREARMS

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is clear the Prime Minister and his Liberal front bench have again been caught trying to divide Canadians for political gain.

Adding hunting rifles to Bill C-21 proves that the Prime Minister and his cabinet govern for themselves. First nations leaders from across our country are voicing their concerns with the sneaky and underhanded amendments to Bill C-21. Where was the consultation? Are constitutional rights to hunt and harvest for sustenance to be protected? Why is the Liberal government criminalizing a way of life?

Every time questions like these are put to Liberals, they claim Conservatives are spreading misinformation. Yesterday, the Assembly of First Nations' Special Chiefs Assembly passed an emergency motion opposing the Liberal hunting rifle ban. Are the Liberals going to stand up today and accuse the AFN of spreading misinformation, or will they just admit to all Canadians that they are guilty of covering their incompetence with deception?

* * *

CHILD CARE

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, child care is not a luxury; it is a necessity. That is why our government is establishing a Canada-wide early learning and child care system. All families should have access to high-quality, affordable and inclusive early learning and child care, no matter where they live, today and into the future.

As a single mom of two kids, I know from personal experience what a universal child care system means for a parent's ability to start a career, provide for their family and contribute to their community.

Bill C-35, introduced yesterday by the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, would enshrine the principles of our Canada-wide system into federal law. Families and child care educators like Anna Care, the director of Blaydon day care in York Centre, have been advocating for a national child care system for decades.

I encourage all my colleagues from all parties to join me in passing Bill C-35 quickly so that we can continue to work together to make life more affordable for families and give every child in Canada the best possible start in life.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government constantly votes to increase taxes on Canadians. It voted to increase taxes on fuel. It voted to increase taxes on home heating. At a time when Canadians are struggling to put food on the table for their families and with 1.5 million Canadians visiting food banks in a single month, the Liberals voted to increase their carbon tax on food production.

When will they finally quit forcing their failed carbon tax on struggling Canadians?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand that the Conservatives are still debating whether the climate crisis is real. I understand their economic policy can be summed up as cancelling the price on pollution. What I do not understand is that yesterday the Conservatives voted against a tax cut for small businesses. They voted against eliminating interest on student loans.

Oral Questions

We have been there for Canadians. We have a strong and prudent fiscal policy in this country. I just do not understand why the Conservatives consistently oppose it.

● (1120)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, what we oppose is their failed carbon tax plan. It is not an environmental plan. What we are voting against is, like the Auditor General saw, \$27 billion in misappropriated COVID funds. What we are going to continue to vote against is the wasteful spending of these inflationary arsonists. The Liberals have not found a tax they do not love.

When will they finally get rid of their tax-and-spend ways and give Canadians a well-deserved break?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am not sure who the Conservative member is referring to when he calls people "arsonists", but clearly the facts and the numbers do not seem to matter to the Conservatives.

If they bothered to look at the facts, they would see that we have the lowest deficit and the lowest debt of all G7 countries. They would also see that we continue to have a AAA credit rating, which means, and the numbers bear this out, business investors are finding Canada to be the most prudent and responsible investment. Business investment is up in this country. I just wish the Conservatives would stop denigrating our economy.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, because of the Liberal government, Christmas will be more expensive for Canadians than ever before. Of Canadians, 52% are worried about buying gifts this Christmas, 61% are worried about putting gas in their cars to go visit loved ones over the holidays, and 53% are worried about buying groceries for Christmas dinner.

This is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year. When will the Liberal government give Canadians a break and axe the carbon tax?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, nobody is believing this feigned compassion on behalf of the Conservatives.

It is the government's policies that ensured that two million fewer Canadians are suffering from poverty in this country. It is the policies that we have put in place that are helping Canadians make ends meet, whether it is the rental benefit that will become available in a few days' time, whether it is the dental subsidy that is already available to Canadian families, whether it is the supports for child care or whether it is doubling the GST tax credit. We have been there for Canadians, and we will continue to be there.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Christmas holidays are two weeks away. Families will gather around the table. However, all families are worried about inflation right now. What is more, inflation is hitting them where it hurts the most: food, which is a basic necessity.

There is one thing that the government could do immediately that is entirely within its control. I am talking about taxes.

Will the government promise not to increase taxes in 2023, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the tax my colleague is referring to is the carbon tax, the price on pollution.

Quebeckers agree that polluters must pay. I must clarify, however, that the price on pollution does not apply to Quebec.

I would simply like to remind my colleague that we must be mindful of the facts. We must also ensure that the votes reflect the Conservatives' position. Yesterday, once again, the Conservatives voted against measures that would help Canadians.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am talking about facts. I just want to point out that I did not mention the carbon tax at all. The member, who is not a minister, should know that she is the one who brought it up. Indeed, she knows full well that the Liberals are going to increase the carbon tax in 2023. This is not going to help anyone. While I am at it, I would like to remind her that her government, after seven years in power, is ranked 58th out of 63 for its effectiveness in fighting climate change.

I will repeat my question. Is her government going to increase taxes in 2023, yes or no?

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is not fair. Yes, I made reference to the carbon tax because that is the only tax the Conservatives could be referring to. There is no federal tax on the price of food, and the member across the way knows it. The compassion my colleague seems to be displaying in the House today does not reflect reality, because yesterday, he voted against measures that are going to help Canadians.

* * *

● (1125)

JUSTICE

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, the Chief Justice of the Quebec Superior Court, Marie-Anne Paquette, criticized the fact that many trials have had to be postponed over the past few months because the Minister of Justice is taking too long to appoint judges. In one judicial district in the Montreal area, no hearings could be held for a month because there were no judges available. When the minister's office is asked about this, it responds that the appointments will be made in due course. Will the minister admit that due course has come and gone?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her question. I attended the Hon. Chief Justice Marie-Anne Paquette's swearing-in ceremony a week and a half ago in Montreal. I can confirm that the bar association and the chief justices are very pleased with the quality and diversity of the people that we have appointed to the Quebec Superior Court. We appointed 10 people to that court this year, and there are still nine positions to fill. We are working on it. I hope to have good news soon.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, when Justice Paquette tells the government that it needs to hire a dozen judges, the government replies that it is short just nine. It has appointed only 10 judges since the beginning of the year. At this rate, it will take another year to fill the remaining positions. I cannot say for sure, maybe the Liberals are running out of names on the Liberalist, but the problem is that this is undermining the public's trust in the justice system. The system simply does not have the capacity to respond anymore. When will the Liberals take the judicial vacancy situation seriously?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is exactly what we are doing throughout Canada with vacancies. We have implemented a transparent and efficient process, and we are filling the positions as they come up. We are doing it in a diligent manner. As I said, the results are excellent. The diversity and quality of judges being appointed is exceptional.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, average wait times in Ontario ERs have hit a record high of over 20 hours. All the premiers are meeting today about the crisis in children's hospitals and ERs across the country. However, guess who decided this was not important enough to show up for: the Prime Minister.

Our health care system is in crisis, and Conservative premiers are openly saying that their plan is to gut and privatize the public health care that Canadians rely on. Why does the Prime Minister not think this problem is important enough to warrant his attention? Why will he not even bother to show up to fix this crisis?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Health, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our system is indeed in a crisis. Our health workers are very tired. Backlogs due to COVID-19 are impacting not only COVID-19 patients, and there are many of them in our hospitals, but many other patients who have been suffering from backlogs in surgeries and diagnostics. That is why we have been there for provinces and territories, sending tens of billions of dollars in addition to the Canada health transfer over the last few months and years.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, every single month we lose a member of the Canadian Forces to death by suicide. Clearly, more needs to be done to prevent these tragic losses for the forces and for the families. One of the barriers to serving members getting the mental health supports they need is the fact that self-harm remains a disciplinary offence under the military code of conduct. For more than six years, the families have been asking this government to act.

Will the Minister of National Defence support my proposal to remove self-harm as a disciplinary offence so that serving members can get the mental health supports they need and deserve?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is a very timely question. In fact, we have been working very hard on responding to the recommendations in the Arbour report, which involve examining our current law as well as law under the National Defence Act.

I take the member opposite's question with great earnest and interest. I look forward to responding to it as we examine the path forward for our armed forces and as we seek to build a military that is inclusive and that responds to the needs of the Canadian Armed Forces.

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FINANCE

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals' wasteful spending continues. The \$4-billion Canada digital adoption program has a stream called "boost your business". The government has given a contract to an organization, Magnet, that will oversee placing more than 16,000 students in jobs. As of October 3, that organization has been paid \$1.2 million, yet there have been zero job placements.

Will the Liberal government end its wasteful inflationary spending so that people can put food on their tables and heat their homes?

• (1130)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her genuine advocacy on behalf of small businesses.

One thing that people learned in her part of the country and right around the country is that ensuring businesses adapt to online commerce is critical to not just their survival but their success going forward. That is why we launched a \$4-billion Canada digital adoption program. That is why we are investing in ensuring that small and medium-sized businesses can do commerce online. That is a way of securing their future. That is what we will continue to invest in on this side of the House, ensuring the monies reach those businesses.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government continues to roll out programs with a lack of controls. We saw that recently in the Auditor General's report, as more than \$32 billion went to people who were not able to apply

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for programs or who need to be investigated. That was due to a lack of controls in pandemic programs.

We know that the Governor of the Bank of Canada said that inflation is homegrown. We know that the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that hundreds of billions of dollars that went out the door during the pandemic were not for pandemic programs.

Again, will the government stop its wasteful inflationary spending so people can put food on their tables and heat their homes?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the pandemic hit, we acted quickly to get recovery benefits into people's bank accounts without delay. To achieve that goal, we planned to verify eligibility on the back end, after the fact. This approach kept workers attached to their jobs and positioned our economy to come roaring back, which it did.

The Auditor General's report found that our individual support programs achieved their intended goals of getting money to Canadians quickly, allowing Canadians to stay home safely and avoiding severe social and economic consequences. The Auditor General also noted that lower-income workers and groups most impacted by the pandemic were able to benefit from these programs.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians were advised by the Deputy Prime Minister that they should cut their Disney+ accounts in order to help them make ends meet. Meanwhile, the government has no problems spending \$6,000 on a single hotel night, \$54 million on a failed arrive scam app and, more recently, \$32 billion on altogether illegitimate or suspicious funding with regard to COVID. The worst part is that Canadians are actually on the hook for all this spending, the Canadian people, who work incredibly hard.

When will the Liberals show them some respect and stop their wasteful spending?

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Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when the pandemic hit, our government acted quickly to ensure that Canadians had the support they needed to get by. We were clear from the outset that we would do post-payment verifications in order to get money out the door quickly when it was needed, while also ensuring support went to eligible individuals. This work is ongoing and being done in a responsible and compassionate manner. We were also clear that fraud would not be tolerated and that individuals who made good-faith mistakes would not face penalties. We are taking a responsible approach to ensure a fair process.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is the problem with the Liberals: They make excuse after excuse. They are spending a whole lot of money to accomplish a whole lot of nothing. At the end of the day, it is Canadians who pay the bill.

The cost of living is going up. Meanwhile, the government has no problem spending. Canadians are facing inflation at a 40-year record high, grocery prices have skyrocketed and 20% of Canadians are forced to skip meals. Meanwhile, those across the way continue to chat with one another and maybe even laugh in mockery. Twenty per cent of Canadians are forced to skip meals, 1.5 million Canadians are going to a food bank—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the policies and programs we put in place helped Canadians weather the storm of the pandemic, and that was incredibly important. We would do it again if we had to.

I would like to point out that the investments we made in Canadians during the pandemic also resulted in our economy rebounding much more quickly and much more strongly than those of other countries around the world. We made responsible choices at a time of emergency in this country, and the result is that the Canadian economy is better for it.

• (1135)

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Speaker, wasteful Liberal spending is up again, as we heard from the Auditor General, and includes sending cheques to prisoners and dead people. This only adds more fuel to the raging inflationary fire. As a result, here is what is also up: grocery prices, interest and mortgage rates and, sadly, food bank use in the GTA.

