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Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 12, 2023

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

AN ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.) moved that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, hon. members, colleagues and friends, I am extremely pleased to be here to speak to you today. To begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered here on the traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

Bill C-13, an act for the substantive equality of Canada's official languages, is now in the hands of members for debate at third reading. At the end of the debate, members will have to decide whether the bill will pass in the House of Commons. I know they will give it due consideration in light of the bill's vital role in promoting Canada's two official languages, halting the decline of French in the country and ensuring that our nation's official language minority communities thrive.

I thank them in advance and I assure them once again of my full co-operation.

[*English*]

Bill C-13 has not yet reached the end of its legislative journey, but the fact that it has made it this far is an achievement worth noting. There has been lively debate, sometimes tense, often emotional but always productive. The operative word here is "productive", because that is the message we should take away from this process. Without such debate, we could not claim to live in a healthy democracy and we would not have the robust bill that we have before us today.

We all have strong convictions about official languages because they define us and are central to our identity. At times, those convictions can divide us. Fortunately, however, everyone has done their bit and we have managed to come together because, despite our differing views, we recognize that our official languages contribute to Canada's development and are integral to the image that Canada projects in the world. I am delighted to have found common ground with the Government of Quebec, which is a key player in the Canadian and international Francophonie. We can be proud of the progress we have made to date.

I would also like to take a moment to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for going through this bill clause by clause and, I have to say, with a fine-tooth comb. I know that, over the past year, they have devoted 26 meetings to this bill and proposed upward of 200 amendments. Some amendments from each party were adopted. Thanks to that colossal effort, Canadians can rest assured that Bill C-13 is on the right track. There is nothing more reassuring than knowing that a bill has passed the test of the House of Commons. Moreover, official-language minority communities have expressed relief, knowing that Bill C-13 has finally reached third reading. That alone is evidence enough for me that this bill has met the expectations on the ground.

[*Translation*]

A reform of this magnitude cannot be undertaken by just one player. It must be the result of collaborative thinking and must embrace all points of view.

We were able to do just that with Bill C-13 thanks to the thousands of people who stepped forward to present their views on official languages even before the reform began and who have continued to do so all along.

Let us remember that, in 2019, on the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, Canadians expressed their commitment to our two official languages. They made it clear that they want to build on that legacy. Francophones and anglophones enthusiastically participated in the round tables and symposia that we organized across the country and online.

Every clause of this bill reflects their hopes, dreams and concerns. We did the impossible by incorporating all of that into the text of this legislation in order to preserve the spirit of their vision and make a difference in their daily lives. It is also important to point out that we took every opportunity to improve the bill for Canadians.

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I want to once again take a moment to recognize the work done by my friend and colleague, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, when she was responsible for official languages. She was the one who started the major work of reforming our language regime, which included reaching out to stakeholders across the country. She was driven by sincere empathy and a desire to forge a friendship with official language minority communities.

She did not hesitate in the least when it came time to stand up for their institutions. As a francophone and a Montrealer, she demonstrated how important it is for Quebec's francophones to show solidarity with francophones in other provinces and territories.

● (1005)

I myself come from an official language minority community, and I personally felt her positive energy. I want to thank her again. In 2021, her efforts culminated in the tabling of the reform document entitled “English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada”, which proposed 56 legislative, administrative and regulatory amendments. Bill C-13 embodies the government's vision for a modernized act.

We have been fortunate to strike the right legislative balance on official languages. Our experience with Bill C-32, the predecessor to Bill C-13, was very enlightening. It enabled us to improve the bill to make it even more robust. Ultimately, Canadians are the ones who will benefit.

[English]

An objective of the language reform has always been clear: to strengthen and modernize our Official Languages Act. Bill C-13 would be one pillar of that reform. In adopting this bill, we would be laying the groundwork for substantive equality between French and English in Canada. Bill C-13 also seeks to ensure that Canadians would be able to live and thrive in both official languages.

The bill would recognize the importance of bilingualism to Canadian identity. In concrete terms, this would mean providing Canada with legislative tools to curb the decline of French; better protect the institutions of official-language minority communities, including English-speaking Quebecers; improve the compliance of federal institutions by strengthening the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the role of the Treasury Board in part 7 of the act; and promote individual bilingualism in Canada.

People might ask, “What difference would this make in the lives of Canadians?” Bill C-13 would make a difference in a number of areas, as it would represent major gains for communities across the country. First, it would recognize the special status of French, which is in a minority situation in Canada and also in North America due to the predominant use of English. That recognition would make all the difference because it would pave the way for the necessary legislative measures to protect French, and Bill C-13 would take all the necessary measures.

Across the country, the stakeholders who best understand the challenges facing our official languages are urging us to pass Bill C-13 as soon as possible. Their calls to action have grown louder and louder in recent months, and I have to say that it is for good reason. Halting the decline of French will require a team effort on the part of all stakeholders, including communities, the Govern-

ment of Canada, our provincial and territorial colleagues and Parliament itself. We can imagine what would happen if we just stood by and watched. The demographic weight of francophones continues to slide, and the demographic weight has already been below the critical threshold for some time now, which has francophones and francophiles worried.

Canada has now met its target for francophone immigration to minority communities for the first time since it set its targets in 2003. To be sure, this achievement is great news, and we have every reason to be delighted. It confirms that we have the capacity to act, and that well-managed efforts yield results, something we tend to doubt at times. However, we also know that we cannot afford to become complacent. We must do more and we must do better. We have made sure that Bill C-13 contains provisions to counter the decline of French, including by investing in francophone immigration. It is so crucial that our immigration policy include objectives, targets and also indicators that are conducive to increasing francophone immigration outside of Quebec.

More generally, Bill C-13 would provide better support for the French language throughout Canada, including in Quebec and also internationally. Such support would necessarily include increased protection for institutions of francophone minority communities across the country, whose vitality would be strengthened as a result. We recognize the positive effects of a vibrant language on the well-being and development of a community. Every action taken to strengthen a language yields profound, life-giving benefits for the people who speak it.

● (1010)

As members have often heard me say in the House, French is the only official language in Canada that is under threat; as such, we must do more in order to protect it. At the same time, we need to understand that increased support for French in no way represents a reduced commitment by the government to English-speaking Quebecers in Quebec. Our commitment to those communities and their vitality remains firm and unwavering. On this point, I want to reassure Canadians that the provisions of Bill C-13 aimed at protecting linguistic minorities and minority institutions would apply to all official-language minority communities in Canada, including English-speaking Quebecers.

[Translation]

For a bill to have a real impact, it needs to have teeth. If not, how could we enforce linguistic rights in this country? I must say that Bill C-13 has the teeth we need.

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It enhances the enforcement of part VII of the Official Languages Act to better regulate the implementation of positive measures by federal institutions and to clarify the duty of federal institutions to take the necessary measures to promote the inclusion of language clauses in agreements negotiated with the provinces and territories. It enhances the powers of the Treasury Board to ensure better coordination and accountability with respect to official languages across the entire Government of Canada. It strengthens the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages, giving him more tools, such as the power to enter into compliance agreements, make orders or even impose monetary penalties on certain private businesses and Crown corporations in the transportation sector that communicate with and serve the travelling public. As I already mentioned, the bill also enhances the francophone immigration policy.

Finally, it enacts a new act that will strengthen the use of French in federally regulated private businesses in Quebec and in regions with a strong francophone presence outside Quebec. What is more, the recently proposed amendments to this new legislation seek to enhance and clarify the federal system with respect to the use of French in businesses.

One of the priority areas of Bill C-13 was to take into account the varying realities of the provinces and territories. Once again, I am pleased that we were able to come to an agreement with the Government of Quebec on this crucial point.

[*English*]

The second pillar supporting our language regime is our action plan for official languages 2023-28, entitled “Protection-Promotion-Collaboration”. That new action plan, which I recently unveiled, would support the implementation of Bill C-13 by putting forward a historic investment of more than \$4.1 billion to support the vitality of our official-language minority communities from coast to coast to coast.

Our plan is built on four key pillars: francophone immigration, supporting lifelong learning, strong measures to support communities, and a federal government that must lead by example. With the adoption of Bill C-13 and the historic investment made with our new action plan, our government would be sending a clear signal that our official languages are a priority for the government.

[*Translation*]

The bill has been a long time in the making. It has now come to fruition. I understand that some members might still be hesitant to pass this legislation, so I want everyone to know that a lot of hard work has gone into balancing the wishes of all Canadians, especially the wishes of official language minority communities and the wishes of their governments.

As members who care deeply about the interests of our constituents, we know that our priorities can differ from one another, and reconciling those priorities is not always easy. However, I am confident that Bill C-13 reflects everyone's interests to the extent possible and will bring tangible gains for each of our communities across the country. Bill C-13 will help protect and promote French across Canada, including in Quebec. Once again, I would like to

salute the spirit of co-operation that has made this such a great success.

As a francophone and an Acadian from Moncton, I never forget who I am and where I come from. I am most proud of having been able to introduce Bill C-13 virtually from Grand-Pré in Nova Scotia, the cradle of Acadia, as I like to call it. It is a place that reminds us of a people's struggle to preserve their language and culture in the face of the violence and assimilation they endured. In my part of the country, people have great hopes for this language reform. They have a great deal to lose if Bill C-13 falls short.

● (1015)

I certainly am not going to disappoint them, and I feel confident that everything has been done to meet their expectations and those of all Canadians. Everyone can rest assured of that.

Therefore, it is with the utmost confidence that I invite my colleagues to pass this bill as quickly as possible. The members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages have already carried out a pre-study of Bill C-13. I now invite them to continue the work.

I now look forward to questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for this presentation.

I am disappointed that the minister truly believes what she is saying. She said that she incorporated everything that was in the white paper into Bill C-13. The white paper said that the central agency should be the Treasury Board and that it should have full power over the entire act. That was written in the white paper.

The minister also said that in the process of developing the bill, she considered all the requests submitted by organizations representing official language minority communities. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or the FCFA, has made one clear request. The entire act needs to be overseen by the Treasury Board. Why did the minister not simply extend the Treasury Board's responsibility to encompass the entire act?

I have other questions. Regarding immigration, the minister said that, coincidentally, since 2023, there has been a 4.4% target. In the Liberals' marketing strategy this year, they note that, coincidentally, just as Bill C-13 was being introduced, they reached the target. In the bill, the only thing the Department of Citizenship and Immigration needs to do is set targets and indicators.

We all know that we are behind and that we have some catching up to do. The FCFA recommends an increase of 12% to 20% to make up for lost time. Who will make the Department of Citizenship and Immigration fulfill its commitments? Who in this government will hold the department accountable so that it meets its immigration targets?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his questions and his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I think that co-operation really is key.

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We understand just how important our two official languages are to our beautiful country, and we can always do more. That is why we introduced an ambitious and robust bill. We often speak about stakeholders across the country. In recent months, the FCFA and many other stakeholders have asked us to pass this bill as soon as possible. They have also said publicly that it is a very good bill.

With regard to the question about the Treasury Board, we made absolutely sure that the Treasury Board will play the role of coordinator for the act. In last fall's economic statement, we put money aside to ensure that the Treasury Board has the resources it needs to do its job.

Let us also look at the matter of francophone immigration. I think that we were very clear in our bill that we want to ensure that we have a robust francophone immigration policy with targets, indicators and so on. Once again, we recognize that francophone immigration is very important to compensate for the demographic loss in this country.

In addition to introducing this bill, we have made historic investments of \$4.1 billion in the action plan, and that includes \$137 million for francophone immigration.

However, I do have a question for my hon. Conservative colleague. Will the Conservatives finally support Bill C-13?

The Bloc Québécois, the NDP and the province of Quebec say that it is a good bill. I hope my colleague will answer. Will they support it, yes or no?

• (1020)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let me set the record straight: The Bloc Québécois is not saying that this is a good bill. The Bloc is going to support it because we feel that it will move things somewhat forward for now, but there are still a lot of unsatisfactory aspects.

The Government of Quebec asked to be in control of language planning within its territory. It also asked for recognition that French is the only minority official language. It requested a truly differentiated approach and asked that Quebec be the one to take positive measures, whether for French or English. It wants to have a say, it wanted a say in this.

The official languages plan was unveiled about a week and a half ago, and it is expected that \$800 million will once again be spent primarily on English. The Quebec government has asked that it be used for French integration instead. Everyone in Quebec wondered why, when French is under threat, almost all the funding is going to English. I am actually pretty happy about that because usually this kind of thing would go unnoticed.

The minister said that part of that amount was for the teaching of French as a second language. That is generally a part of Canada-Quebec agreements, but only a small percentage, maybe 5% to 6%, is earmarked for French second-language teaching. Most of the funding goes to support the English school system. That is what we heard from a public servant who spoke anonymously.

My question for the minister is this. Is the government open to the possibility of increasing support for French in the positive measures and to adjusting its approach based on the requests of the

Government of Quebec, taking into account the fact that French is in decline and that measures really do need to be taken? Furthermore, the federal measures that hasten the decline of French must be stopped.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, once again, I want to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for the work he has done on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I think we share a common goal with the Bloc Québécois. We recognize that French is the only one of Canada's official languages in decline and that we need to work together to address this decline. I must also mention that we are the first government to recognize that French is the only one of Canada's official languages that is in decline. To counter this decline, we introduced an ambitious and robust bill.

Also, last week, or two weeks ago, we announced an action plan containing unprecedented investments of \$4.1 billion that will really make a difference. If we have any hope of ensuring that Canada's francophonie will thrive, we have to follow through with the necessary investments. As I often say, if the francophonie is thriving across Canada, it will surely thrive in Quebec as well.

I should also say that the Quebec government has publicly stated that Bill C-13 is a very good bill. This week, I even had the chance to talk with Minister Roberge. Quebec wants this bill to pass as quickly as possible.

I would like to once again thank my Bloc Québécois colleague, who openly and publicly stated that he will support the bill. This bill is really going to make a difference for our official language minority communities and it will also help us address the decline of French across the country, including in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I consider the minister a friend and colleague.

New Democrats are pleased that we are finally getting to this bill. We are disappointed that it took so long. It was first introduced in the last Parliament; days later, an election was called. Months after we reconvened, it finally came back before us. Despite the fact that minority-language communities have been heard for a long time about these issues and we knew what the issues were, they have been kept waiting.

Could the minister comment on why it took so long to respond to what the minority-language communities were asking for?

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• (1025)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague and friend, as well as the NDP member for Churchill—Kee-watinook Aski, for the work that she has done on Standing Committee on Official Languages. She has truly been a partner, and I appreciated working with her.

If this were an easy piece of legislation, governments in the past would have moved it forward a long time ago. We had the ambition, and we wanted to make it a priority. That is why we moved forward with many steps in modernizing our Official Languages Act, as well as making sure that, as a federal government, we did all that we could to protect and promote our official languages. My friend and colleague, the Minister of Global Affairs, started that work when she was the minister responsible. Now, I have been privileged to continue that work.

We tabled Bill C-13 last year. I took it as a priority to meet with stakeholders to make sure we had an appreciation of what they wanted to see. We have moved forward with presenting a robust piece of legislation that really meets the needs of the interveners from coast to coast to coast. It would make a real, tangible difference in making sure that we address the decline of French, all while supporting our official-language minority communities from across the country.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my first language is neither English nor French. I had my education in English. When I was in university 36 years back, I joined a friendship course to study the French language. Although I did not study the language much, I met the love of my life there, and we are still married.

One good thing I have noticed is that a lot of my friends here in Canada are sending their children to francophone schools so that their kids have the knowledge of both English and French as they are educated.

There is a bit of apprehension among the anglophone community in Quebec. What assurances can she give to that particular community?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, French is the language of love.

I want my message to anglophones in Quebec to be very clear. Bill C-13 in no way removes any rights from English-speaking Quebecers.

With this legislation, the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we want to make sure that we do all we can to protect and to promote both our official languages. That Canada has two official languages is a comparative advantage to other countries. However, with this piece of robust legislation, we want to protect our communities and address the decline of French.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind members that this is the time for questions and comments, not speeches.

[*English*]

The quicker we can get a question in, the quicker we can get the answer, and more people can participate in the debate.

[*Translation*]

Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to your intervention, you are absolutely right, but there are so many things to say about that particular file. It is so very important. That is why we are so passionate and why we have been working diligently for many months.

First of all, I would like to ask for unanimous consent to split my time with my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who is an excellent representative for his constituents.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank all my colleagues for their openness. I will therefore be sharing my time with the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

As I rise in the House today, I cannot help but feel disappointed. All that, for this? The Liberals tabled a white paper in February 2021 that clearly stated in black and white that the Treasury Board was to become the central agency responsible for implementing the Official Languages Act, as I pointed out in my question earlier. A few months later, in June 2021, the official languages minister at the time, currently the Minister of Foreign Affairs, introduced Bill C-32. An election was called two months later. What a coincidence. A lot of time was wasted, and we had to start over at square one.

The new Minister of Official Languages introduced her bill, C-13, in March 2022. We were told that the bill solved all the problems and that it had to be passed as quickly as possible. The Liberals begged the opposition parties to co-operate and expedite the bill. It was referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages, where we heard from witnesses so we could do our work effectively. All of a sudden, the Liberals moved a motion to cut off debate. We had to move so quickly that we wasted eight meetings discussing this problem that had been caused by the Liberals at committee.

They are talking out of both sides of their mouths. They want us to move quickly, but they muzzled us for eight meetings. The opposition parties worked together to take the time needed. We reached out to the Liberals several times to try to get them to listen to reason. They wanted four meetings and we wanted twelve, so we split the difference and decided on eight. I think that is a good compromise. It shows that the opposition parties were acting in good faith. As for the Liberals, that is another story.

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The Conservative Party takes bilingualism in Canada very seriously. We worked hard in committee, as I mentioned. We took the time to listen to stakeholders across the country. We worked to respond to their concerns. I am talking about stakeholders like the Fédération des communautés francophone et acadienne du Canada, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, the Commissioner of Official Languages and many others. These people live with the reality of being a linguistic minority every day. The Liberals would have everyone living in these official language minority communities, particularly in New Brunswick, believe that they are responding to their demands.

• (1030)

I want to tell everyone living in those official language minority communities—whether it is in New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories or British Columbia—not to worry, because the Conservative Party of Canada is there for them and always will be.

In committee, we received a pile of amendments from all parties. About 10 amendments were tabled by the NDP; the Bloc proposed over 80, and we tabled about 60.

It comes as no surprise that the Liberals were ready. They had written a white paper, then introduced Bill C-32, followed by Bill C-13. They must have refined their bill, at least I hope so. However, they filed about 50 amendments, which is pretty interesting. In addition to the 50 amendments, it was clear that there was some dissension within the Liberal caucus. Among those 50 amendments, there were duplicates, which means that two Liberal members had tabled the same amendments. This goes to show how much time they are wasting. Are they even talking within their party? Are they talking to the anglophone members from Quebec? It is a mess. Then they want us to move quickly. They say this issue is so important. This is just one example of Liberal incompetence and inconsistency.

Again this week in the House, the Liberals proposed amendments that could and should have been put forward in committee—but no, they are holding up the process. They claim that it needs to move quickly, but they are holding up the process. Worse, to hear the Liberals talk about official languages, the decline of the French language and the need to protect both official languages, it all seems to be so important to them. However, there was a vote at report stage yesterday, and the Deputy Prime Minister, whom we have been looking for in all the committees, and even in the House of Commons, did not even vote, even though we have a virtual application to do just that. The Minister of Justice, who is a Quebecker and is affected by this legislation, did not even vote. Worse yet, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Quebec lieutenant, who is the main party involved and has responsibilities under this bill, did not even vote. Official languages and the decline of the French language are so very important to them—we had another clear demonstration of that yesterday.

This government's lack of interest and disengagement is obvious again today. What day is it? It is Friday, the day when members have the least amount of time to speak. Who is in charge of the agenda? The Liberals are. Who chose to do this on a Friday? The Liberals did. What does that mean? It means that they do not want to hear about this, that they want to sweep it under the rug. That is

obvious, because there is bickering within the Liberal caucus. This is just more smoke and mirrors, to create the illusion that the Liberals care about official languages.