When will the Liberal government end its wasteful inflationary spending so Canadians can afford to put food on the table and heat their homes?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House, we know the programs we put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic helped nine million Canadians weather the storm, stay safe and keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Since that time, we have continued to invest in Canadians. Over two million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty in this country since this government came into power. May I remind members that 450,000 children are now living better than they were before. We have put in dental care for children under 12. We are putting in rental supports for low-income families. The opposition—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Huron—Bruce.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Madam Speaker, gradually and then suddenly, from 2015 to now, the Liberals have added \$800 billion in debt. They nearly doubled the debt. What was the inflation rate in October 2015? It was 1%. What was it earlier this year? It was over 8%. Now they have tripled the carbon tax on every single thing we need for living our lives.

If the Liberals want to help Canadians, what can they do? How about cut the carbon tax? When will the Liberals get rid of the wasteful carbon tax?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Conservatives had the opportunity to vote for affordability and they failed. The other thing they failed on is fighting climate change. However, there is good news coming to Ontario: The price on pollution is increasing, yes, but the climate action rebate is also increasing. For our citizens from Ontario, the average family of four will get \$244 a quarter. That is \$1,000 in people's bank accounts.

We can fight climate change. We can help affordability. They do not have the plan for—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Longueuil—Saint-Hubert.

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[*Translation*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, Ottawa imposed a moratorium on the herring and mackerel fisheries two days before the season opened.

In committee, the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard offered a solution for fishers deprived of income. She suggested they change jobs. The minister gave people two days' notice that they would not be allowed to work. When they asked for help, she told them to change jobs.

When the government decides to prevent people from earning a living, it owes them something. When will the minister drop the condescension and announce compensation for pelagic fishers?

[English]

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I sit on committee and let me correct the record: That is not what the minister said.

Our goal is to grow Canada's fish and seafood sector, and the science has been clear that mackerel stocks are in the critical zone and have been for more than a decade. Without this forage fish, other fish do not survive. That also goes for lobster and crab.

We are taking action. We want, on this side, not just for the mackerel to survive, but for it to thrive for fishers and coastal communities.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Madam Speaker, protecting fishery resources is very important. Fishers would be the first to agree.

However, the Minister of Fisheries never thinks of fishers. She has no compensation plan, and no plan to redirect them toward other fisheries. Her only plan, until this week, was to tell fishers to apply for EI. However, they are ineligible because the minister has prohibited them from working. The minister must not improvise like that when it comes to people's livelihoods.

Will the minister come to her senses and announce compensation for fishers before the holidays?

[English]

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Madam Speaker, saying it twice does not make it more true. The fact of the matter is that we are focused on the stock. We are focused on creating a healthier stock.

As I mentioned, the stock has been in the critical zone for the past 10 years. Our focus is on fishers and also on fishers' communities. That is what we are about on this side. We will continue to work with fishing communities and we will continue to work with fishing associations because that is the right thing to do for the stock and it is the right thing to do for fishers.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberals awarded a contract to protect sensitive RCMP communications systems from espionage to the subsidiary of a company charged with espionage. No security review was undertaken. No consideration was given to Beijing's ownership of the company.

The Liberals claim that vigorous security processes are in place. Where were those security processes when this contract was approved?

• (1140)

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, that is an important

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question. I want to make it very clear to all members of the House that our government takes foreign interference very seriously.

We are aware of the concerns around the RCMP's contract with Sinclair Technologies, and it is our understanding that the RCMP has suspended that contract. We are also undertaking a review to ensure that never at any point is Canadian national security jeopardized.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the only reason this contract was approved is that we have an incompetent Liberal government that has repeatedly failed to protect our sovereignty and security from Beijing, from illegal police stations to interference in our elections to now this.

The contract has been suspended, but it should never have been approved in the first place. Why do the Liberals only do the right thing after they get caught failing Canadians?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let us be very clear, and I am sure all members of the House agree on this. Safeguarding our democracy and our national security is of paramount importance. This is not a partisan issue. This is an issue that we all agree on, and we need to make sure that we remain vigilant when it comes to protecting our national security.

That is why the contract with Sinclair Technologies has been suspended by the RCMP. That is why we are reviewing all mechanisms to ensure that such contracts are never awarded. Once again, safeguarding our democracy and national security is of paramount importance.

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[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, despite the Prime Minister's claims, his admiration for the basic dictatorship of the regime in Beijing speaks louder than his actions on national security. Canadians have every reason to be worried because the Liberals only take action when they get caught. The briefing documents of the Criminal Intelligence Service Canada, or CISC, revealed this week that China is the most dangerous source of threats linked to foreign interference in Canada. Parliamentary committees, CSIS and the United States have been warning the Prime Minister since 2015.

Is this wilful blindness or China's influence on the Prime Minister's Office?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague asked an important question. Indeed, it is very concerning. Also, our independent public service never should have signed that contract. Under the circumstances, we expect national security issues to be at the heart of every decision we make. That is why, in the Indo-Pacific strategy, we mentioned that we will view things through a national security lens when it comes to all these decisions.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, things will be viewed through a lens, she says.

Oral Questions

Reports have been coming out since 2015. The Prime Minister would have been briefed several times. CSIS warned about the risk of foreign interference by China. Public servants, and the government who is responsible for them, awarded contracts to companies with nearly direct ties to the communist Chinese regime. What the minister is proposing today is a lens.

Why is Beijing's interference important only when it is in the media?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think that my colleague should read Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy. It clearly seems as though he has not read it.

I think that, if members are going to ask us questions, they should be informed about the government's foreign policy and, of course, its national security policies.

As I mentioned earlier, matters of national security must be taken into account in all of the decisions made by the independent public service, and the contract never should have been signed.

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[English]

FIREARMS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, veterans, indigenous people and hunters are contacting my office with serious concerns about the last-minute amendment to Bill C-21, and yesterday, the AFN voted unanimously against it. The government needs to listen and reverse course. It feels like a target on rural communities and has distracted from the original purpose of the bill.

It is time for the Prime Minister to see his mistake and fix it. Will he?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think all members will agree that Canadians expect their communities and homes to always be safe. They want to ensure that deadly military-style assault guns are not available on our streets. That is the commitment that we made to Canadians.

What we are not targeting are lawful hunters. This is a complex piece of legislation. We need to make sure that we take the time to review it carefully so that we can take deadly military-style assault guns off our streets.

• (1145)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Liberals promised they would keep people safe from handgun violence. However, at the very last second, the Liberals added an amendment to Bill C-21 that is not about keeping our city centres or children safe, but instead would hurt rural and coastal communities. This bill was supposed to protect people, not go after hunters, farmers or indigenous peoples.

Will the Prime Minister listen to the outpour of concerns and clean up his mess?

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a first

nations person, I know that hunting is a constitutional right that is integral to many nations. Bill C-21's intent is to ban handguns and assault weapons, like AR-15s, full stop. There has been some confusion and there have been some concerns raised, but the committee will get it right.

We will always respect indigenous hunters and their right to pass on that knowledge to their children, like I plan to pass on to my son.

* * *

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Madam Speaker, foreign investment is key for our economy and supports the creation of employment opportunities across the country. We know that national security goes hand in hand with this type of investment.

Can the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry update the House on what our government is doing to strengthen our investment requirements?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that economic security is national security—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would ask the hon. members to please allow the minister to answer the question.

The hon. minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Speaker, I can see the enthusiasm on the other side for what we tabled just this week.

As I was saying, we know that economic security is indeed national security, something that our colleagues raised this morning. Earlier this week, I was proud to table a bill that would amend the Investment Canada Act so that our government can act more decisively when it comes to foreign investments and national security.

We will continue to ensure—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Sturgeon River—Parkland.

FIREARMS

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, opposition to the Liberals' proposed ban on hunting rifles and shotguns is growing. Yesterday, the Assembly of First Nations issued a declaration opposing Bill C-21 because it attacks treaty hunting rights. The Liberal government claims that there is no relationship more important than that with indigenous peoples, but it failed to consult with first nations, Métis and Inuit.

When will the Liberals admit that they failed to respect the rights of indigenous peoples and scrap Bill C-21?

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, for more than 20 years I have been going to the Assembly of First Nations. I have been a part of the resolutions. I have been a part of drafting those resolutions. I have been a part of voting on those resolutions.

I applaud the proactive advocacy of first nations when they hear something that they do not quite understand, but I want to make it clear that first nations' hunting rights will always be respected by this government. We know it is a constitutional right. We know there is a constitutional element to this. We will get it right and indigenous hunters will continue into the future.

Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC): Madam Speaker, I spoke with Joe this morning, a local hunter and manufacturer of parts for legal hunting rifles. He recently purchased a CNC machine and hired skilled trade workers. Now the Liberal government is threatening to shut the doors on his business and take away his firearms. One must assume that hundreds of thousands of dollars for CNC machines are part of the buyback program that does not exist. While law-abiding Canadians are on the right side of history, the Liberal government is the outlier.

When will the Liberals stop targeting hunters and farmers like Joe?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am sure that Joe would agree that there is no place in our society for deadly military-style assault guns, the kind that were used for the shootings at École Polytechnique, the Quebec mass shooting or, most recently, the two police officers who were killed in South Simcoe.

We are not targeting lawful rifles that are used by hunters. This is a complex piece of legislation. That is why it requires careful review and scrutiny. I am very thankful to Bloc and NDP members who gave their permission to have emergency meetings so that we can get this legislation right.

• (1150)

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, farmers and hunters are not responsible for the increase in violent crime, nor are they the source of illegal firearms pouring in from the United States.

Time and time again, the Prime Minister blames law-abiding firearms owners for his government's failure to make our communities safer. Will the Prime Minister do the right thing, stop targeting our farmers and hunters, and go after the criminals and gangs that are to blame for the increase in violent crime?

Oral Questions

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to assure the member opposite that we respect all our hunters and indigenous peoples who rely on hunting. We respect the sustenance rights of indigenous peoples. We are not targeting those rights whatsoever.

What we are going after, what we are banning, what we are trying to take off our streets, are deadly military-style assault guns, the kind that are made to be used on the battlefield. They have no place on our streets. We are going to make sure that we review this legislation carefully and get it right, so that our neighbourhoods are—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Langley—Aldergrove.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Madam Speaker, Marissa from Langley shared with me recently her deep concern about the Liberal Party's direct attacks on hunters like her, farmers and sport shooters. She also shared with me her concern about gun violence, and urges me to support common-sense gun controls. In her own words, she says, "I can detect no sign of that in Bill C-21."

On behalf of Marissa and the hundreds of others who have written to me recently on this topic, when will the Liberal government stop targeting law-abiding hunters and farmers?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the King's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be absolutely clear. We are targeting deadly military-style assault guns that are made for battlefields. They have no place on our streets, in any community, whether it is a rural community or an urban community.

We are not targeting and, in fact, we respect hunters and indigenous peoples who rely on hunting. That is not the intention of this legislation. It is a complex piece of legislation. Members know this. It is quite lengthy. That is why we are going to take the time to review it and get it right, so that we could ban military-style assault guns—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***CHILD CARE**

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, Quebec's early childhood centres are a child care model that is unique the world over. Quebeckers are right to be proud of these centres. Not only do they foster children's socialization exceptionally well, but since they were created, they have enabled millions of Quebec women to have better access to work. Quebec's child care centres are universal, egalitarian and beneficial to Quebec, which is crazy about its children.

Can the minister commit to respecting the expertise of this Quebec model of child care in Bill C-35?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for the question.

[English]

Quebec has led the way for 25 years in what good, affordable, high-quality child care means to Canadian families. I am pleased that every province and territory in this country has now signed on in understanding how affordable child care is needed and demanded by families across this country to give our children the best start in life.

Bill C-35 respects the jurisdictions of every province and territory in how they run their affordable child care systems. We continue to learn from Quebec. We are so happy that provinces and territories have signed on board.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, promising to respect Quebec's jurisdiction over child care means not imposing conditions. It means enshrining the right to opt out with full compensation. We know the Liberals want to protect their Canada-wide child care program going forward, and they want other jurisdictions to copy the Quebec model, but imposing conditions on Quebec's way of doing things is out of the question.