Let us talk about the stakeholders. We met several, but I want to talk about two in particular. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, which represents 2.8 million French-speaking Canadians outside Quebec, was calling for six amendments. It was not a huge or unreasonable request. How many of those amendments were fully adopted? Not one was adopted. Good job, Liberals. The Conservative Party agrees with those recommendations and brought forward amendments along those lines. Unfortunately, the NDP-Liberal coalition ignored the FCFA. It did the same thing to the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Liberals and the NDP did not listen.

The bill moved a step forward, but at a snail's pace. It is not that important, then. It was just one step forward. I think I would walk a long, long way for our official languages, but this bill, sadly, goes no farther than a single step. As parliamentarians, this was our chance to take concrete action to reverse the very real decline of French in Canada, and even in Quebec. It is deplorable that official language minority community stakeholders are not being listened to and get nothing but empty words.

• (1035)

I am concerned about the future of Canada as a country bilingual in English and French. We must remember that we have a Governor General who is bilingual but does not speak French. When we talk about bilingualism in Canada, we are referring to the two official languages, the two founding languages.

I was born a francophone in Canada, and my children speak French. I hope that my grandchildren will be able to speak French, here, in Canada. I am proud to be Canadian. I am proud to be a Quebecker. I am proud to represent the people of Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. I will fight tooth and nail for francophones in Quebec and across Canada. My ancestors fought that fight and I will continue fighting it. I am proud of our bilingual Canada, and I am not alone: More than 80% of Canadians value their bilingualism.

I want to remind members of one thing. The Official Languages Act was introduced in 1969 and modernized in 1988. Who did that? The Conservatives. The Harper government was the first to recognize the Quebec nation in a united Canada. He understood Quebec and its unique linguistic reality, and he recognized that it was important for the country.

Quebec has the largest pool of francophones in North America, and it must have the tools it needs to preserve its language and culture, which, by extension, will help francophone communities across Canada.

Our leader, the member for Carleton also values the French language. He is educating his children in French and he speaks both official languages here in the House. He understands the challenges and is making an effort to protect and promote both of Canada's official languages.

In closing, I would again like to reassure the official language minority communities. Unlike the Liberals, we have heard them very clearly and we will call for a single central agency and an enumeration of rights holders. We heard them.

It is truly important to the Conservative Party of Canada that Canada remain an English-French bilingual country, and it will focus on reversing the decline of French and protecting both official languages.

• (1040)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would simply like to say that, since 2015, our government has basically doubled the investments in all areas of official languages through our official languages action plan. We are making historic investments of \$4.1 billion over the next five years.

Second, I listened attentively to my colleague's comments. He said that he listened to what the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the Société nationale de l'Acadie and the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick had to say. I would like to know whether he really paid attention to what they were saying because, over the past six, seven or eight months, stakeholders across the country have been telling us that they are looking forward to the passage of Bill C-13. They openly and publicly told us that this is a good bill, an ambitious and robust bill.

All of the parties in the House have told us where they stand on this bill except the Conservative Party. Their position is a big mystery.

My question is this. Will the Conservative Party support the bill, yes or no? If my colleague wants to ensure that his grandchildren have the opportunity to talk and live in French, then I think it would be a good idea for the Conservative Party to support the bill.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Official Languages has very good questions and she is passionate about this issue, which is why she asks a lot of questions.

She says that her government has doubled investments since 2015, but that is not the whole issue. Throwing money around, the way the Liberals are used to doing, is not necessarily the solution. We must have tools, such as empowering the Treasury Board as a central agency. It is important to put money into it, but that is not a magic bullet, and it is not a Liberal magic wand.

Now, I do not understand this dogged determination to know a party's position ahead of time. I would like to remind the minister that, according to the procedures of the House, voting is a parliamentary right. If we want to respect House practices, we exercise our right to vote here.

Even if I disagree with her way of doing things, I do appreciate my colleague and I would like to assure her that the Conservative Party will be here to vote.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking my colleague for supporting several of the Bloc Québécois's proposed amendments to Bill C-13. We know

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that the Government of Quebec made some demands, and we tried to get as many of them adopted as possible.

Things were going well at the start, but later there was some manoeuvring on the part of some Liberals, who even voted against the bill yesterday. We could always ask our minister about that.

With regard to the action plan for official languages, we have a government here that says that French is threatened in Quebec but then chooses to subsidize only English in Quebec. That is quite shocking. What does my colleague think? Does that make any sense to him?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île. I was pleased to work very productively with him in committee. We are both interested in protecting French, which is in decline, and promoting both official languages. However, the Conservatives have a vision for Canada, while my colleague has a vision for Quebec.

I completely agree with him. It is unacceptable that 20% of the money is going to English-speaking communities in Quebec. English is not under threat in Quebec and across Canada; French is.

What is the proportion of anglophones in Quebec compared to francophone minorities outside Quebec? That would be 8%. Why is the Liberal government giving them 20%?

If I had to speculate, I would say it was to buy the silence of anglophone MPs from Quebec. It makes me seriously wonder, and I am very much in tune with my Bloc Québécois colleague, whom I want to thank again for the work he did in committee.

• (1045)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today's debate on the Official Languages Act has to be placed in the context of the demographic decline of francophone minority communities.

Given that both Liberal and Conservative governments have consistently failed to reach the 4.4% target of francophone immigration, aside from this attempted legislative fix the Liberals are proposing, does my hon. colleague from the Conservatives have any ideas on why successive Conservative and Liberal governments have failed to reach that target? As well, does he have any ideas of his own on how to best meet that target?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, yes, there is a problem with immigration. I would remind my colleague that this Liberal government has been in office since 2015. I cannot answer for them.

The Liberals met the target this year, probably with the help of their marketing firm, making sure that they got good press and that everyone knew they met their immigration target. This has happened only once since 2003, so there is definitely a big problem.

I want my colleague to know that we are going to do everything we can, once we are on the other side of the House, to ensure that official languages and the decline of French are a government priority.

Government Orders

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, with whom I sit as a member of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, as well as all the parties who worked on Bill C-13 in committee. The committee members worked for some time on studying the bill.

I sincerely think that my colleague did extraordinary work and that we did everything we could to improve this bill, unlike the coalition between the NDP and the Liberal Party, who prevented us from adopting certain amendments. Despite that, I think that we did good work.

I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the use of French in federally regulated private businesses act and to make related amendments to other acts. We are now studying the bill at third reading after having studied it in committee. The way I see this legislation and the entire process for the final adoption of this bill is that it is a lot of effort for little result. We did a colossal job and in the end we do not have much to show for it. That is about the size of it.

Some will say that it is better than nothing. Of course it is better than nothing, but this bill does not go far enough. In committee, this Liberal government tabled no fewer than 31 amendments. It was actually more than 31. Even yesterday, the Liberals tabled amendments in the House. Clearly, they were not prepared despite all the work they said they did beforehand on the previous bill, which was introduced before the 2021 election, and on the white paper. In passing, the white paper set out some extremely important elements, which, unfortunately, were not kept in the bill.

The fact that a government tabled so many amendments to a bill that it drafted demonstrates how poorly thought-out it was. With the complicity of their faithful allies, the NDP, the Liberals imposed closure so this bill would be studied quickly. The closure motion stated that, after a certain amount of time, all the amendments would be deemed adopted by the committee without them even being studied. So much for respecting the work of parliamentarians in committee.

The bill ignores the requests for amendments made by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes, or FCFA, and the Commissioner of Official Languages. Their requests are not found in the final text of the bill. We were not given the time we needed to discuss them properly. The FCFA is the organization that brings together the largest number of associations and organizations representing francophones in Canada. It had only six requests; it did not put forward 80 of them. Not a single one of the FCFA's requests ended up in the bill.

I could spend hours naming the problems with this bill, but I will concentrate on a few points on which we put forward amendments. Our party put them forward in good faith to give the bill more teeth and to give organizations the necessary tools to slow the decline of the French language in Canada. Unfortunately, those amendments were all voted down by the NDP-Liberal coalition.

We tabled amendments regarding the power given to the Treasury Board.

The Official Languages Act has been around for over 50 years. We have seen the result. French is in decline everywhere, not just in Canada but also in Quebec. It has been proven that the way the act is designed, but especially the way it is managed, structured and overseen, is not working. Everyone was unanimous on the proposal made by many organizations across Canada. Even the Liberals were on board in the beginning. In their white paper, they said that the central agency of the Treasury Board would be responsible for enforcing the act. Unfortunately, that is not what we are seeing and that is not what is going to happen in the current bill. That is really unfortunate.

The bill as it now stands contains a provision to change the act every 10 years, unlike how it was before. There is a provision that says that we can review the bill every 10 years. We suggested that it should be every five years, but our amendment was once again defeated.

That said, these 10 years should give us enough time to examine and verify whether it would have been feasible to make a central agency responsible for implementing the act. Ten years will be enough time to check whether making the Treasury Board the lead for implementing the bill would have worked. We could have made changes after 10 years, but no, a decision was made to stick with the same approach.

Despite what the Minister of Official Languages said, the Treasury Board leads the only three agencies that have the binding authority needed to address violations of the act.

- (1050)

We tabled amendments to that effect, and the majority of francophone organizations also made this request, but they were all rejected.

We made concessions, proposed amendments to the amendments in order to reach a compromise, but again, they were flatly refused. In my mind, that confirms the lack of desire to make this bill more effective.

With respect to the enumeration of rights holders, another very important element is that Bill C-13, in its current form, does not ensure that all children of rights holders will continue to be counted under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As set out in the act, rights holders are divided into three categories of individuals who have the right to send their children to official language minority public elementary and secondary schools. This right allows the children of rights holders to preserve their mother tongue and retain their constitutionally guaranteed rights.

Currently, the government is only obligated to estimate the number of rights holders, and that was the subject of much discussion. We proposed including a question to this effect in the census, but it was rejected. This will unfortunately lead to an underestimation of the number of children of rights holders.

Government Orders

As for reviewing the legislation, we proposed that Bill C-13 be reviewed every five years. As I said earlier, unfortunately, that too was rejected. At least it is going to happen every 10 years. As I said earlier, we did a tremendous amount of work but have very little to show for it. The 10-year period is part of that. Once again, it is better than nothing.

The same goes for the powers granted to the Commissioner of Official Languages. We wanted to increase the commissioner's power and give him the tools needed to enforce the act with businesses and federal agencies. The problem is that it means the federal government might have to fine federal agencies. It is important to understand that, here in Ottawa and in all government organizations across the country, several agencies and departments are not meeting their official languages obligations, especially in writing. The government is still sending English-only messages across Canada, on many platforms. There is no translation.

With our amendments, the commissioner would have been able to crack down on this and do his job more effectively, but once again, the NDP-Liberal coalition did not want to enhance the commissioner's powers.

The last thing that could have been improved, but was not, also concerns part VII of the act. We wanted to include obligations to ensure that federal institutions would implement more measures to protect and promote both official languages. This country was founded 150 years ago, and there were two founding peoples. After all these years, one might think it would be second nature to communicate in both languages, but even today some departments communicate only in English. That is completely unacceptable.

Clearly, Bill C-13, which we are debating today, is incomplete and has several flaws. The powers of the commissioner were not strengthened, there is no central agency to enforce the act and the act will not be reviewed every five years to keep it up to date.

After eight years of this government, it is difficult to trust that it will stop the decline of French in order to protect the strength of both official languages.

Again, I want to thank my colleague and colleagues because the Standing Committee on Official Languages may be the least partisan of all the House of Commons committees. Honestly, I have been a member of that committee for a long time. We have done some absolutely spectacular studies that are very interesting and very instructive at that committee.

The process involved in Bill C-13 was derived from its primary objective, which was to improve the legislation and come to a consensus among all parties to ensure that we have the best Official Languages Act possible in Canada. Unfortunately, that did not happen. However, fortunately, in 10 years, we will be able to review it. When a majority Conservative government is in power in the next few months or next year, we will review the act when the time comes to do so.

• (1055)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages and his support for a number of proposals.

I would like to hear his opinion. We know that the House of Commons recognized Quebec as a nation with one official and common language, French. We know that, in the beginning, language was supposed to fall under Quebec's jurisdiction.

What does my colleague think about the Government of Quebec's request to have authority over linguistic development and management in the province, while respecting the rights of the anglophone community, obviously?

With regard to positive measures, what does he think about the action plan that we have seen that invests a massive amount of money in English in areas under provincial jurisdiction?

I also would like to know whether he agrees that we should review the act before the 10 years is up, because, although I think that this bill does make some progress, it will continue to have an anglicizing impact on Quebec.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, to answer the last question my colleague asked, because he asked several, yes, a Conservative government would review the act, likely within 10 years. We believe that a central agency is absolutely fundamental to managing official languages in this country. Our leader, the member for Carleton, has said very clearly that the act is not strong enough and does not go far enough and, most importantly, that there is no central agency to ensure compliance.

I also want to talk about the division that we have been seeing on the Liberal side. In fact, yesterday, one Liberal member abstained from voting on the Liberal bill, and another voted against it. Anglophone MPs from Quebec have been working hard to derail the process of passing this bill. It was unmistakably clear that the Liberal Party of Canada is divided.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to return the favour and thank my hon. colleague, who is an active participant at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. He is doing a great job.

The minister said she has a great relationship with Quebec's minister of the French language, Mr. Roberge. That is interesting because I saw Mr. Roberge make a statement about the massive investment in Quebec's anglophones. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Speaker, during the process, at the last minute, less than 12 hours before a meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, we were presented with a series of amendments proposed by the Government of Quebec, so we were able to speed up the bill's passage, because it was about Quebec's demands.

Once again, it was a game of ping-pong between the two ministers, one in Quebec and one in Ottawa, who could not come to an agreement. That is pretty much what happened. The day before yesterday they were once again patting each other on the back while holding a falcon. Maybe they will be less happy three months from now, I have no idea, but one thing is certain. We in the Conservative Party will listen to Quebec, and we will solve this bill's problems in the future.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

• (1100)

*[English]***NATIONAL NURSING WEEK**

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Windsor—Tecumseh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the incredible nurses and nurse practitioners in my community of Windsor—Tecumseh and to say thanks for their dedication, talents and compassion.

On Monday, our community gathered to recognize nurse practitioner Mary Cunningham as the recipient of the Lois Fairley Nurse of the Year community service award. Mary, reflecting on her 46-year career of service above self, much of it taking care of the most vulnerable in the intensive care unit, says she always wanted to be a nurse, since she was a little girl. “I think when you touch people’s lives and you can help people, there’s nothing more rewarding than that”, says Mary.

Nursing is a calling, and nurses are our angels. To Mary, my wife Shauna and all the incredible nurses and nurse practitioners who look after our community, we wish them a very happy National Nursing Week.

* * *

ALBERTA WILDFIRES

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, wildfires continue to ravage communities across Alberta, including in Parkland, Yellowhead, Brazeau County and Drayton Valley. A state of emergency is in place and many residents have evacuated to the towns of Stony Plain and Spruce Grove.

Last weekend, our community stepped up to help the evacuated families by hosting a pancake breakfast at the Stony Plain Legion. I would like to thank all the volunteers who showed up, including Roger Hebblethwaite and Kristine Alex, as well as those from the Stony Plain Legion and the Kinsmen Club. I also want to thank our generous local businesses like Freson Bros., the Grove RV and the Co-op for their generous support.

While there has been some rain, the situation remains volatile. I want to thank Parkland Mayor Allan Gamble, MLA Shane Getson and their teams for their leadership.

Finally, I also want to thank all of our first responders, particularly our newly deployed Canadian Forces members, for their assistance at this terrible time. This is truly an all-of-Canada effort, and I am so proud of my community for stepping up to help our neighbours in their time of need.

* * *

MOTHER’S DAY

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to all mothers across Canada who will be celebrating Mother’s Day this weekend.

As we celebrate this special occasion, I cannot help but reflect on the immense contributions of mothers across Canada. As a member of Parliament, I am privileged to represent the values and aspira-

tions of my constituents, but today I want to take a moment to recognize the hard work and dedication of my wife, Monica, who is the mother of three and grandmother of six. She has been a source of inspiration and strength for our family, and her selflessness and devotion to our children and grandchildren have been unwavering.

Indeed, mothers everywhere play an essential role in shaping the lives of their children and building strong families and communities. They provide care, support and guidance to their children, and they instill the values that shape their character and shape our future. On Mother’s Day, let us celebrate and appreciate the countless contributions of mothers in our lives. Let us honour them, cherish them, and give them the respect they deserve.

I wish a happy Mother’s Day to all.

* * *

ALBERTA WILDFIRES

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the out-of-control wildfires in western Canada have forced thousands of my fellow Albertans from their homes. Even worse, many have no homes left at all, like one of my elders, Harry Supernault. A retired community leader and constantly hard-working man, he carved his home out of the bush in the East Prairie Metis Settlement. He has raised his children and his grandchildren on that land, passing down many invaluable indigenous teachings, his home now reduced to ash.

My friends, let me be clear, this crisis is the product of the deadly combination of climate change and UCP austerity. The UCP’s cuts to first responders and firefighter programs, like the rappel program, have undoubtedly left Albertans with less protection. Albertans are paying for the Conservatives’ dismantling and defunding of first responders.

To Harry and to folks like him, I say, “We are with you. Stay strong, and we will rebuild.”

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*[Translation]***HAVE A HEART DAY**

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight the contributions to Have a Heart Day of students in my riding attending Dr. F. J. McDonald Catholic School, École élémentaire publique Charlotte-Lemieux and École élémentaire publique Mamawi.

This annual event is organized by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society and dedicated to indigenous reconciliation. On Have a Heart Day, these engaged youth took the initiative to write to our Prime Minister to plead for lasting and positive change in the lives of Inuit, Métis and first nations children.

It is heartwarming to know that youth are fighting for justice. Seeing the energy and determination of these young people, I am convinced that our future is in good hands.

* * *

• (1105)

[English]

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS' SAFETY

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week we lost another police officer, and two more were injured in the line of duty. Sergeant Eric Mueller lost his life while working to keep his community safe. Our condolences go to his family and the entire law enforcement community. We wish for a speedy recovery for the other officers injured.

Across the country, this week in Vernon, B.C., the RCMP and School District No. 22 are partnering to hold the Jean Minguy Memorial Youth Academy, in honour of RCMP Constable Jean Minguy, who lost his life in an accident while on duty in 2005. The academy provides an opportunity for candidates to explore law enforcement in a hands-on, simulated police academy format. It is my hope that the candidates' experiences will lead to a bright future in law enforcement.

I also hope that we, as legislators, can work with law enforcement agencies to draft and amend effective laws that will keep our officers and our communities safe in the future.

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JOHN AND MURIEL ARNASON AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the John and Muriel Arnason Award is granted to a couple who “serve together to make the Township of Langley a better place through charitable, philanthropic, or other means”.

This year's recipients were Township of Langley residents Darcy and Manjit Gill. Since 1994, Darcy and Manjit have both been actively volunteering in the community and have made a significant difference in people's lives. They are or have been involved with the Langley Memorial Hospital Foundation, Langley Meals on Wheels, BC Children's Hospital Foundation, the B.C. Cancer Society, and the list goes on. Even right now, every week, Manjit delivers meals to students at HD Stafford Middle School. Our community is very grateful to this couple.

I congratulate Darcy and Manjit on this recent recognition. Their work makes our community a better place.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all moms, including mine, a happy Mother's Day.

Statements by Members

HEART LAKE WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Leo O'Brien, a resident of Brampton North, for his tireless efforts to protect the environment and the turtles that call Heart Lake home.

Heart Lake Road divides a conservation area from a marshy wetland. With an increase in traffic, the community noticed a spike in deaths of wildlife on the road. This, of course, prompted Leo into action. He recruited a team of volunteers to do the arduous task of gathering data by tracking how many and what type of amphibians and other animals were being killed by vehicles. This involved even having to scrape dead turtles off the road and meticulously catalogue them. This sad and often gruesome task played a vital role in understanding the impact on the local ecology, which led to the approval of the installation of an eco fence, a huge victory for Leo and the team of turtle troopers, but also for Bramptonians.

As a community, we are fortunate to have someone like Leo. I want to commend him for his hard work, his passion and his unwavering commitment to the environment. I hope his example will inspire others to take action to protect our planet.