Can the minister guarantee that Bill C-35 will not impose any conditions on Quebec and that it will contain the right to opt out with full compensation?

[English]

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will emphasize again that the legislation that we are putting forward is to ensure what is in place stays in place, including the wonderful model that Quebec has put in place for their citizens for the last 25 years. We want to respect the jurisdiction of all provinces and territories in running their early learning and child care systems, and we want to make sure that every child in every part of this country, no matter where they live, has the best start in life.

• (1155)

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, winter is already a hard time for so many Canadian families, and this year is going to be especially tough with rising interest rates and inflation. Heating costs are expected to double this winter, which will leave more families making a hard choice between heating and eating. The carbon tax is not working. It is a tax plan that is driving up the cost of everything, from gas to groceries.

Will the Liberals stop forcing their failed carbon tax on Canadian families?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are focused like a laser beam on affordability. We had rental supports, dental supports and other affordability measures that the Conservatives just voted against, and that is unfortunate.

The hon. member is from the Prairies, like me, and there is good news coming to the Prairies. In her province of Alberta and in Saskatchewan, there is \$1,500 in the climate action rebate. Those payments are going to be coming quarterly. That is going to help with affordability, that is going to help with cash flow and that is going to help reduce pollution and drive innovation.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that is absolutely cold comfort for families who are struggling right now to keep the heat on in their homes. More Alberta families are going to be paying more in carbon tax than what they will receive back. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has made that exceptionally clear. Also, 1.5 million Canadians visited a food bank in one single month. Just a couple of days ago, a poll came out saying that 53% of Canadians are fearful about feeding their families.

This is not a laughing matter, and it is not something to just spend away. Inflation is eating up those costs. When will they axe their failed carbon tax?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in listening to the Conservatives on the other side, the words "climate change" just never pass their lips. That is not surprising, because for 10 long years they did absolutely nothing on climate change. We are building the new economy. While Conservatives want to make pollution free again, we are looking to the future. They are stuck in the past. We are doing something about climate change and affordability.

Oral Questions

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, war, food scarcity and energy insecurity is devastating our European partners who are now cutting back production, turning down the heat and going back to high-polluting energy sources. However, the Liberal government, whose environmental record is abysmal, shows no recognition of this global disaster that awaits, nor its effect on our own citizens as we have seen with skyrocketing home heating costs.

When will the Liberal government do the prudent thing and stop forcing its failed carbon tax on Canadians?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to have the opportunity to talk about how we are standing alongside our European allies. We are standing alongside Ukraine and all of our European allies in this really difficult time. I am happy that the member opposite acknowledges that this is a global challenge that we are facing. In fact, when the German Chancellor came to Canada, we worked with him to have a deal on hydrogen and critical minerals. These are the pieces that they came looking for in support from us. We are there to continue with the energy of the future and an economy for the future of our country.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tomorrow is Human Rights Day.

This day commemorates the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

When human rights are being trampled in places like Russia, Iran and Myanmar, Canada must stand up for the values we hold dear.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs inform the House of the steps we are taking to protect human rights and hold human rights abusers accountable?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle for her excellent question.

The matter of human rights is central to our foreign policy. That is why, today, we are imposing sanctions on 67 individuals and nine entities that are complicit in human rights violations in Russia, Iran and Myanmar.

Canada will continue to fight for justice and hold to account those who violate human rights. Our government will always defend the values of Canadians both here and around the world.

* * *

● (1200)

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is -40°C. Welcome to the first week of December in the Prairies. Cold winters do not shut us down, and driving long dis-

tances is something we have to do even when it is freezing cold outside. However, something we should not have to do is wear our winter coats inside our homes.

When will this Liberal government stop forcing its failed carbon tax plan on Canadians?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the hon. member mentioned the Prairies, where I am from. I wonder if she knows that in Manitoba we had two one-in-300 year floods that cost a billion dollars each. There was the Calgary flood at \$5 billion, and 7,000 people were forced from their homes in my home province.

The costs are rising. The Conservatives are in denial. When are they going to get serious about climate change?

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, people in rural regions like mine and across Canada have to heat their homes. The cold weather has set in. What happens in winter? Bills go up. The worst thing is that they will continue to go up with the Liberals' plan to triple their carbon tax. People do not need long-term measures right now. They need immediate action to help them get through the coming winter. They are stretched thin, and the government remains completely indifferent.

What is the government waiting for? Why does it not immediately cancel its plan to raise that tax?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak about everything we are doing for the environment and to support Canadians.

I would first like to point out that the federal system does not apply in Quebec because Quebec has its own system.

For our part, we are doing a great deal to support Canadians. We just created a dental care plan and provided rental assistance. We understand that times are tough and we are there to support Canadians and also to help the environment.

Oral Questions

[English]

CONSULAR AFFAIRS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, since 2017, Canadian diplomats and their families who were posted to Havana, Cuba, have complained of suffering from unexplained illness. Despite the Prime Minister saying he takes this “very, very seriously”, this has dragged on for years without a resolution. Last month the government appointed Justice Cromwell to mediate for the families but not the diplomats.

Is the government going to resolve this matter, or is it going to throw these public servants under the bus and blame them, like the government did yesterday with the RCMP contract with Sinclair Technologies?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am concerned, as my colleague is, about this very issue, and I look forward to working with him on it. Obviously the health and safety of our diplomats and their families is at the core of our priorities. We are working with the RCMP, Health Canada and also within Global Affairs Canada through an expert team to address this issue. However, as mentioned, it would be a pleasure to work with my critic on this.

* * *

CHILD CARE

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development introduced Bill C-35 in the House to enshrine a Canada-wide early learning and child care system in law. On this side of the House we know just how important access to affordable, quality and inclusive child care is for the economy and women's empowerment. Last Friday, the Prime Minister announced in Richmond that British Columbia reached its target to reduce child care fees by 50%.

Could the parliamentary secretary for family, children and social—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Madam Speaker, Bill C-35 would enshrine the Canada-wide early learning and child care system in law, ensuring a future government could not unilaterally cancel the agreements. Bill C-35 is necessary, because we know Canadian parents are counting on us to have affordable child care available to them, and they are planning their family budgets with this in mind and their futures. Our government is committed to delivering affordability measures to help Canadians, and affordable child care is a hallmark of that commitment.

I invite all members—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Nunavut.

FIREARMS

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): Madam Speaker, Nunavummiut need to hunt to feed their families and to protect themselves from dangerous predators, such as polar bears. Bill C-21 was about getting handguns off the streets, but now with this last-minute amendment, the Liberal government has shown how out of touch it is with the daily lives of Nunavummiut. My community is worried and confused.

When will the government stop playing political games and ensure indigenous communities can protect themselves from dangerous predators like—

• (1205)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have heard from many northern MPs, who live in different realities from many of us in urban centres. We know there have been concerns. There has been some misinformation on Bill C-21. We know the committee added two extra meetings to make sure we are getting it right, because we always want to make sure we are respecting indigenous hunting rights. Our government will continue to do that. We know it is a constitutional right, but it is also the right thing to do.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I speak to members from Montreal, where the world is gathering for COP15 in a desperate, last-chance effort to save endangered nature. We do not have to look far. We do not even have to look as far as Fairy Creek on Vancouver Island or the threatened caribou habitat in the boreal. Here on the Island of Montreal, the federal government is ignoring the opportunity to protect 215 hectares of highly threatened, important wetland biodiversity, home to the Least Bittern, short-eared owl and monarch butterflies.

This is federal jurisdiction. When will the government act to protect it?

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think the member would agree that thousands of species are at risk here at home. One in five species, according to the wild species report, are in danger of extinction. There are millions around the world. That is why we are gathered in Montreal to face the biodiversity crisis head on at the UN Biodiversity Conference. We are stepping up to preserve and conserve 30% of our land and waters by 2030, and we hope to inspire the world to do the same.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Speaker, I have a point of order arising from question period. The member for North Island—Powell River said during QP that the Liberals were solely responsible for the mess of Bill C-21, when in fact the NDP voted with the Liberals on time allocation. I would like to—

Routine Proceedings

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): • (1210)
That is a question of debate.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, a few minutes ago, at the beginning of her question, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands mentioned that she was in Montreal for COP15.

I attended this event myself yesterday, so I have no problem with that. However, I would like to make a request for clarification.

Although this is far from scandalous, I would like to know if members of Parliament can mention where they are when they are not physically present in the House. As far as I know, we cannot mention that. I would like the Chair to clarify that for me. That said, it is a relevant question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The member is quite right. I just noted that with my colleagues.

The matter will be taken into consideration. This has happened several times in the past. It will be taken into consideration under the rules of the House.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 13 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in relation to Bill C-18, an act respecting online communications platforms that make news content available to persons in Canada.

[*English*]

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

PETITIONS

TAXATION

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, on behalf of my constituents, I am tabling a petition calling on the Minister of Finance to suspend the federal excise tax and the carbon tax for Canadians until the cost of living crisis has been resolved. They remind the House of four facts, including that next year the clean fuel standard will raise the cost of living by \$1,300, and that the estimated cost of extra mortgages will be about \$7,000.

My constituents say they are expecting, because of the continuing tax hikes, that many Canadians will not be able to make ends meet. Therefore, they are asking for the Minister of Finance to suspend the federal excise tax and the carbon tax.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition on behalf of nearly 700 constituents and British Columbians. Children who have grown up witnessing domestic violence are more likely to become involved in domestic abuse in their adult life. Often, as we know, Canada's family law and judicial system can be ill-equipped to deal with allegations of domestic abuse in custody and visitation decisions. Studies by the Rise Women's Legal Centre have concluded that Canada's current family law legislation makes it possible for domestic abusers to continue to have access to their children.

Therefore, the undersigned, nearly 700 people, call upon the Government of Canada to pass amendments to the Divorce Act and other federal family law legislation that recognize the rights of survivors of domestic abuse and their children to be protected from future domestic abuse, and that revoke custody, access and visitation rights for a parent found guilty of a violent crime against their partner or the primary caregiver of the children in question.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 916 and 917.

[*Text*]

Question No. 916—**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:**

With regard to government forecasts related to a recession in 2023: (a) is the government forecasting a recession in 2023, and, if so, when does the government forecast that Canada will (i) enter the recession, (ii) exit the recession; (b) which industries are projected to be the most negatively impacted by the recession and what are the forecasts on how each of those industries will be impacted; and (c) what are the government's forecasts related to the depth of the recession and when the recession will be at its worst?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2022 fall economic statement, or FES, released on November 3, 2022, is the most recent economic outlook published by the federal government. It is based on the Department of Finance survey of private sector economists conducted in early September 2022. The average of private sector forecasts has been used as the basis for economic and fiscal planning since 1994, helping to ensure objectivity and transparency, and introducing an element of independence into the government's economic and fiscal forecast. It can be found on pages 9 to 12 and 43 to 45 of the FES or at FES-EEA-2022-en.pdf on canada.ca.

In the FES, the Department of Finance did also develop a scenario that illustrates a slower growth track relative to the September survey. This scenario is not a government baseline forecast; it is one of many plausible paths the economy could follow. This scenario was presented in the FES for illustrative purposes to facilitate prudent economic and fiscal planning. It can be found on pages 12 to 13 and 44 to 45 of the FES or at FES-EEA-2022-en.pdf on canada.ca.

Question No. 917—Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman:

With regard to the Minister of National Defence and the recommendations of the Honourable Louise Arbour following the Independent External Comprehensive Review of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces: (a) which of the recommendations will the government (i) fully implement, (ii) partially implement, (iii) not implement; (b) of the recommendations which will be fully implemented, what is the timeline for when each implementation will be complete; and (c) for each recommendation which the government will not fully implement, what is the rationale for not fully implementing it?

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, National Defence is committed to building an inclusive and diverse defence team, free from harassment, discrimination, racism, sexual misconduct and violence.

That is why the Minister of National Defence accepted former Supreme Court Justice Arbour's independent external comprehensive review in its entirety and welcomed all 48 recommendations in the report. She also committed to immediately implement 17 recommendations.

The minister further committed to updating Parliament by the end of the year and looks forward to doing so.

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, furthermore, if the government's response to Questions Nos. 912 to 915 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 912—Mr. Blake Desjarlais:

With regard to the Canada Student Financial Assistance Program, broken down by province and territory, and by fiscal year: (a) what is the total amount of student debt owed; (b) what is the total amount of interest charged on student loans, since November 2015; (c) what is the total amount that the government has collected in repayments of student loans; (d) what is the total amount of new loans delivered to students who (i) are full-time and part-time, (ii) are from low-income and middle-income families, (iii) have dependents, (iv) have permanent disabilities; (e) what is the total amount of new grants delivered to students who (i) are full-time and part-time, (ii) are from low-income and middle-income families, (iii) have dependents, (iv) have permanent disabilities; (f) how many new applications have been received under the (i) Repayment Assistance Plan, (ii) Repayment Assistance Plan for Borrowers with a Permanent Disability; and (g) how many borrowers have defaulted on their student loans since November 2015, broken down by fiscal year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 913—Mr. Warren Steinley:

With regard to government dealings with GC Strategies, since January 1, 2016: (a) has the government paid GC Strategies for services related to any applications other than the ArriveCAN application, and, if so, what are the details, including (i) the name of application, (ii) the amount paid, (iii) the goods or services provided by GC Strategies, (iv) the date of payment, (v) whether the contract, or other form of payment, was awarded on a sole-sourced basis or through a competitive bidding process; and (b) has the government paid GC strategies for any other goods or services, and, if so, what are the details of each, including (i) the date of payment, (ii) the amount, (iii) the summary of goods or services, (iv) whether the contract or other form of payment was awarded on a sole-sourced basis or through a competitive bidding process?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 914—Mr. Colin Carrie:

With regard to government advertising on health topics, in 2021 and 2022 so far, broken down by year: (a) how much has the government spent on advertising related to (i) COVID-19, including vaccines (ii) nutrition, (iii) fitness or active living, (iv) other health topics, broken down by topic and amount spent on each; and (b) what is the breakdown of (a) by type of media outlet?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 915—Mr. Adam Chambers:

With regard to the measures in Bill C-21, An Act to amend certain Acts and to make certain consequential amendments (firearms), to increase the maximum penalties from 10 to 14 years imprisonment for certain firearms related offences: (a) how many people have been convicted of each of the related offences since January 1, 2016, broken down by year and offence; and (b) of those convicted in (a), how many received the maximum sentence, broken down by year and offence?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I would ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

JUDGES ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, An Act to amend the Judges Act, be read the third time and passed.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I understand that I have about 18 and a half minutes left. I will do my best, but I cannot promise that I will use up all of that time. I am just pointing that out for the benefit of the person who is speaking next.

Now that all the Christmas wishes and greetings have been sent, I want to come back to Bill C-9, which I spoke about in June, as I mentioned. It will come as no surprise to anyone that the Bloc Québécois will support this bill at third reading for a number of reasons. One of them is that the community has been calling for this bill for quite a long time. It has been calling for a review of the system for removing judges who engage in conduct unbecoming of the profession.

This bill will also help shorten the process and, incidentally, reduce the cost associated with assessing judicial misconduct, while still maintaining sufficient procedural equity that a judge who is facing sanctions can make their case and ultimately exercise their right to full answer and defence. In a way, this bill is streamlining a process that, in the past, was unfortunately inconsistently applied and abused, as in the case of Judge Girouard, who has been mentioned quite a bit in the House. It took nearly a decade to come to a final decision on the acts he was accused of.

It is worth mentioning that this bill introduces a mechanism to deal with less serious complaints that would not necessarily require removing a judge who has committed wrongdoing. This mechanism would still allow the judge to be punished for their actions. It is no longer a purely black-and-white system where there are only two possible outcomes to a sanction: either to reject the sanction outright or to remove the judge from office, which is the ultimate sanction for misconduct. Under the old law, there was no in-between. The new bill allows for a slightly fuller range of options, with different shades of grey—not that I am naming a particular book—in terms of the sanctions that can be imposed.

Realistically, we cannot expect Bill C-9 to change much on a day-to-day basis, because not that many judges face possible sanctions, which is a good thing. My colleagues have said that about eight cases have come under the microscope. This is not something that happens very often.

However, the bill will affect the way people perceive the justice system. If a judge is put under the microscope, we can expect the process to elicit far less criticism and complaint from the public, because it will presumably be much more effective.

As I said, we will vote in favour of the bill. Based on what my colleagues have said, most if not all members of the House will do likewise. The only real criticism we heard during members' speeches had less to do with the content of the bill than with the timeline of its passage, which should take place in the coming days.

Government Orders

This is not our first time studying a bill like Bill C-9 in the House. We saw a previous version, Bill C-5, which ended up dying on the Order Paper because the government decided to call a basically useless election in August 2021, so again, this is not the first time we are indirectly talking about Bill C-9 in the House. However, there is so much consensus on it that, hopefully, this will be the last time.

Bill C-9 upholds a principle that is absolutely critical in our democracy, namely, the principle of security of tenure for judges. This principle is set out in section 99(1) of the Constitution. I think section 99(1) bears quoting.

● (1215)

It states:

the judges of the superior courts shall hold office during good behaviour, but shall be removable by the Governor General on address of the Senate and House of Commons.

With respect to this aspect, Justice Dalphond, who is now a senator, spoke to Bill S-5. He said the following:

By imposing a process that makes it the responsibility of judges, first and foremost, to deal with allegations of misconduct against a judge, the Judges Act protects judges from acts of intimidation or retaliation by the executive power or litigants. In addition, since the act provides for parliamentarians to exercise their constitutional power to remove a judge only after having received the report and recommendation of the council in this regard, Canadians can rest assured that this measure, intended to be exceptional, will only be taken when it is truly justified.

This essentially separates the different branches of democracy, namely the executive, legislative and judicial branches, by ensuring that if a judge is removed, it is not for purely political reasons, for example.

Although the current system for removing judges in cases of wrongdoing is recognized as one of the best in the world, there was room for improvement. I will name a few of the drawbacks that have been identified.

As I mentioned, the current process can be extremely long. Along the way, there is always the possibility of countless appeals and judicial reviews. Under the act, the review panel was seen as a sort of administrative tribunal that opened the door to using the regular court system, meaning filing an appeal, reviewing a decision or applying for a judicial review. As a result, some cases dragged on for over a decade.

Government Orders

One of the problems that was identified is that a judge who may be at fault could have a financial interest in dragging out the proceedings with stalling tactics, because the judge still gets paid while the process is underway. They can keep contributing to their retirement fund, so the benefits continue to add up. The judge therefore has an incentive to make sure the final decision on their alleged conduct does not come out too quickly.

That is something that has been corrected through proposed section 126 of the new bill. Proposed subsection 126(1) states:

For the purposes of calculating an annuity under Part I, if a full hearing panel decides that the removal from office of a judge who is the subject of a complaint is justified, the day after the day on which the judge is given notice of the full hearing panel's decision is the day to be used to determine the number of years the judge has been in judicial office and the salary annexed to the office held by the judge at the time of his or her resignation, removal or attaining the age of retirement unless

- (a) the decision is set aside by a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, or by the decision of an appeal panel if the appeal panel's decision is final;
- (b) the Minister's response under subsection 140(1) provides that no action is to be taken to remove the judge from office; or
- (c) the matter of removal of the judge from office is put to one or both Houses of Parliament and is rejected by either of them.

Should the complaint be rejected, the judge could retain all benefits associated with their office. From now on, pension and benefits accumulation ceases as of the day on which notice of the decision is given. That removes any incentive for a judge to draw out proceedings.

As I also mentioned, one of the benefits of the bill is that it now offers a wider range of sanctions than was available under the old act. The act did not, for example, allow for mandatory sanctions, so it made them seem like half-measures. The parties could make them mandatory by mutual agreement, but there was no real possibility of imposing anything. That is no longer the case. There is now a range of different measures.

Let me read some more of the bill. Proposed section 102 of the new bill provides as follows:

● (1220)

If the review panel does not refer the complaint to the Council under section 101, it may dismiss the complaint or take one or more of the following actions if it considers it appropriate to do so in the circumstances:

- (a) issue a private or public expression of concern;
- (b) issue a private or public warning;
- (c) issue a private or public reprimand;
- (d) order the judge to apologize, either privately or publicly, by whatever means the panel considers appropriate in the circumstances;
- (e) order the judge to take specific measures, including attending counselling or a continuing education course;
- (f) take any action that the panel considers to be equivalent to any of the actions referred to in paragraphs (a) to (e);
- (g) with the consent of the judge, take any other action that the panel considers appropriate in the circumstances.

It uses the word "order". That means it would be mandatory, and the panel has a lot of latitude.

There are plenty of measures that can be taken to improve the quality of a judge's work in the future, without having to resort to the extreme punishment of removing their right to sit on the bench. The bill improves what can be done within the system while also

reducing the burden of what is required to make the review process work.

In the past, under the Judges Act, no fewer than 17 judges might be needed to convene a review panel to examine a case. There is currently a shortage of judges. The courts are operating at a slower pace. If a judge were to be accused of something, we cannot afford to take 17 judges out of the system when there is a shortage everywhere.

Under the new version of the act, a panel can be formed with slightly fewer judges than what was required in the past. The bill also creates an internal appeal process, which will limit reliance on external courts and therefore limit the possibility of invoking the legal system for disciplinary matters involving judges.

I am making an aside on this aspect because the issue of tying up courts and judges cannot be solved by Bill C-9 alone. We had a discussion about Bill S-4 and the possibility of making greater use of virtual tools to hear cases. This debate may continue in the days to come. That would help, but even if we add the option of virtual hearings, if there are no judges to hold these hearings, it does not matter that platforms like Zoom are available because the system will not work.

That is why, in addition to Bills C-9 and S-4, it is important that the Minister of Justice quickly appoint judges to fill vacancies. Currently, there are nine vacancies. The chief justice of the Quebec Superior Court is even recommending that a dozen judges be added to those currently sitting. This would increase the minimum number of justices that can sit on the Quebec Superior Court. Let us hope that this message will be heard by the Minister of Justice.

Basically, Bill C-9 is about improving people's trust in the judicial system. However, as I said, it may be relatively limited in scope, because most people will not read the contents of Bill C-9. If a judge were to commit a wrongful act, people might be interested in this new process that exists to reprimand judges.

Beyond the possibility of reprimanding a judge who has already been appointed, if we really want to improve public trust in the system, we must also address the issue of judicial appointments. Some work has been done. The Liberals have mentioned that they are going to abandon the infamous Liberalist, but that may not be enough. The process is still potentially partisan. The power to select and recommend who will be appointed as a judge is still in the hands of the executive branch of government.

● (1225)

That is why the Bloc Québécois recommends creating a truly all-party committee tasked with evaluating candidates for judicial positions in courts under federal jurisdiction, such as superior courts.

Government Orders

This is what Albania did in hopes of joining the EU. It had to change a lot of its judicial practices to meet EU standards and bolster public confidence in its institutions.

At present, Albania's justice minister has no power over judicial appointments. An independent committee is in charge. The justice minister's primary responsibility is to oversee sound administration of the courts. The minister monitors statistics to ensure that hearings are progressing without wait lists or undue delays, but is not actually responsible for appointing judges. That allows for true separation between the powers of the executive and the judiciary. The House may consider following suit as it develops a different judicial appointment system.

It is on this wish that I will end my speech. Bill C-9 is a good thing. It is an improvement that has long been called for. It may have taken a long time for it to come to fruition, but we commend the initiative nonetheless. There is still work to be done on the judiciary. The Bloc Québécois will always be a very approachable partner when it comes to improving the legal system. I think that begins with a review of the judicial appointment system.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the importance of the passage of the legislation. It is encouraging to see the type of unanimous support the legislation is receiving. That speaks well of the legislation itself. It also adds value to what I have made reference to in the past, which is public confidence in our judicial system and its independence.