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MOTHER'S DAY

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mother's Day is a day to celebrate and honour mothers and mother figures for the love, support and care they provide to their children and families. It is a day to appreciate the hard work and the sacrifices mothers make to raise their children and maintain their households. The day also recognizes the many different forms of motherhood, including stepmothers, foster mothers, adoptive mothers and grandmothers. Mother's Day is essential because it promotes gratitude, respect and love towards the most important women in our lives and strengthens the family bond. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the importance of maternal figures and the impact they have on our society.

On a personal note, it is a day when I reflect on the love of my family: my children, who have made me the woman I am today and have given me a reason to fight for this country. To my own mother, I say, “I love you. I thank you for always having my best interest, and for the love and support you have always provided to me. I know you are watching today. Happy Mother's Day.”

To all the mothers abroad and here in Canada, I wish them a happy Mother's Day.

Statements by Members

● (1110)

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight Canada's continued support for the vital work of the International Criminal Court.

Last week, the Minister of Justice and I had an opportunity to meet with Mr. Karim Khan, chief prosecutor of the ICC, on his first official visit to Canada. Canada has been a leader in supporting the ICC since its inception, and we continue to support its efforts in bringing those who commit atrocities and crimes to justice. Victims, survivors and their families deserve to know the truth and have a path toward justice.

While much work remains ahead, I am encouraged by the leadership and the relentless commitment of Karim Khan toward pursuing accountability. I would like to thank and salute Karim Khan and all of the staff at the ICC for their tireless efforts to ensure that independent and impartial investigations are undertaken and the pursuit of justice is at the centre of their work.

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ALBERTA WILDFIRES

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as wildfires rage across Alberta, the people of Edmonton have opened their doors and their hearts to those fleeing the devastation. Adversity brings out the spirit of community adopted by the pioneers who settled our province in the face of much hardship.

Many times, we have no control over the situations we find ourselves in, but we can control our response. Canadians come together in a crisis. We support each other, because that is the Canadian thing to do. Albertans and Canadians understand the need to work together. I am grateful to those across the country who have travelled to Alberta to aid the firefighting efforts.

On behalf of everyone in Alberta, I want to thank those from other provinces and territories for standing with us to fight the wildfires. I hope the federal government will do the same.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Prime Minister, life in Oshawa costs more. Housing is through the roof, food costs are up and this tired, expensive government is out of touch. While Oshawa seniors struggle, the Prime Minister takes his private jet to New York to take selfies with his rich friends, or to one of five vacations this year alone. Who pays for this Hollywood lifestyle of his? It is Canadians and his Trudeau Foundation donors, of course.

While the Prime Minister lives it up, seniors are paying twice the amount for rent and have to choose between food and energy. With the new carbon tax, gas will go up another 41¢ per litre. To make things worse, the Liberals' catch-and-release "justice" makes our streets less safe, and by decriminalizing hard drugs, we are seeing record overdoses and violent crime skyrocketing. Why will he not put the needs of victims ahead of the rights of repeat violent offenders?

Oshawa needs a Prime Minister who works for them, not a Prime Minister who is out of the country and out of touch while Canadians are out of money.

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I join my voice to that of my many colleagues who are concerned about the Conservatives' Bill C-311, which is an attempt to reopen the abortion debate.

Our government will always protect access to abortion and affirm that it is an essential right for women's health.

In budget 2023, we committed to pay Health Canada \$36 million to renew funding for sexual and reproductive health and to guarantee access to sexual and reproductive health care for vulnerable populations across the country.

Since 2015, we have invested more than half a billion dollars in international aid for reproductive health and we have expanded access to the morning-after pill.

In Canada, our mothers fought hard for their rights until abortion was decriminalized in 1988. That said, the fight for women's rights is far from over.

On this side of the House, it is crystal clear, we are proudly pro-choice and we always will be.

* * *

[English]

OPIOIDS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hearing a parent say, "Once they are dead, there is no helping them" is terrible. Across Canada, so many people have lost their loved ones to the toxic drug crisis. In the past six years, nearly 25,000 Canadians have died of apparent overdoses. Moms Stop the Harm is fighting back, in the name of the precious children they have lost, using all that pain to take action for every opportunity to save a life.

A recent report by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction found that fewer than one in four people with problematic substance use accessed services. Many constituents have talked to me about safe consumption, knowing that safe supply is there to address what is killing their loved ones, the toxic drug supply. This is not a treatment for addiction; it is an intervention to keep people alive.

There is nothing I would not do to keep someone alive long enough to consider treatment. To save lives, we must stop the stigma.

* * *

• (1115)

[Translation]

VOLARIA FESTIVAL

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from September 8 to 10, my hon. colleagues are all invited to Volaria, the biggest air show in Quebec.

Drawing over 50,000 visitors last year, this proudly Mirabel-based festival is shooting for the moon for its second edition, with an open-air museum, breathtaking air shows, a futuristic showcase featuring the latest advances in aerospace technology, a job fair, a family zone, a gourmet food court and more. The festival has everything visitors could want to make their weekend unforgettable. To top it all off, the Volaria festival has secured level 3 carbon accreditation.

Everyone knows how strongly I feel about developing Mirabel's aviation industry. I talk about it often in the House. From providing jobs to promoting the future of the Mirabel airport and our aviation sector, this event is extremely important to local residents.

This summer, I urge everyone to make room in their schedule for the Volaria festival and prepare to be amazed. Everyone is welcome.

* * *

[English]

SENIORS

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to Stats Canada, over 115,000 widowed seniors are living below the poverty line. These are men and women who have worked their entire lives building this country, but they are no longer able to put food on the table. Instead, they are waiting in long lines at their local food banks.

In fact, according to Global News, over 3,200 people are being served weekly at a Toronto food bank. Food banks are on the verge of collapse. The annual budget of \$1.8 million has now become a monthly budget. What will happen when these food banks have no choice but to turn away hungry people due to the Liberal government's out-of-control inflationary spending?

It is clear. The Liberals are out of touch and Canadian seniors are out of money. Our common sense Conservative leader will make life more affordable and fix what the Liberals have broken.

Oral Questions

SPORT IN CANADA

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was such an important day for Canadian sport. Our government announced reforms to the Canadian sport system that will improve governance and accountability, increase athlete engagement and decision making, and enhance safe sport practices right across our country.

Canadians love sport. It keeps us happy and healthy, and ensures that our communities are active, connected and engaged. The changes announced yesterday will ensure that sport continues to be a healthy, happy place for kids and all participants right across our country.

Through the community sport for all initiative, our government has partnered with organizations such as Participaction, Canadian Women and Sport, KidSport, Spirit North and Canadian Tire's Jumpstart, and the results are incredible. Hundreds of thousands of children have had opportunities to learn physical literacy skills, meet new friends and set new goals because of our government's investments in affordable and accessible community-level sport programs from coast to coast to coast.

Last month, I had the chance to go to Canmore, Alberta, to visit Spirit North to see first hand how it is working with first nations communities and leaders to bring sport and traditional activities to Stoney Nakoda youth and indigenous kids right across Canada. I love to see it.

The weather is great, so let us get out and play.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are unable to access basic services. Our streets are being roamed by violent, repeat offenders, and housing and food costs are out of control.

Where has the Prime Minister been? Well, so far this year, he has been on five luxury vacations. It is as if he does not care at all. Is the Prime Minister's only interest in Canada that Canadians are picking up the tab for these luxurious vacations?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Prime Minister did go on vacation at Christmas with his family to a friend's house.

Oral Questions

The obsession of members opposite with the Prime Minister personally is, of course, driven by a partisan interest, but there are a great number of things in front of the House that have an enormous impact on Canadians' day-to-day lives, whether it is the dental care plan, or the investments we are making in housing and lifting people out of homelessness. There are many better issues to be focusing on.

• (1120)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, these Liberals are out of touch. Canadians are out of money, and often, we find the Prime Minister is out of the country. Meanwhile, an entire generation of Canadians has given up on ever owning a home. While the Prime Minister is jet-setting and spending three months' average rent on a single night in a hotel room, Canadians are wondering whether they will be able to keep the lights on and feed their families.

When will the Prime Minister step out of the luxury suite and step up for Canadians?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Housing and Diversity and Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reason they are focusing on the Prime Minister is to cover up for their lack of a housing plan.

We have been working hard, every single day, to make sure more and more Canadians have access to a safe and affordable place to call home. We have put investments in place to help renters pay the rent. We have put investments in place to build more supply, and what did they do? They voted against it. They come to the House to focus on the Prime Minister, and then they pretend to care about housing.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one has ever spent as much to achieve so little as the housing minister and these Liberals. The only thing that seems to get them out of bed in the morning to support their Prime Minister is to make sure his next taxpayer-funded trip is paid for by Canadians. He has been out of the country on vacation, with his most recent one being paid for by a donor to the Trudeau Foundation. Now he is tuning up the jet to head off again next week.

While drug use and crime rage, and food bank use soars, is the Prime Minister ready to park the taxpayer-funded jet to step up for Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a time when we are facing the existential challenge of climate change, and at a time when we are dealing with the worst inflation crisis this planet has faced in a very long time, does it not matter that Canada is leading the world? We are ahead of the G7. We are ahead of the average of both the G7, the G20, the eurozone and Japan. We now have it down below 5%.

The member is now suggesting that the Prime Minister going to the G7 to represent our nation among G7 nations and talk about the future is a vacation. They are suggesting that he should not be there, which shows just out of touch the party across the way is.

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government is really out of touch with reality. After eight years, everything costs more. What is more, the government is planning to impose an additional tax of \$0.41 per litre of gas. Farmers are struggling as a result of the rising costs of inputs and fuel. Processors and distributors are also frustrated. The result is that 1.5 million Canadians are using food banks. In my riding, there has been a 27.5% increase in the use of the Moisson Beauce food bank. That is unprecedented.

The government's role is simple. It is to ensure that Canadians can put food on their tables. When will the Prime Minister understand that enough is enough with the new taxes?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should know just how much our government is doing to help farmers.

Right now, we are enhancing and improving the advance payments program, which enables farmers to get interest-free loans of up to \$350,000. We also enhanced the program for good agricultural practices on the farm. Most recently, we signed a partnership agreement with the Government of Quebec and all of the provinces and territories. That represents \$367 million for Quebec.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister must still have her head in the clouds, because what Canadians are looking for are tangible solutions to the cost of living crisis. This government would rather raise taxes and watch Canadians starve.