Then the member started to talk about the appointment process, which has always been of keen interest to me. Where I disagree with the member is that she seems to think the appointments are political appointments when in fact they are not. I truly believe that about the judicial appointments that have been made to date.

The member mentioned that there are some other countries looking at it, and I expect there are a lot of countries looking at it. Can she cite a country with which she feels comfortable in the way a judge is appointed?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned Albania because we had a discussion with Albania's justice minister. He said that the process for selecting judges is not just the responsibility of the government. It is an independent committee that is in charge of appointing judges.

The parliamentary secretary mentions that there is no risk of a political appointment being made by the government. More than that, what matters is that there is no appearance of a risk. That is what a committee made up of parliamentarians from all parties represented in the House would allow.

I think that is a solution that would clearly improve public trust in the process and at least deserves to be studied. We are not asking for more than that. I more than welcome the opportunity to have

this debate at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the justice committee, the Conservative members put forward what we thought was a common-sense proposal to amend Bill C-9 to allow one appeal directly to the Federal Court of Appeal, not to the trial division where things became bogged down with the Girouard case. This proposal was made because we thought there should be some judicial overview on the work of the Canadian Judicial Council.

I wonder if my colleague would have a comment about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very specific and interesting question.

I reviewed the work that was done in committee, the recommendations that were retained and those that were not. When we look at the proposed structure, we see that there are nevertheless many possible appeal processes.

From the very first level of appeal by the review panel, there is the possibility of appealing to the reduced hearing panel. That is the first option. Next an appeal can be lodged with the appeal panel, which is set out in the bill. Thus, there is a second possibility of appeal, and after that, a third, but only by leave of the Supreme Court. The process already provides for three stages of appeal. I think that should be enough to respect procedural guarantees and fairness.

There are already three levels of appeal as is the case in regular courts. Would it be appropriate to add another to ensure procedural fairness? I believe that, with the process that has already been put in place, there are sufficient guarantees to ensure respect for the rights of judges under review.

[*English*]

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats support the modernization of the complaints process and the adding of alternative remedial options beyond the current sole option of removal of the bench. As we have heard, the bill would allow for varied sanctions, including counselling, continuing education and other reprimands.

In contemplating this, I recall a situation that I dealt with in Hamilton with Justice Bernd Zabel who wore a “make America great again” hat into the courtroom the day after the U.S. election. This created quite an outcry within our community. When people tried to engage in the complaints process, it was made very clear that unless it was something so egregious that it would result in the removal of the justice, it would be very unlikely anything would happen.

Government Orders

I would like the hon. member to reflect on the importance of maintaining a process that would ultimately hold justices responsible for ensuring that they are not influenced by partisan interests, that they maintain their objectivity and that they shall not in any way discredit the bench through any perception of bias or prejudice toward any party or interest.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to talk about a bunch of things that stand out from that question.

With regard to the review process referred to by the hon. member, one of the amendments adopted in committee was that, if the complaint is dismissed, the person who made the complaint should at least be informed of the reasons for dismissing it. This implies that a minimum of work must be done to explain why the complaint is not being pursued any further. This seems to have been a concern in the case my colleague mentioned.

As for partisan appointments, having a transparent committee to select judges is already a step in the right direction, in order to ensure that judges are not always Liberal leaning, for example. This is what we have unfortunately seen in the past with the “Liberalist”.

However, if we want to go a little further, there is one thing we must also consider: What happens to judges once they have completed their term on the bench? Many of them go to large firms, but others go to work for lobbies or for groups that are a little more partisan.

Perhaps we should also review the possibility for judges, at the end of their term, to work in the private sector in businesses, groups, companies that may be considered more politically oriented, for example?

There is work that could be done throughout a judge's life, from appointment to retirement, to ensure greater impartiality, generally speaking, and greater public confidence in the system.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, justice is important, but the appearance of justice is just as important. In Quebec, they say that the Supreme Court is like the leaning tower of Pisa. It always leans the same way: against Quebeckers.

I wonder if Quebeckers' declining confidence in the Supreme Court is due in large part to the secrecy and long-standing lack of transparency we see over and over in judicial appointments.

The noncommittal answers and wishy-washy suggestions we have been hearing from the government side lead me to believe that the Liberals do not really understand the magnitude of the task before them with respect to the appointment process.

Does my colleague think they are taking this seriously enough?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, if, every time we talk about reviewing the judicial appointment process, the government basically systematically closes the door on it when all we want is for the issue to be examined or considered, then, of course, that will likely not help with transparency and the public's confidence in the justice system.

It is important to remember that judges rise through the courts. When a judge is appointed to a superior court, it is possible that they will one day serve on the Supreme Court, but it is rare for a Supreme Court justice to be appointed without first being appointed to a lower court.

Taking a bottom-up approach would involve starting with the appointment of judges in the superior courts of Quebec and the provinces, and reviewing that process from the bottom up would likely lead de facto to better confidence in the rest of the process and in the path that judges may take to the Supreme Court.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, when individuals reflect negatively on the system, that in itself feeds the answer the member provided to me the last time around. In other words, if we have a system to which other countries look to see how Canada manages things, then I think we set a very good example. I challenge the member to indicate which members of the judiciary, any judges, she believes this government appointed as political partisan decisions.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I think the member's question is exactly why people are cynical. That is the issue. They want us to identify people and they say that we should not question the judicial system because that could undermine it. I say we must question it. There is always room for improvement.

I do not believe for a second that the best way to bolster public confidence in the judicial system is to close our eyes. I think it is better to be as transparent as possible and as open to improvement as possible. That does not seem to be an approach the Liberals embrace.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the bill.

I know that for many people in the public, an act to amend the Judges Act is not the most exciting thing they can imagine for a Friday afternoon, but the bill deals with things that are fundamental to our system, even if they are not exciting. Things like the rule of law and an independent judiciary make sure that our democracy can continue to function. We have to have a citizenry that has confidence in our institutions and confidence in the judges, and the bill is about making that confidence more apparent.

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I have to say that I am troubled by exchanges like the one that just took place between the Liberal and Bloc members. It is true that we have to be able to question our institutions, but the kind of exchange that takes place where someone asks for someone to name a judge who is political is not helpful when it comes to keeping confidence in our judiciary. A blanket charge that the appointments that are taking place are political is not helpful either, so if we want to talk about the system, let us talk about the system and how it functions, but the wild charges do not contribute to confidence in our system, and I say “a pox on both your houses” for that, frankly.

One of the things I will give credit to the Liberal government for, on which it has done better than any previous government that I have seen, and as a former criminal justice instructor I have been watching this system for more than 30 years, is the diversity of appointments to the bench. Diversity is an important thing, because if Canadians do not see themselves reflected in the legal system, it is hard to have confidence in that system.

I will point to two things that I think were quite historic this year in and of themselves, but that also contribute to confidence.

The first, of course, was the appointment of Judge O'Bonsawin to the Supreme Court of Canada. I was very pleased to see her take her seat this fall. It really broadens the perspective of the court to have the first indigenous woman sitting there, and I think the court will make better decisions because of that diversity.

The second, which is sometimes overlooked, also took place this fall, and that was the appointment of Justice Shannon Smallwood as the chief justice of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories, so an indigenous woman as a Supreme Court chief justice for the first time.

What does this mean for the public? I do not think it means very much, but in the judicial system it means a whole lot, because as a chief justice she takes her seat on the Canadian Judicial Council, which is the body that is in charge of the discipline of judges. Therefore, for the very first time we are going to have a racialized woman sitting in the group that makes decisions about whether judges have acted fairly or discriminatorily. I think these two appointments are extremely important.

I will also say that the current government has done a good job of increasing the number of women appointed to the bench. Again, my belief is that the more diverse the group that is making decisions, the better those decisions will be and the more confidence the public will have in those decisions.

We are happy to support the bill. There is no doubt that the current system for dealing with complaints against judges is long, complicated, costly and non-transparent. The bill before us would be a significant improvement in how we deal with complaints against judges.

The main way I see an improvement here is not just with respect to the cost and the complicated process, but by providing for some intermediate, I guess I would call it, sanctions. We are stuck with a system right now in which, if someone misbehaves on the bench in what I would call a minor manner, or if it is a correctable problem, there is no choice but to recommend that they either stay on the

bench or be removed from the bench. The bill is a significant step forward in allowing the Canadian Judicial Council, other judges, to say that a judge may need some remedial training. They may need a time out, just like with kids, a suspension for a while, or other things that do not result in removal of the judge from the bench.

Now, in committee there were a few amendments, two of which I put forward, to address transparency, and I just want to point out one of the odd things in our current system. There are two points at which complaints currently can be dismissed, and they are at the initial screening level and then after a decision by a review panel. The current system, before being amended by Bill C-9, maintained this curious practice of saying, “We're going to give you a summary of our reasons for our decision, but we're not going to give you the reasons. If you want the reasons, you have to file an appeal.” What is the first thing that happens when someone files an appeal? They are given the reasons. Anybody who looks at that with a basic sense of logic and fairness would ask, “Why do we not release those reasons?”

• (1245)

Two amendments were adopted by the committee that reversed that presumption. The presumption now, going forward, will be that unless there is a public interest or a privacy concern, complainants will get the reasons for complaints against judges being dismissed. That is very important for the individual complainants and their confidence, but it is also important for confidence in the system as a whole.

The two other amendments I put forward were rejected, and I will take a minute to talk about both of those.

One of those was brought forward by the National Council of Canadian Muslims. I think it raises a very important concern, but unfortunately other parties on the committee did not share my view of the council's suggestions. It said that at the initial stage, the reasons listed for dismissing a complaint would be that it does not amount to discrimination. The council's concern was that in law, discrimination has a very narrow definition, so cases could get dismissed without being investigated.

Therefore, the council put forward the proposal that we add in that section, “discrimination or actions substantially similar to discrimination”. Because it is the gatekeeping function at that first step, it was suggested that we broaden that a bit more. I was disappointed that the other parties did not agree to that suggestion. With respect to that one, I was moving the amendment on behalf of complainants who wanted there to be a broader look at those complaints before they are dismissed.

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With respect to the other amendment, I was on the side of judges. There is still a significant flaw in this bill, although we will support it because it is an improvement. I put forward an amendment saying that the appeal for a judge on the decision of the Canadian Judicial Council should not be to the Supreme Court of Canada, but rather to the Federal Court of Appeal. Let me explain that very obscure difference. What we are dealing with here is judges judging judges when it comes to complaints. The Canadian Judicial Council is composed of judges. If the appeal is made to the Supreme Court, there is no right of appeal. The Supreme Court accepts only applications for leave to appeal, meaning it will decide if someone's case is important enough, and it has a very high bar for hearing cases. The Supreme Court has said it will hear only cases that are of substantial national importance or that raise important constitutional issues. It hears only about 8% of the requests to hear cases, so in fact, we are leaving judges to be judged by their peers, with nobody from outside getting a look at that decision. I find that disappointing.

Some of my colleagues have said to me that the Court of Appeal is also judges. However, there is a different function. When the Canadian Judicial Council makes a decision on complaints, it is defending not just the complaint, but the whole confidence in the judiciary and the whole integrity of the judicial system. It has a bit of a different function. If a complaint is referred to the Court of Appeal, its appeal court judges look only at that case and the procedural fairness for that judge. Fortunately, there are very few of these cases. I am prepared to support the bill, but I am concerned that we have not left an effective appeal mechanism against what I will call at this moment the closed club of the Canadian Judicial Council.

Having said that, I would like to have seen those two amendments added. They were not. It is still a good bill. It is still something we should proceed with.

I have to say, and cannot let it pass, that this could have been done before the last election. It could have been done in the last Parliament. Sometimes I just do not get why my colleagues on the Liberal side are so slow to get things done that have broad support within the House of Commons. However, I am glad to see it here. I am glad to see it moving forward. I am glad to see we are going to get this done. It will contribute significantly to confidence in the complaint process by being more transparent and by being quicker, but it will also contribute to the overall confidence in our judiciary while still protecting the independence of judges.

• (1250)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague and I serve on the justice committee together. I see that the NDP members are claiming credit for putting forward a motion around the Federal Court of Appeal. It is true that they did that, but so did the Conservatives. We supported that amendment. Because he and I are in full agreement on it, I suppose it would not really make a lot of sense for me to ask him a question about that.

Therefore, I will ask the member this question a little more generally. Does he feel that with Bill C-9 the independence of our judiciary, which is so crucial to our justice system, would still be fully protected?

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, the member is quite right and I apologize for failing to mention that the Conservatives had supported the amendment on the appeals by judges. I got mine in first, and that is why it was the one considered, but honestly, I appreciate their support and I think we share that same concern. Maybe, in our attempt to get a faster, more efficient process, we took it a step too far when it comes to those appeals.

Do I think the independence of the judiciary is protected? Yes, I do. I think it is protected, but again, to me, there are other things besides independence and confidence in the complaints process that are important. I am going to say again that I think the work the government is doing to make sure we have a judiciary that reflects the face of Canada is also important.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech and for the work that he did in committee that he mentioned in his speech. It is always interesting to see what arguments were presented there.

First, for the record, I want to confirm to my colleague that I am not suggesting that there are judges who are impartial because of the appointment process, but rather that we must ensure that the appointment process itself does not give the appearance of partiality.

With regard to the addition that he wanted to make to the bill of the possibility of appealing to the Federal Court of Canada, we know that not all appeals in the justice system are appeals as of right. Did my colleague want the appeal to the Federal Court to be an appeal as of right?

If so, would that not be opening the door to unduly lengthening the proceedings?

If he was talking about an appeal with leave, which is mostly the case at the Supreme Court, one must, at the very least, show that there are grounds for appeal, rather than just using this as purely dilatory measure.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that I respect the work the member for Saint-Jean does in this chamber. She is a very diligent and thoughtful member of Parliament, and I respect her contributions.

I will extend my same caution: Whenever we talk about the impartiality of judges, we need to keep our focus on the system and not on the individual judges. We inadvertently do damage, both to the judiciary as a whole and potentially to individual judges, when we talk about the appointment process in individual terms. I agree with her that we have to be able to question that process, but I urge us to keep our focus on that process.

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As for the appeal and the fact that the Bloc did not support my amendment to make it to the Federal Court of Appeal, I would just say again that the Supreme Court is likely never going to hear an appeal regarding a judge's disciplinary complaint, because of the very high standard it has set for leave to appeal to the court.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. Every time he stands in this place and speaks on his knowledge about the justice system in this country, I learn something. I am grateful for the work he has done and for his thoughtful interventions in the House.

Today he spoke about the fact that the bill could have been brought forward sooner, that there is cross-party support, and that there are still some flaws in it, but that it is, by and large, a good bill. He also spoke about the importance of diversity in the appointments of judges and the work that has been done in that area. I have been hearing some worrying concerns about the diversity of appointments in Alberta, my home province.

Can he speak about how we could improve that system even further? How can we ensure the system is appropriate across the country?

• (1255)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona for her question, because it is a serious concern. Unfortunately, what happens in our systems is that the funnel starts removing diversity very early.

If a person is ever going to be a judge, they have to go to law school. The ability of various communities to get their kids into law school is highly differentiated. Certainly we are talking about Black Canadians and indigenous Canadians. The number of people who are represented at the law school level is far below what it should be. We start narrowing the funnel at law school.

Then someone has to practise law for 10 years. We have a time factor. Even if we improve the diversity in law schools, which we are doing, it is going to be a 10-year time lag before someone is eligible for an appointment to the federal judiciary. That funnel is narrow, and it takes time.

I do not know the details of Alberta. Being a British Columbia MP, I have not looked at the appointments in Alberta, but I am hopeful that the initiatives of both law societies and law schools to get more women and people of colour into law school and into the profession will eventually produce a more diverse judiciary.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is my honour to speak to Bill C-9 today. I know this is always an interesting topic, and I have spoken to it at the other stages along the way.

I commend the Liberals for taking on the issue of judge accountability. It seems like an interesting topic for me, given the fact that Conservatives are often critical of the decisions made by judges across Canada. We find their leniency to be annoying. We find the overturning of the mandatory minimum sentencing to be frustrating, and all of those kinds of things, therefore we think there needs to be accountability for judges along the way.

Then there is the issue of comments made by judges in public. We have seen that become an issue. There are also the actions judges may take in their personal lives that are beyond the pale. It is frustrating to the public that folks in a position of authority and a position of stature in our society would behave in such a manner. These are all areas in which we need to have a level of accountability.

The member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke talked about the independence of the judiciary. That is an important principle, and the bill would maintain that, for sure.

The bill does a good job around personal behaviour accountability and accountability for comments made by judges outside of their role. It would not necessarily deal with accountability in terms of making judgments and things like that, so I would suggest perhaps there is an opportunity to go forward from here.

We will be supporting the bill. It is a good first step. We have heard from folks across the country around the appeals process. Conservatives put forward recommendations to not make the Supreme Court the final appeal process, but to make the Federal Court of Appeals the final appeal process, and I would have supported that as well.

Ensuring accountability for judgments is an interesting and more complicated area. For as long as I have been here I have been trying to come up with a solution for not only maintaining the independence of the judiciary but also having some sort of accountability for judgments made that are not in line with what the Canadian public agrees with. We have seen this very recently around sexual assault and people who are intoxicated. We have seen horrendous judgments from judges in that respect.

I understand there is the notwithstanding clause here, so that Parliament can pass legislation to clarify a judgment. However, we have seen how the Liberal government has been loath to use the notwithstanding clause and has condemned other governments for using it. The notwithstanding clause is an extreme measure, and it also comes with a five-year renewal process. I do not think that is necessarily a good process.

One of the more fascinating items that has come to my attention, and I throw this out there as more of a possibility, is around judge selection by having a panel of judges put forward. As I understand it, cases are generally assigned to particular judges along the way by a chief justice of sorts. There are jurisdictional regions from which cases come that are assigned to particular judges.

There might be an opportunity for the movement of culture within the decisions that are made by judges to put forward a panel of judges rather than one particular judge. Similar to jury selection, both the prosecution and the defence would then agree upon a particular judge. If three judges were put forward in a particular case, out of the three, the prosecution and the defence would have to agree on a particular judge.

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• (1300)

That may in fact be the free market of judges, so to speak, a selection process that would ensure judges' accountability. Judges who were making poor judgments would not get as many cases, therefore it would be a kind of corrective action. I am not a lawyer. I am an auto mechanic, so there may be huge holes in this argument, but it seems to me that it is one way of providing judge accountability without going after the independence of the judiciary.

If this place deals with judges and their inaction or their overturning of laws, because there is an interface there, that would be problematic. Putting politics into the judiciary would also be problematic. We want an independent judiciary, and that is very important. I want to reinforce that. I just put forward the idea around the panel of judges and the judge selection process as a possible opportunity for another mechanism for judge accountability.

I am now going to turn my focus to more broader justice issues in this country. We saw the lowering of sentencing across the board in Bill C-71 and now in Bill C-5. We see how the removal or reduction of sentencing has led to an increase in violent crime across the country.

Folks come to me often about rural crime in their communities and how that seems to be on the increase. Some of it is not so much to do with the laws. The laws have not changed a great deal over the last seven years, but the attitude has. That is really what frustrates me about the Liberals. The Liberals' lack of emphasis on justice and their emphasis on the rehabilitation of the criminal but not on aid to the victims or survivors are the kinds of things that have really frustrated me. There is also the lack of taking seriously the crimes that happen in our communities.

I totally understand that there is a host of things, from our prison system to our justice system to our laws, that come into play. Then there is the administration of all of it. When people feel that the system will work, that their cases will be heard, that justice will be had and, if they are victims of crime, that the person will be taken out of their communities or their property will be returned to them, then there is an appetite to participate.

If none of that is seen to be happening, there is an increasing issue of people not being interested in participating in the justice system. That goes in either of two directions. It goes to desperation in terms of not feeling like their country cares for them, but it also goes to vigilantism, where people take things into their own hands.

The Liberals have completely failed in the administration of justice. It is mostly an attitudinal thing. It is not about the particular laws or the system. It is a lot about where they place their emphasis. We have seen, since the Liberals have taken power, that rural crime and violent crime across this country have been on an upward trajectory. That is because victims do not feel that they will get restitution for the problems they are facing. Criminals do not feel they will be held accountable either.

Constituents contacted me about some pickup truck rolling into their yard. They went outside and there were people stealing scrap metal or copper right out of their yard. They confronted them, and the criminals said to call the police and asked what they were going to do about it. That is exactly what is happening in our communi-

ties. It comes from the tacit support for the movement to defund the police, from the lowering of sentencing across the board and from the lack of concern for the victim.

• (1305)

It is not a funding issue. We hear the Liberals saying all the time that they have more funding for all of those issues. It is not the funding that is the issue. It is the attitude. We see it over and over again.

The case in point is probably the border security issue that is tangentially attached to this. Under the Conservatives, we spent a lot less on border security. We also did not have a big problem with people coming across the border illegally. People understood that if they came across the border illegally, we were turning them right back around. When the Conservatives were in government, that was the case. That is my major frustration.

Last, I will talk a little about the firearms situation in Canada.

The Liberal government has let the veil slip. It has been trying to ban, confiscate, make illegal and criminalize firearm ownership in this country, full stop. The Liberals always deny that. They always say they are not doing that. However, they have now let veil slip and have put in an amendment to Bill C-21 that includes hundreds of hunting rifles. They were caught, and now they are saying they did not mean to and did not understand.

The Liberals are the ones who say they know how to define firearms. They are the ones telling us they have the experts on their side. They are the ones who said they paid for all the studies.

If they have done all of that hard work, how come hunting rifles are ending up on the list? They are ending up on the list because the Liberals have let the veil slip. They have been after everyone's firearms, not just the handguns, which we were fine with. We said that if they were going to do this, they were going to do this. We do not think criminals should have firearms.

However, when it comes to hunting rifles and farmers having the tools of their jobs, that is where we have drawn the line. We now know what the Liberals' plans are when it comes to firearm ownership in this country. They want to ban it. They want to criminalize it. They want to confiscate the firearms of everyday Canadians. That is extremely worrying.

This particular bill is about judge accountability, and I commend the Liberals for it. I did not think they had it in them to bring forward a bill on judge accountability. I am happy they have. I think judge accountability is something we need to ensure continues in Canada. I have put forward another mechanism for judge accountability, and I am looking forward to having more discussions on that as well.

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However, I am concerned that the issues this country faces around justice and law and order do not come from the particular laws and systems that we have in this place, but from the soft-on-crime attitudes of the Liberals and their lack of concern for public safety. This has caused a dramatic decrease in the safety of everyday Canadians, with the running wild, the unaccountability and the lack of fear that we see from criminals in this country as they operate on the streets of Canada.

That is what I hear more and more from Canadians across the country. Criminals operate with impunity. People ask me about this all the time. Why do these criminals operate in broad daylight? Do they not fear the police? They do not.

We hear from Canadians over and over again that these criminals fear nothing in Canada. They do not fear the judicial system. They do not fear our police. We need to ensure that our police forces have the political backing to do what they need to do to take these guys off our streets. We have to make sure that the justice system takes these criminals off the streets and puts them away for a long time to ensure that our streets are safe. If we do not have safety in our communities, we do not have anything. That is the reality.

Safety and security are the fundamental building blocks of a stable and strong country, and we must maintain that as we watch other things fall apart in this country. That starts with the justice, law and order issues in this country, not to mention the inflation issues, the border security issues and the inability to get a passport. There is a whole host of other things that are falling apart.

• (1310)

We need to ensure that our justice system works and that we feel safe to walk around the streets of Canada. Therefore, I will be supporting this bill, and I look forward to questions and comments.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, I certainly know the member has done incredible work on human trafficking. I was hoping he could share more of his insights and experience regarding the incredible work he has done with respect to the content of the bill.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, with respect to the fight against human trafficking here in Canada, I am working hard to have Canada declare zero tolerance for human trafficking. I know that in Canada we have a national strategy to end human trafficking and modern-day slavery, which was put in place by a Conservative government back in 2012. It was not funded from 2016 to 2019. The Liberals have re-funded it now.