“Canada's Food Price Report 2023” is very clear. A family of four will have to pay \$1,065 more for food.

When will the government show some common sense and commit to not imposing new taxes?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know if my colleague heard, but last week, I announced a new call for proposals for the local food infrastructure fund. We are providing \$10 million to help our food banks, community gardens, community greenhouses, youth centres, seniors' programs and more. All those working in our local and regional food systems can submit their projects right now to be fully funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

*Oral Questions***IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP**

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to follow the Liberals when it comes to the Century Initiative and their goal of increasing the Canadian population to 100 million people. They say they reject the initiative, and yet they refuse to support our motion to reject the initiative. They say they deny the initiative's target of 500,000 people per year, and yet their own target for 2025 is 500,000 people. The Liberals say they are shutting the door on the Century Initiative, but in reality they are keeping it wide open and doing exactly as it says.

Do they take Quebeckers for fools?

• (1125)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be perfectly clear. The Century Initiative is not a government policy. The government does not endorse the findings of this independent group. The government does not have a goal of increasing Canada's population to 100 million people. We have announced our immigration thresholds for the next three years. These thresholds were set according to the needs of Canadians and Quebeckers.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is difficult to believe the Liberals when they say that they did not take a page from the Century Initiative, because their immigration targets are identical. However, we will give them the benefit of the doubt. We do not yet know the Liberal targets starting in 2026. Perhaps they will not copy the Century Initiative targets after 2025.

Can they promise Quebeckers that their target starting in 2026 will be lower than the Century Initiative target of 500,000 per year, or, on the contrary, will their silence be confirmation that they are indeed copying the Century Initiative?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will say it one more time and the Bloc needs to hear it. The Century Initiative is not a government policy. First of all, the Bloc Québécois needs to stop scaring people.

Second, the Bloc Québécois knows very well that the federal government gives the most money to Quebec for the francization of immigrants. We are there with more than \$700 million per year to work with the Quebec government and to ensure that immigrants who arrive in Quebec can speak French. Of course, on this side of the House, we will always be there to defend Quebec's interests.

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[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the poppy helps us commemorate the sacrifice and bravery of the women and men who served in the Canadian Armed Forces. Canadians are proud to wear their poppy in remembrance, but not Conservative premier, Danielle Smith. She is picking a fight with veterans to try to score political points for herself. It is shameful.

Will the minister stand up for veterans and condemn the remarks of Danielle Smith?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is so important that we pay respect to our veterans. We have, and we always will. What we have to do is pay respect to our veterans and make sure we support our veterans. I can assure the member, on both issues, that this is what the government is doing and will continue to do.

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind folks to make sure that questions and comments are about federal government issues.

The hon. member for Edmonton Strathcona.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's corporate watchdog is responsible for ensuring that Canadian companies act ethically abroad, yet in five years, with an annual budget of millions of dollars, no investigations have been done to protect indigenous people, the environment or human rights. This failure allows bad companies to act with impunity. This harms Canada's reputation, and it makes Canadian companies complicit in rape, murder and the destruction of indigenous communities.

I put forward legislation that would strengthen corporate responsibility. When will the Liberals do what they always do, and copy the NDP work to fix the core?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the very heart of Canada's trade policy is an inclusive trade policy. At the very heart of our policy is responsible business conduct.

We, for the very first time, appointed an ombudsperson for corporate responsibility. She has set up shop, and she is doing her work. I look forward to working with my hon. colleague and all members to ensure that Canadian businesses operating anywhere around the world are operating with those high standards, led by Canadian values.

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PASSPORTS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, instead of addressing their passport and immigration backlogs, these Liberals are disrespecting our veterans and Canadian Armed Forces who protect our sovereignty and freedom. The government's useless and unnecessary passport redesign will erase the image of Vimy Ridge, the place where Canada came of age and first fought as a unified force. How do these Liberals explain to our veterans and Canadians who served our country that their sacrifice is not even worth one page on our passports?

Oral Questions

• (1130)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just for everyone to know, every 10 years the government updates its passports to protect Canadians from fraudsters and ensure it is hard to counterfeit the passports. This is not a partisan issue. This is about ensuring Canadians get the most secure and reliable passports that they can use around the world. The Conservatives just do not get that.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that member does not get it that we get to sit in here because of the sacrifice made by our veterans. The brave Canadians who served at Vimy Ridge are not the only ones who are getting caught up in the Liberals' cancel culture. From Terry Fox to Nellie McClung, famous Canadians are being erased from our passports. With our rich history and culture, one would think that the iconic beaver might actually get a mention in the passport, but instead the government went with a squirrel holding a nut. Does the government really think that all Canada has to offer are under-represented rodents?

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when one of the greatest darknesses ever known to man began to cast its shadow over Europe, Canada responded in an unprecedented way, sending tens upon tens of thousands of men into harm's way. Every single one of us viscerally and deeply understands the sacrifices that they made at that point and that those in our Armed Forces make now on behalf of democracy. There is not a person in this House who is not seized by that. How we honour it and the ways in which we recognize it may differ, but let us never question our commitment to that cause.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year, Canadians of all stripes travel to France to honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice at Vimy Ridge. I myself have made that trip to a place where Canada defined itself as a nation and a place that unites us all. That is why everyone was stunned, including veterans like me, that the government has decided that it needs to wipe it and other important symbols that define our nation from the new passport design. When will this minister reverse course and stop trying to erase Canadian history?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that we understand the history and what took place when my hon. colleague's party was in power. In fact, it slashed 1,000 employees from Veterans Affairs. It slashed funding to Veterans Affairs. It slashed funding to commemorative programs. It slashed 17% from the commemorative program, which includes Vimy Ridge. I was at Vimy Ridge a few weeks ago and I announced \$12 million to make sure that the commemorative program continues as it should. We have respected and always will respect veterans and make sure we attend to our veterans as properly as we possibly can.

Mr. Fraser Tolmie (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was this Prime Minister who said veterans were asking for too much. The legion membership was disappointed, saying, "Removing that image was...a poor decision."

The Vimy Foundation, whose mission is to teach Canadians' shared history, said its members were disappointed, especially with the decision coming just a month after the 106th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Was the Minister of Veterans Affairs consulted on this change? Is he okay with his government's trying to erase the memory and sacrifices of Canadian veterans?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is this Prime Minister who decided we would reverse the track that the previous government was on in slashing veterans funds, closing veterans offices right across the country and slashing funds to commemorative programs in Europe. We have and this government has put \$2 billion extra per year in the pockets of veterans. We have to make sure that we treat veterans properly because that is why we are able to say what we like in this House. We have supported and will continue to support veterans.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is once again giving itself every right to do whatever it pleases, this time by having the nerve to erase symbols that Canadians hold dear from the newest version of the Canadian passport.

Instead of respecting the men and women who fought for our freedom, why is the government opposite attacking them by sacrificing the images that represent freedom for thousands of Canadians?

• (1135)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do we know what Conservatives are good at? They are good at pitting Canadians against each other through fear and divisive rhetoric.

We are updating the Canadian passport to protect Canadians against fraud, but the Conservatives are good at turning this issue into a cultural war. They are trying to bring a Trump-style war to Canada. We will not be swayed. We will continue to help our veterans, just as the minister said. Symbols will always be respected in Canada.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government's chosen design, which replaces historical symbols with heritage illustrations, is unacceptable. It is an affront and profoundly disrespectful to veterans.

Could the government show some respect and good judgment and reconsider the so-called modern design of future Canadian passports?

Oral Questions

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we are all keenly aware, a Canadian passport is one of the most reliable travel documents around. We can celebrate our history here in the House and across Canada in lots of ways, and we can also ensure that our passports are secure.

I think we might be losing sight of the main objective. Our passports have to be secure, which is exactly the task we set out to accomplish. We will keep commemorating Canada's history without compromising the safety and security of Canadian travellers.

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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims that he was unaware of the threats against the member for Wellington—Halton Hills in 2021. No one believes that, but let us say that it is true.

This morning, The Globe and Mail reported that CSIS had a file as thick as a brick against the expelled Chinese diplomat: taking of photographs, tracking dissidents for the Chinese regime, interfering with the staff of Liberal ministers to distance them from pro-Taiwan movements.

According to the paper, Global Affairs Canada and the Prime Minister's Office knew all that since 2020. Why did they wait until Monday to expel this diplomat?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, of course we are taking the issue of foreign interference very seriously. Of course we will never accept any form of foreign interference in our democracy.

That is why, after much reflection and evaluation of all the different potential consequences, we decided to take action based on principle and pragmatism. After summoning the ambassador, we decided to expel the Chinese diplomat in question and that was the right decision.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that the member for Wellington—Halton Hills is reassured.

The Liberals are once again asking us to not only believe that they knew nothing about the threats against the member for Wellington—Halton Hills in 2021, but also that they were not aware of the diplomat's other reprehensible actions, which were known about since 2020. We are even supposed to believe that the Liberals were not aware that CSIS had had the diplomat under close surveillance since 2019.

To be blunt, the Liberals have been exposed. They obviously do not want to shed light on or take action against Chinese interference. When will they launch an independent public commission of inquiry?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague has been following everything that has been done on this file over the past few weeks, then he knows very well that a special rapporteur has been appointed, former governor general David Johnston. He is doing his work and we are going to let him do that. He will make his recommendations shortly.

The Minister of Public Safety is following this file very closely. Given the facts that have come to light, we decided to declare the diplomat in question *persona non grata*. That was the right decision.

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for three years, the current government knew that a diplomat in Beijing's Toronto consulate was spying on Chinese Canadians and sending information back to Beijing's secret police. At the same time, the government knew that the very same diplomat was targeting a sitting member of Parliament and for three long years it did nothing.

Either the current Prime Minister is grossly incompetent or he just does not care about protecting Chinese Canadians from Beijing. Which is it?

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when a foreign government comes at one of us, it comes at all of us.

While Conservatives try to politicize and play partisan games, we are taking real action to keep Canadians safe. We have a government here that cares, a government that looks out for our Canadian values with empathy. We want to ensure that all members of Parliament move forward, working together with our families, friends or neighbours facing those very values.