I have a bill that I just put on the Order Paper, Bill C-308, which would mandate a national strategy to end human trafficking from now into the future. It would also require the Minister of Public Safety to issue an annual report on what the government is doing to fight human trafficking with measurable deliverables.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, a man died recently on Mirabel airport property after Aéroports de Montréal prohibited its firefighters from responding to a fire.

I wonder if my colleague is comfortable with the fact that today we are reviewing legislation dealing with sanctions for judges and

calling for more accountability for the judiciary, while non-profit organizations like Aéroports de Montréal, which act like a state within a state, which lack transparency, which endanger the lives of the public and the health and safety of their employees, are in no way accountable to taxpayers, to Quebeckers and Canadians.

Am I the only one here who finds this is abhorrent and thinks there should be more accountability in many other areas, including Aéroports de Montréal?

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, the accountability of the Montreal airport authority is something I know very little about. That sounds terrible. I am generally in favour of less government and more democracy. That would be my take on this. I am not really familiar with the specifics of what the member is talking about, but what I can say is, I think this bill is a good first step with respect to the accountability of judges. However, I have put forward some other recommendations on judge accountability, and I look forward to having discussions about that as well.

• (1315)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, in Bill C-9, there is a strengthened review process where allegations are made against judges regarding sexual misconduct. That is a good thing, but this is the same government that just passed a bill, Bill C-5, to allow criminals convicted of sexual assault to be able to serve their sentences at home, perhaps next door or down the street from their victims.

What does that say about the current government's priorities?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, that was precisely the point of my entire speech, that the attitude of the Liberal government around crime is causing an increase in crime across this country.

Bill C-5, which the member mentioned, also allows human traffickers to be placed under house arrest rather than spend their time in jail. Many human traffickers are able to control their victims from inside prison, never mind when they are inside the very same community they were operating in before. Many of them operate from their homes and are able to control their victims through a multitude of means. Not taking these people out of society to do their time and rehabilitate them is a complete failure of justice and leads to the reasons why Canadians do not report crime when they see it and why criminals feel that they can operate with impunity.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I was very bothered recently to see, in the city of Calgary, that the Louise Dean school for pregnant teenagers is being shut down and moved to another school in a different location.

Private Members' Business

I know that the member has taken an interest in this issue as well and has done some local advocacy on this issue. I was hoping that he might give his thoughts on the decision by the CBE school board to move these women from an environment that is more supportive to their situation as individuals to a less safe and less supportive situation.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, the Louise Dean school has been a gem in Alberta for a very long time. It has helped thousands of women who have found themselves to be pregnant while still in high school. This school has a long track record. It is widely loved by the community. The decision to shut that particular school down is atrocious, and I certainly hope that the decision will be reversed. I know that the member for Calgary Midnapore has a unique relationship with that school as well. I look forward to hearing from people from across the country who are concerned about this kind of action being taken by the Calgary school board.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is the House ready for the question?

[Translation]

Some hon. members: Question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. deputy House leader.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Madam Speaker, I think that if you canvass the House, I am sure that you will find consent to see the clock at 1:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1320)

[Translation]

NATIONAL RIBBON SKIRT DAY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-219, An Act respecting a National Ribbon Skirt Day, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): There being no amendment motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.) moved that Bill S-219, An Act respecting a National Ribbon Skirt Day, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

[English]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin moved that Bill S-219, be read the third time and passed.

She said: Madam Speaker, as always, I want to first begin by acknowledging that I am addressing the House from the unceded territory of the Anishinabe people. At the core of the beliefs of the Anishinabe is a notion of respect. Each element is part of the cycle of life. Each has its purpose and deserves as much respect. Our relationships are what matter the most, and we should cherish them.

I have the immense honour to move Bill S-219 at third reading. I want to thank the member for London West from the bottom of my heart for being my seconder and for all her support and encouragement in making today a reality.

I want to thank my colleagues on all sides of the House for their participation and collaboration. I cannot say enough good things about the members of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, who studied this bill and helped ensure its swift passage through the House at all stages. INAN is a shining example of how committees should work.

Each member has made a deep commitment to indigenous peoples across this country, coming from a place of respect and understanding. We were the first committee, I believe, in history to conduct a blanket exercise before our first session to properly set the tone. For those who may not know what a blanket exercise is, it is an experiential learning experience about the story of colonialization. It goes through the true history of Canada, deals with the intergenerational trauma and sets the path toward reconciliation.

I would also like to sincerely thank Senator McCallum and her amazing team for their work, guidance and friendship. I will never forget this experience. I had the incredible good fortune to be gifted a ribbon skirt from the senator to mark this special day. Four colours of the medicine wheel don the skirt, a symbol I have drawn strength from since I was a child. Red, yellow, white and black are represented, symbolizing the people of this world, signifying unity and inclusivity.

I am a non-indigenous woman and I have been invited to be a part of this movement, which speaks volumes and goes to the heart of the bill. There are also three cornstalks featured on the skirt. To me, this represents motherhood, planting a seed and raising my two sweet *Wolastoqey wassisok*, my children. I am incredibly grateful, and I will cherish my skirt forever.

I also want to note that the main colour is red. The red dress is sacred and represents missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This week we are in collective mourning for the loss of four more indigenous women in Winnipeg. My heart is with their families. I want to honour them today and add my voice to the call for red dress alerts. No more stolen sisters.

Private Members' Business

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge my colleague from Nunavut for her advocacy for respect and recognition of Inuit women and girls across Canada. Not all indigenous women wear ribbon skirts, and they have their own traditional regalia with significant meaning. This bill is not meant to pan-indigenize, but to speak to anyone who has been made to feel less than or alienated. It is meant to offer strength and positive celebration.

To the member from Nunavut, I say *qujannamiik*.

In the words of Senator McCallum, this bill is for Isabella Kulak and her family. I look forward very much to bringing our families together to celebrate this bill, and I am so excited for the prospect of January 4 of 2023 being the first national ribbon skirt day in Canada.

At this time, I would like to read some of the testimony we heard at committee to further highlight the importance and significance of this bill. In the words of the senator:

This bill will create a forum for dialogue within which we can explore the dark side of Canadian history in ways that do not dishearten or shame, but rather inspire us to enact a process of reconciliation for ourselves, both within our communities and the wider Canadian society.

Ribbon skirts themselves are meant to be worn, meant to be danced in, each skirt fashioned with uniqueness, a sign of pride, spirituality, taking back our spirit and making ourselves visible, meant to empower us to be seen. The ribbon skirt will continue our healing and will continue to transmit our history. It is a way to give voice. As we collectively wear our dresses, we gather strength.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Marie-Josée Wapistan said the following:

This is not just a national day; it is also a day for us to say that our identity will no longer be disrespected. We, women, want respect for our daughters and sisters, who express their identity by wearing their skirt. When we wear a skirt, we are also carriers of life. We, women, are directly connected to mother earth and to all her strength and splendour. She is our nourishing mother.

[*English*]

In the words of Christopher Kulak, Isabella's father, something he and his wife, Lana, often told their children, "You've got to stand up for what's right and what you know to be true in life." He said:

Bella is brave because she's a small little girl who likes to trap rabbits with her dad and wear sweatpants and go into the woods. It was hard for her to put on that skirt. Sometimes she feels like her skin is a little bit pale to be feeling like a native person, but in her heart she's *anishinaabekwe*. Her culture and her ceremony give her that, and her ancestry.

I told her: "You wear that with pride. That's where you come from. Your Auntie Farrah Sanderson made that for you, and it comes from all the hard work from your ancestors who worked so hard to keep those traditions alive."

A poem was read into the record by the senator. It is by Vera Wabegijig and is called *jingles speak to the healing*. It reads:

we carry our stories on our backs
sometimes stories are heavy,
weighing down, curving the spine
like trees bending from the northern wind
sometimes stories are shared
like seeds floating on a summer breeze
taking root wherever they land
becoming medicine from the earth
our stories take root
ground us in the earth
so we can gather the strength
to stand like the trees

and reach for sky

This bill is about standing up to ignorance and injustice and turning it into something positive and powerful.

I want to acknowledge the 2SLGBTQIA+ people across the land. There is a growing movement of two-spirited powwows and celebrations that ensure safe spaces for all.

I give a special shout-out as well to Kieran Davis of Lac Seul First Nation and Treaty 3 territory for wearing a ribbon skirt at this year's Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly and for standing up for gender-diverse voices. I see them, I hear them and I hope to amplify them in the House.

The ribbon skirt is for everyone, and thanks to Isabella Kulak, we can enshrine this reality into law.

To anyone watching at home, keep rocking those skirts and anything else that makes a statement of identity and pride in culture, whether it is moccasin Mondays, traditional Tuesdays, Wolastoc Wednesdays or ribbon skirts every day.

Mr. Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her advocacy not only today but at the INAN committee.

The only thing I am saddened by is that we are not able to see the beautiful ribbon skirt she is wearing. I hope the cameras will pan out as she answers this question so the people at home can see the remarkable skirt she is wearing and the beautiful craftsmanship that indigenous communities continue to promote and recapture after several years of colonization that took away indigenous regalia and indigenous dancing. I have seen and heard of some schools opening up days for children to wear their traditional attire, whether it be ribbon skirts, ribbon shirts or other regalia.

I am wondering if the member could comment on the importance of indigenous peoples reclaiming their traditional attire and culture and it being accommodated in schools, government buildings and all across Canada.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, this speaks so much to the path of reconciliation. What this is all about is reclaiming. It is about safe spaces. It is about being proud of identity. It is about awareness. It is about bringing people together and building bridges.

What I have seen across this country is that so many more entrepreneurs are making and selling ribbon skirts, sharing this idea and spreading it throughout their communities. They are doing exercises in schools to teach little girls how to make their own ribbon skirts for every occasion. It is a beautiful thing that has snowballed.

Private Members' Business

Again, Isabella started all of this, and it is an incredible shining moment for this young girl, who I hope has drawn strength from this process. We are all so proud, and I am really proud to be a part of this journey.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I remember an elder talking to me very clearly when I asked a question about colonization and the impacts of all the factors of colonization and what it stole from communities and indigenous people in terms of their traditions and knowledge. I remember the elder told me two things. One is that they worked really hard to maintain and hide what they needed to pass on to their children. On the other side, they believed fundamentally that children born into the earth brought back from the spirit world the traditions that were lost. I am wondering if the member could speak to that.

• (1330)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Madam Speaker, the member for North Island—Powell River is a mother to indigenous children, and I know she is very passionate about sharing those teachings and raising her children to be proud.

Her question reminds me of another story I heard from an elder recently who was speaking about indigenous languages and teachings. One of their children mentioned to them that languages and cultures were in danger of dying out and that they had been hidden. The elder was quick to correct them and said that no, they had always been there, and they are there for the people of today to reclaim and to be proud of. If we listen and seek out these teachings, they are ready for the taking.

Back home in Wolastoqey territory, some proposed the Wolastoqey language would be extinct by now, and it is not. It is revitalized and is thriving, and there are immersion schools. These are all pieces of the puzzle, and it really feels like we are entering this period of healing. That is what reconciliation is all about.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill S-219, an act respecting a national ribbon skirt day, was introduced in the Senate by the Hon. Mary Jane McCallum on November 24, 2021. I was blessed to have the opportunity to attend and participate in the study of the bill at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs this past Monday, where it passed, and now here we are in third and final reading. I want to thank Senator McCallum for being at the heart of creating a national ribbon skirt day throughout Canada, which, upon the passing of this bill, will be celebrated every January 4.

The Cote First Nation and the community of Kamsack are neighbours in my riding of Yorkton—Melville. On December 18, 2020, 10-year-old Isabella from the Cote First Nation wore a ribbon skirt to her school in Kamsack. She knew the special meaning behind her ribbon skirt. She knew it was a centuries-old spiritual symbol of womanhood, identity, adaptation and survival, and is a way for women to honour themselves and their culture. That day, Isabella was told that her outfit was inappropriate for formal day, that it did not match and that next year she should wear something different.