In conclusion, I would say this to the members opposite: Let us all consider our responsibility to our citizenship versus our responsibility to our politics.

● (1140)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer is an insult to Chinese Canadians. This government expelled one Beijing diplomat after they got caught doing nothing.

It gets worse. According to national security sources, CSIS has provided this government with a list of other Beijing diplomats identified for expulsion because of the threat they pose to Chinese Canadians.

How many names are on that list?

How many more warnings from CSIS is this government ignoring?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we take the issues of foreign interference extremely seriously.

In fact, we took this issue so seriously that we started implementing measures as soon as we took office, something I would like to remind Canadians that Conservatives never did.

The Leader of the Opposition said, and members want to heckle because they do not want to hear the fact that the Leader of the Opposition actually admitted this, that when he was the democratic minister, he actually did not do anything to deal with foreign interference because he did not think it was in his political interest.

Oral Questions

We do not believe in that. We are going to take action to protect our democracy.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the foreign affairs minister is too embarrassed to answer these questions.

We have learned that Beijing diplomat Wei Zhao has been under intense CSIS surveillance for three years. We know he was targeting a member of Parliament two years ago. It took a front-page story in *The Globe and Mail* for the government to finally act by expelling the diplomat this week.

What else have we learned? We have learned that her department has known about it since 2020.

Why did the Prime Minister allow this agent to operate in Canada under diplomatic cover for three years? How many Canadians were victimized?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague forgot to pay attention yesterday and listen to what was happening in committee.

Jenni Byrne, Pierre Poilievre's chief strategist, his confidante, the person who thinks of everything necessary—

The Deputy Speaker: I want to remind members that we cannot mention the names of members in the House.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, allow me to repeat that. Jenni Byrne, the official opposition leader's chief strategist, his confidante, the person he trusts, told the committee yesterday that when the official opposition leader was minister of democratic institutions, he did nothing about foreign interference.

We are not going to take any lessons from our Conservative colleagues, and we are going to be there to act in the interests of Canadians.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is pathetic.

The *Globe and Mail* article is what led to the diplomat's expulsion, even though the Department of Foreign Affairs knew about this for three years. We are talking about her department.

More shockingly, we now know that the Department of Foreign Affairs has had, since 2020, and I quote, “a list of diplomats that could be considered for expulsion because of their involvement in foreign interference and 'threat' activities outside of their regular diplomatic duties”.

There has only been one expulsion, even though there is a list of Beijing operatives who continue their dirty work in this country under diplomatic cover, because the Prime Minister refuses to act.

When will the Prime Minister take the threat seriously and protect all Canadians from the threats of diplomats, who are still in their posts just because they want to be?

[English]

Hon. Mark Holland (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I was in opposition as the critic for public safety and we were watching the horrors that happened to Mr. El Maati, Mr. Almalki and Mr. Nureddin, and we were reviewing the recommendations of Justice O'Connor and Justice Iacobucci, and there were critical calls, then, for the government to act, to create an oversight committee of parliamentarians that could look into every aspect of security and intelligence, the Conservatives refused to act.

Even in the wake of those tragedies, they refused to move, year after year after year.

When our government came in, we made sure that happened, and that is why they can see every piece of intelligence.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Ontario's Greenbelt is a world-class program that protects critical farmland, wetlands and forests, yet the Ontario premier, Doug Ford, thinks the Greenbelt is a scam.

Well, do we know what else some people think is a scam? Inviting developers to donate to one's daughter's wedding is a scam. Handing over the Greenbelt to these Conservative-connected donors is a scam.

When will the federal government take action under the Impact Assessment Act to prevent the corrupt Doug Ford developers scam from further selling out our environment?

• (1145)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we can be proud of in this place is that we put in a national urban park, Rouge National Urban Park, which is an amazing jewel for our city.

It is something that we have worked on and that we protect. It has species that are very important and endangered, and that we protect within that space.

We have started a study, through the Impact Assessment Agency, to make sure that we are taking into account all possible impacts on that park and we will always be there to support our urban green spaces, which are so important to us.

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HEALTH

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to a media report, nurses are leaving the public health care system in droves and returning through private job placement agencies.

The health care crisis is getting worse under the Liberals' watch. Poor work conditions, low wages, forced overtime and high patient-to-nurse ratios are causing burnout. The structural problems must be addressed, and budget 2023 missed the mark.

Oral Questions

Will the Liberals work with the provinces to ensure that nurses get the respect, resources and support they need so that patients can get the care they deserve?

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge that this week is National Nursing Week. I would like to thank every nurse from coast to coast to coast, including our Minister of Seniors. Nurses absolutely do the most important work, and it is a very thankless position sometimes, so I would like to thank them.

To the substantive question, nurses deserve fair wages. They deserve a safe environment for work, and they deserve better work conditions. This is why budget 2023 is investing \$198.6 billion into our health care system, including better wages for those who care for the most vulnerable.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in recent days, many Canadians have expressed deep concern over the developing political crisis in Pakistan. This is in the wake of the violent arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan.

Thanks to our strong people-to-people ties, most Canadians have a family member, friend or neighbour with deep links to Pakistan. There is real concern about what this arrest means for loved ones overseas and for the region generally.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell the House what the Government of Canada is doing about these events?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for Pierrefonds—Dollard, a fantastic riding, for his important question.

The recent images of the arrest of Imran Khan are deeply troubling. We are very preoccupied with the political crisis that is happening right now in Pakistan. We are monitoring the situation very closely, and I am receiving regular updates.

Of course, Canada will always stand up for human rights, for the rule of law, for democratic values and for free and fair elections. We will continue to engage on this very issue with Pakistan and, of course, with the community here in Canada.

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CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past month, a constituent's bill for natural gas was \$168.50. The federal carbon tax was \$30.78. This is more than the individual charges for delivery, transportation costs and HST were. Under the government, it is evident that life costs more for Canadians, with the rising costs of gas, heat and food. How are regular Canadians supposed to keep up?

When will the Prime Minister get rid of the carbon tax and prioritize the financial needs of Canadians?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and

Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for that question, because it gives me an opportunity to talk a bit about how carbon pricing works.

To be clear, the way carbon pricing works is that every bit of money that comes through the carbon price is returned to the province; it goes to the families in the province, as well as to the hospitals, schools and cities in the province of Ontario. Every penny goes back to support people in the member's community.

In addition, as a government, we are providing supports to Canadians, be it through the dental benefit, be it through child care or be it through the Canada child benefit. We are there to support Canadians.

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THE ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the cost of government is driving up the cost of living, and now the Liberals plan a 41¢-a-litre tax on gas, groceries and home heating. Liberal deficits are driving up inflation. This means that interest rates are higher, making mortgages more expensive and harder to qualify for. Prices have doubled, down payments have doubled, rents have doubled and new housing construction is falling because of high interest rates and red tape.

When will the government stop increasing taxes, stop its inflationary deficit and let the builders build?

● (1150)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a little hard to take Conservatives seriously as they talk about affordability, when we have several affordability measures that are in front of the finance committee right now and instead of talking about those measures, they have turned them away. They have been filibustering for 23 hours. Food banks were scheduled to visit us. We wanted to hear from them. The Bloc and the NDP wanted to hear from them. The Cons wanted to talk to themselves.

Stop the filibuster and let us get to work.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's tax-and-spend policies are driving up the cost of everything, and now he has plans to push the tax on gas to 41¢ a litre. What happened to his promises to help the middle class? Brandon from Langley wrote to me recently and said, "I am one of many middle-class citizens getting pushed down to the lower class".

Oral Questions

My question for the Prime Minister is this: Will he reverse course, stop the never-ending tax increases and finally stand up for the middle class?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing we know for certain is this: When it comes to Canadians, Conservatives will always hold them back. They voted against the CCB, they voted against dental care and they voted against rental supports; they voted against everything, including child care at a certain point. They tore up the agreements from the previous government when we were in power.

What we know about Conservatives is that, during their time, there were 2.7 million more Canadians in poverty than there are today. We have 450,000 more children out of poverty today than when they were in power. They keep holding Canadians back. We are lifting them up.

* * *

[Translation]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot take it anymore. We have said it over and over in many different ways. They are fed up. What is this Prime Minister doing? He is planning to increase the carbon tax again. Contrary to what he says, it will have an impact across Canada, including in Quebec. Quebec is not separate from the rest of the country, it is part of it. Everyone will inevitably be affected.

This confirms that costs for farmers and truckers will increase again. What will happen in the meantime? Ultimately, everyone ends up paying.

Will the Prime Minister wake up and abandon these disastrous policies?

Hon. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can reassure my colleague opposite by saying that the government will continue to work tirelessly to help Canadians. In budget 2023, we have already put measures in place to tax the wealthiest Canadians. We are proposing a 2% tax on repurchases of equity, and we will tax share dividends received by banks.

We are ready to do all that, but the Conservatives always block our measures, obfuscate and filibuster. I urge them to get to work.

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JUSTICE

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there are 85 empty judges' seats in federal courts, and this is resulting in "stays of proceedings" against criminals. That is the warning of Supreme Court Chief Justice Richard Wagner in a letter obtained by CBC.

Liberal ministers must answer for those delays, because they always interfered in the appointment process. They filter candidates based on data from Elections Canada to find good Liberal donors. They consult other Liberals to find out who is part of the family.

When will they stop wasting their time with partisanship? When will they appoint the missing judges based on their qualifications?

[English]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has appointed more than 600 judges since November 2015. We appoint judges to the bench more efficiently than any other government, yet we know it is still not enough. We are working to fulfill vacancies in various provinces. We spoke with members of the judiciary, as well as the bar, to encourage more people to apply to the bench.

We will continue to make appointments at a steady rate, and the number of vacancies will continue to decline.

• (1155)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the delays in judicial appointments remind us of that coincidence in 2019. By the end of the process, out of six judges appointed in New Brunswick, five had personal connections to the current Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities. There were three of his donors, his brother-in-law's wife and his neighbour.

Obviously it is harder to appoint judges these days. People can no longer count on the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities. He has already made his contribution.