I want to say directly to Isabella that I am so sorry she was exposed to such a hurtful and devastating experience and that it was embarrassing and humiliating. I note how she, her sisters, her mom

and dad, Chief George and their Cote First Nation family chose to respond to such a grievous experience, how she responded to international attention and how she chose to respond to the Good Spirit School Division, her school and the wrong that she experienced. She did it with fortitude wrapped in a giving heart and with a mind that saw the good that can come out of a place of sorrow.

As I listened to Chief George and Isabella's dad speak at committee, their words brought to light the source of her strength, and I think it best for me to share some of those words with Isabella today and the people who are listening so we understand where her strength comes from.

Chief George said, "In the spirit of truth and reconciliation, talking with Chris and Lana, we decided to make this have a positive impact on our nation." They decided that they would have a ribbon skirt day and Isabella would wear a ribbon skirt, along with all of the women and her peers, on a special day to specifically acknowledge what she went through.

Chief George described the ribbon skirt as:

...something that our community and our ladies have been wearing in ceremonies. It represents a lot of issues with regard to what our people have been going through, with murdered and missing women, suicide and a lot of the addictions that are in our community. It's a way of us coming together and healing.

He spoke of the participation of the Good Spirit School Division, the Cote First Nation and the Kamsack Comprehensive Institute in deciding to come together and come up with a day when this young girl, Isabella, could tell the world her story in a manner that was supported by her dad Chris and her mother Lana. He also spoke of the opportunity with the Good Spirit School Division that opened a door regarding the curriculum to put Cote's language, history and all the things that first nations have gone through into the non-first nations schools; to introduce land-based training, which is about bringing schools out to Cote First Nation to give them an opportunity to participate in cultural activities; and to introduce a cultural room in the school, which some of the elders can visit to share their stories with those who are interested. He shared the desire to ensure that all cultures represented in the school are proud of who they are and can wear their attire at any time, not just on January 4.

Isabella's dad also shared heartfelt comments, saying that the director of education at Good Spirit School Division was very gracious and gave the impression that she believed what he shared about what Isabella experienced. He said:

We were immediately working on solutions.... I remember how we were speaking about faith and belief. I remember speaking about the coat of many colours, and how the Creator made such a wondrous variety of people that we might have fellowship and be close together, learn each other's ways, learn to be tolerant of each other and love each other. These are all values that my family stands very firmly on. We have to be the change that we want to see in the world.

Clearly, those values are represented in who Isabella is and how she behaves.

Private Members' Business

• (1335)

He continued to say, “I’m raising seven girls”, which is amazing all on its own, “with this in their hearts. I get the strength to do this as a father through my wife and my family’s culture. We are just so humbled to be honoured in such a way and to stand for all the first nations and indigenous peoples”.

I do not have a lot more to say, but I want to make sure that I end with at least a final comment by Isabella’s father. It truly speaks to why she has been able to turn ashes into beauty and why ribbon skirt day will be remembered as a significant turning point in reconciliation in so many ways. He said:

I think the advocacy that my daughter displayed was definitely through the hand of the Creator. Nothing is by mistake, and the divine nature of what’s going on here shows that the Lord is in all things and guiding us all here today to do the right thing and show some unity and some respect and to realize that our mistakes of the past can be righted and that we need to do the best thing for the youth of Canada now. I believe that’s what we’re doing today.

I want to say to Isabella that I am looking forward to being home on January 4 no matter what. I do not know what else is going on. I will have to talk to the whip possibly because I do not know, but I will be there. I am so grateful for the invitation. Again, this is an amazing achievement of reconciliation, and I am very pleased to represent the Cote First Nation and the communities of Yorkton—Melville.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would first like to take this precious opportunity to wish happy holidays to all the staff of the House, my fellow members, the interpreters and my constituency office team, Lynda, Mélanie, Jenny, Nancy and Éric.

It is an honour to rise in the House this afternoon to speak to Bill S-219, which creates a national ribbon skirt day to be held every year on January 4. The Bloc Québécois is obviously in favour of the bill, given that it aligns with our party’s general position and our commitment to being an ally of first nations. It also aligns with the process of reconciliation with indigenous peoples.

Much like the orange shirt and the red dress, the ribbon skirt has become a very powerful symbol for indigenous peoples and for indigenous women. A symbol of femininity and, quite frankly, resilience, this simple and humble garment is in itself a political manifesto. Although they should not have to do so, these women are putting themselves out there and loudly expressing their right to exist by wearing the ribbon skirt.

The ribbon skirt is a centuries-old symbol of womanhood, identity, adaptation and survival. It is a way for women to honour themselves and their culture. It represents a direct connection to Mother Earth and her sacred medicines. What is extraordinary is that with this symbol that is now recognized by this bill, these women are telling the whole world that despite all the tragedies and attempts at cultural genocide, they are still there, standing strong. They are alive and proud to be who they are.

Designating this day would pay special tribute to these indigenous women as life-givers entrusted with traditional knowledge to care for their families, communities and the environment. Celebrating this symbol would be a way to recognize the fact that indige-

nous culture, tradition and ceremony, including ties to language and the land, are critical to the vitality and well-being of Canada’s first peoples.

Throughout the debate on this bill in the Senate, the sponsor of Bill S-219 generously shared statements received at her office. One of them, from Isabelle Susanne Kulak, a young 10-year old indigenous girl, represents the essence of this bill. She explains that for her, a ribbon skirt symbolizes strength, resilience, cultural identity and femininity. She says that when she wears a ribbon skirt, she feels sure of herself and proud to be an indigenous girl.

In fact, it is a matter of pride, including among young people, to be able to wear the skirt to honour their *kokum*, or their grandmothers, and their mothers. Ms. Wapistan, who came to testify at committee, explained that when a person wears a ribbon skirt, “it is about honouring ourselves as indigenous women and honouring our grandmothers and our mothers who wear the skirt every day.”

We are living in an era of reconciliation. It is important to include the indigenous cultures and traditions in public spaces in order to facilitate this reconciliation and allow the expression of their pride. We also recognize that not all indigenous peoples wear the ribbon skirt. Nevertheless, the spirit of this national ribbon skirt day is to celebrate indigenous women, pillars of indigenous communities across Canada.

The Bloc Québécois has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to being an ally to the first nations. The principle of this bill makes it possible to take one more small step forward toward reconciliation by responding to article 15.1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It also refers to calls for justice 2.1 and 15.2 of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Viens commission was given a mandate in my riding of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou and, still today, very little has been done to help missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. This is still a problem. I still see posters in my riding when I travel from Val-d’Or to Chibougamau and around northern Quebec, so a lot of work still needs to be done.

These two calls for justice line up with what the Bloc stands for, which is reconciliation. That is defined as the establishment of a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership.

• (1340)

Specifically, call for justice 2.1 in the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls calls “upon all governments to acknowledge, recognize, and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their cultures and languages as inherent rights, and constitutionally protected as such under section 35 of the Constitution”.

Private Members' Business

I am almost done, but before I wrap up, I just want to pay my respects to the friends, families and communities of the four indigenous women who were the victims of a despicable person. Let us hope that reconciliation will be stronger than hate and that people will come to realize that, while we have our differences, we are all human beings.

In closing, the bill refers to “traditional knowledge”. We must never forget that women have managed to preserve that knowledge. That is a fine example of resilience. I hope we all approach this initiative with sincerity as a way of showing these women and their communities that they are no longer alone.

• (1345)

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, first I want to acknowledge the people of this territory, the Anishinabe, for letting us continue to work here. We know that the history is not a good one, but here we are on their territory making the laws of this country.

I also want to take this opportunity to honour all the missing and murdered indigenous women across this country. We know, as we see what has happened in Winnipeg, this raw wound has been ripped open yet again. We know so many people around this country are suffering. I want to recognize and honour the hard work they are doing every moment in surviving this history, surviving this reality now and what that means. Everywhere we go in this country is indigenous land. It is a very special relationship between the first people of that land and the land itself.

I remember years ago speaking with late elder Ellen White from Snuneymuxw. I am so honoured she took the time that she did with me. I expressed my concern about the fact that colonization was continuing to happen, that so much culture was lost due to smallpox, the outlawing of traditional practices, residential schools, day schools and the continued apprehension of indigenous children today. She told me that much of the knowledge was saved, protected and hidden to keep it safe and that everything that was lost came back in the children who were born. They were the carriers of knowledge from the spirit world, so that nothing was ever really lost. That had a really significant impact on me.

When I look at Bill S-219, a bill to make January 4 national ribbon skirt day, it makes me think of how, in spite of everything, in spite of such a targeted effort to destroy the first peoples of this land, they are still here. It makes me think of how the children keep bringing things back to our communities in so many ways. Indigenous children carry inside them this beautiful spirit that will not bend in the face of discrimination, hate or shaming. Therefore, when we think specifically about this day, we have to think about Isabella Kulak who, at 10 years old, inspired a movement based on the pride she had in herself, in her family and in her culture by wearing a ribbon skirt to school.

From the Cote First Nation in Saskatchewan, she wore her ribbon skirt to a formal event at her school. Sadly, an educational assistant made fun of her. Why any adult would feel the need to make a child feel small I can just never understand. The pain perpetrated on children's bodies and spirits over history has never made any sense to me. Indigenous children, for far too many generations,

have continued to experience this pain and suffering, and collectively in this place we must all fight to make it stop.

However, this did not prevent Isabella from having her own sense of pride in her family or her family's determination to support her. This moment of shaming was made into something powerful and beautiful. In solidarity, women and men wearing their ribbon skirts and shirts walked Isabella to school in January, and people from around the globe began to post ribbon skirt photos in her name.

I remember my Granny Minnie, from Stelat'en First Nation, who went to Lejac residential school, used to always say to me, “We are still here.” I remember as a child not understanding what that meant. I just knew that we were here. As I got older and learned about the history and what that meant for my granny, I understood that what she meant was that, no matter what happened, we just found a way to survive in those communities. I have such deep respect for that. I often tell people, when they express pity for indigenous communities, that I hope they have compassion but that I hope they recognize how powerfully strong indigenous peoples are because they are still here.

I want to recognize those moments of solidarity, moments when we stand with indigenous children, hold them up and keep them strong in the face of so many challenges. We know that the support for Isabella became much bigger than her community and spread across Canada. Her love for culture, family and community made her famous, and that is beautiful.

• (1350)

I am in support of this bill because pride of first nations, Inuit and Métis culture is part of the restoration of communities that have experienced genocide in this country, but it is also a significant part of Canada becoming a much better and stronger country.

I cannot help but think of my son, Henry. He comes from Homalco First Nation, Coast Salish Nation. Those people always wore cedar. I remember when he was a young person, he worked with an incredible, powerful weaver, Shyanne Watters. He made himself a cedar hat. It was not made in the traditional way; he actually made a cedar top hat. It is beautiful, and it has a very important place in our house. As he got older, he would wear it to high school on their fancy Fridays. Every fancy Friday, he would wear a suit or a vest and his cedar top hat. I watched him walk with pride into his school, and was really moved that it was part of his reality and his identity, and he was not going to hide it.

There is no doubt in our children, there is no core doubt in them about who they are and where they come from. We have to continue to fight for that to be a reality for all indigenous children. They know where their territory is under their feet, and I am so proud of them.

Private Members' Business

Honouring national ribbon skirt day on January 4 is important, and I look forward to supporting this bill. [Translation]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank everyone who participated today and, again, everyone who has helped make this a reality.

Ribbon skirts, much like reconciliation, are for everyone. It makes me think of the new name for our friendship centre back home, Monogonuwicik, which means people of the rainbow. It is about that inclusivity. It is about bringing everyone together. Like I have said many times in the House, it is so important that we honour indigenous women and girls across this country because that, to me, is the fundamental key towards that meaningful reconciliation. Today, we have taken a very big step forward in doing that. I am so grateful.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:54 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:54 p.m.)

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