My question is this: Would justice not be better served by an impartial, independent process held far from ministers and based strictly on merit?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that the appointments are non-partisan and independent. It is very important because we are a country of rule of law. I think that everyone here agrees on that. It is also a priority of ours for the bench to be representative of the population.

We will work with the justice system. We will also work with the different representatives in society. The current Minister of Justice has appointed more judges than any other justice minister in the history of Canada. It is a priority and will continue to be.

[English]

HEALTH

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, disturbing reports from the National Post show that the Liberal-NDP approach of safe drug supply is actually subsidizing harm. It states that the government's approach has "caused the street price of hydromorphone (the primary opioid dispensed at safer supply sites) to drop by an estimated 70-95 per cent in cities with safer supply programs".

This illegal resale market is flooding streets with dangerous drugs. When will the Liberals stop these black markets and end their harmful drug policies?

[Translation]

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government obviously takes the diversion of controlled substances very seriously. This is a deeply concerning issue with regard to all prescription medications, not only those prescribed through safer supply programs.

Health professionals, including those who manage safer supply services, have to follow federal rules on the secure handling of controlled substances, including measures designed to prevent diversion.

We will continue to monitor this issue and take appropriate action as necessary.

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is disturbing to see the member not take seriously the number of addiction and drug overdose deaths, which is continuing to rise.

It has been reported that patients take their government-supplied drugs off-site, fuelling a new black market that is driving street drug prices down. Physicians are saying that this is even leading to a rise in new addictions, particularly among youth and individuals in recovery.

When will the Liberals stop fuelling addiction and stop their harmful drug policies?

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we take an evidence-based approach to solving the addictions epidemic and the poisoned opioid crisis that is having such a devastating impact on our communities.

It has really been alarming over the last couple of weeks to hear the members in the Conservative Party blaming addicts, people who use drugs, for this crisis. We take an evidence-based, science-first approach. The Conservative fact-free approach is absolutely atrocious, and it is going to lead to more harm.

Oral Questions

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal government, the Prime Minister is out of touch, and Canadians are out of money.

Once fully implemented, the Liberal carbon tax would cost Canadians an additional 41¢ for a litre of gas, driving up the cost of groceries even higher and sending even more Canadians to the food bank for their next meal.

When is the Liberal government going to cancel its inflation-causing carbon tax?

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing I have a hard time with in these questions is that carbon pricing is in fact a market mechanism. It encourages industry to be more efficient and to reduce their emissions. That actually makes them more competitive in a world where that is exactly what people are looking for.

I would expect the members opposite to be supportive of anything we could do to help our industries be at the cutting edge of green technologies, which, by the way, we are.

* * *

[Translation]

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, forests and trees purify the air that we breathe, improve water quality, promote biodiversity and help cool down our urban centres. Their ability to capture and store carbon is an effective natural way to combat climate change.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Climate Change tell the House what the government is doing to promote and support new tree planting projects?

● (1200)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

We know that nature is one of our best allies in fighting climate change.

On Wednesday, at the Montreal Climate Summit, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change announced a \$40-million investment in three projects under the federal two billion trees program, which will allow for 275,000 trees to be planted in Montreal and Vaudreuil-Dorion.

The planting of more than a quarter of a million trees in Montreal will undoubtedly contribute to making the city happier and the planet healthier.

*Oral Questions**[English]***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Japan and South Korea, tremendous allies and trading partners, are choosing cheap Russian crab over crab caught by our fishermen. As a result, the Newfoundland and Labrador snow crab industry is at a standstill. In 2022, according to The Japan Times, Japan imported a record 1.6 billion Canadian dollars' worth of Russian seafood. The biggest import in that category was snow crab, at 40 million pounds.

Why has the Liberal government failed to convince our Asian friends to ban Russian crab, defund dictators and support jobs for Canadian fishermen?

Mr. Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is known for its sustainable, ethical and premium-quality snow crab, and it is thanks to Canada's hard-working fish harvesters. That is why we are taking a team Canada approach, working closely with industry and Atlantic provinces and raising these concerns with our Japanese counterparts. The government has proven this time and time again: We will stand up for the Canadian fish and seafood sector and the fishers who work in it to help export top-quality products around the world.

Mr. Clifford Small (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the government has proven time and time again is that it is a complete failure. The U.S. banned the importing of Russian crab in June 2022. The Liberal government has been aware of the continued Japanese and Korean purchasing of snow crab from Russia, and was warned last October of the effect it would have. Our trade deficit with Japan and South Korea combined is at least \$5 billion.

While the Prime Minister is jet-setting to Japan and South Korea next week, will he convince our allies to follow suit with the U.S. to ban Russian crab, defund dictators and support paycheques for Canadian fishermen?

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of International Trade, Export Promotion, Small Business and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I applaud the passion for fishermen, because we do too, on this side. We stand up for Canadian fishers. We stand up for Canadian industries. We have issued sanctions against Russia. We stand up for Ukraine. Absolutely, this is an issue that is on our radar.

I am not going to take any lessons from the Conservatives when it comes to good trade deals and standing strong so we can have terrific trade with our trading partners all around the world.

* * *

CORRECTIONAL SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, meeting notes obtained via access to information reveal that the union representing prison staff is alarmed that, at Correctional Service of Canada's existing prison farm, staff are required to work with inmates after hours in unsafe conditions. This includes being alone and unaccompanied, and being denied the personal paging devices necessary to call for immediate backup. The union's fears include the potential for assault and hostage taking.

If the government cannot provide safe working conditions at its existing, relatively small, prison farm, how will it do so at its planned vast, new goat- and cow-milking operation?

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a good opportunity to reflect on a lot of the work the minister is doing, this being part of it, in working with our partners to ensure a lot of what the member brings up is being dealt with.

* * *

SPORT

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know the importance of sports for the development of children, fostering physical fitness, team work, discipline and resilience while also promoting overall health and well-being. Furthermore, our Canadian athletes contribute to our national unity, cultural diversity and pride.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Sport tell the House, the parents who have children participating in sports and our athletes at the national and international levels about the strong measures the government is taking to ensure the responsible cultural change Canadians want to see in sports, a culture that will benefit the safety and well-being of our athletes and lead to more success as a system?

● (1205)

Mr. Adam van Koevorden (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health and to the Minister of Sport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a really important day in Canadian sport. Our government announced reforms to the Canadian sport system that will contribute to sustainable culture change through improved governance and accountability; increased athlete engagement and decision-making; enhanced safe sport measures right across our country; better diversity and athlete representation on boards, with term limits; and resources for athletes to ensure they get the governance training they need in order to be active and productive members of each board.

I would like to thank every athlete and participant who has stepped up bravely to tell their story, contributing to these sport reforms. This has been a heavy lift and a team effort. I want to thank everybody involved. It is a great day for Canadian sport.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Sudanese Canadians in my riding, Einam and Hani, have been pleading with the government for help. Their families are stuck in Sudan amidst violence, and the government is nowhere to be found. The government's disorganized evacuation program left people behind with its restrictive criteria. Now Einam and Hani agonize over whether they will ever see or hear from their loved ones again.

Will the government expand and broaden the special immigration measures to allow Sudanese Canadians to bring their loved ones to safety?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Sudan is highly volatile, and we are deeply concerned for the safety of Sudanese people. That is why we have announced that we are introducing immigration measures to support Sudanese nationals in Canada who are unable to return home. We are also providing facilitative measures and expediting the processing of their applications, free of charge.

We are ready to help the people of Sudan and help their families here.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, newcomers to Canada who apply for permanent residency wait for months on end for the decision that will give them this coveted status. When they finally receive an email telling them that they have been accepted, needless to say that they are overjoyed.

However, there is one small problem: Even though it is now 2023 and despite the technology and the number of civil servants we have, the government takes between four and eight months to print and mail the permanent resident card that allows them to get the services they need and are entitled to.

Can the Prime Minister tell us if there is any hope that a simple directive will be sent to the department to provide the residency card at the same time as the confirmation?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my colleague for his question.

Let me be very clear: We are doing everything we can to reduce wait times in processing applications. We have tripled the number of work permits for clients. We have returned to our 60-day service standard for new study permits, and in 2022 we welcomed more than 437,000 new permanent residents, a record number since 1913. This is good news for Canada.

Our modernization of the Canadian immigration system continues, and we continue our good work to return to our usual service

Points of Order

standards. We will continue to help people who want to come to Canada as quickly as possible.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period today, the member for Burnaby North—Seymour used a pejorative term in referring to another political party here. I encourage you to look at the record.

If this is the new standard in the House, I am looking forward to the various terms with which I will be referring to his party.

The Deputy Speaker: We will review that, but I will remind folks that we have the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, the Bloc Québécois, the New Democratic Party and the Green Party. They all have their names.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Let us not just have a random accusation. If I said something, let us hear what I said.

The Deputy Speaker: At the end of the question, the hon. member said “Cons” rather than “Conservatives”. Maybe the member should retract it and we can move on.

Mr. Terry Beech: I will retract it, and if I hurt the member's feelings, I truly apologize.

• (1210)

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind members to use the best terms they possibly can.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was a comment during question period that I want to clarify.

Talking about our nation's veterans and how we support them in public is absolutely a matter for discussion in this House. The poppy, that powerful symbol of support for the sacrifice of our nation's veterans, is also a very appropriate issue to raise in the House. Conservative Premier Danielle Smith's despicable comments about poppies and veterans are absolutely appropriate to raise in the House, and Conservatives, frankly, should be ashamed of themselves.

The Deputy Speaker: I would give a full reminder that questions about things that are important to Canadians and to the Government of Canada, not governments of provinces, are to be asked in the House.

On a point of order, the hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Damien Kurek: Mr. Speaker, this is directly related to the business of the federal government. A number of times, a parliamentary secretary, in response to questions on the carbon tax, said, and I am paraphrasing, that Canadians get back every penny they pay into that program.

I ask for unanimous consent to table the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report, which definitively proves that the Liberals are wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: I am hearing a lot of nays on this, so we will move on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and consistent with the current policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaty entitled “International Tropical Timber Agreement, 2006”, done at Geneva on January 27, 2006.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 21 petitions.

These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, in relation to Bill C-45, an act to amend the First Nations Fiscal Management Act, to make consequential amendments to other acts, and to make a clarification relating to another act.

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

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence, entitled “Main Estimates 2023-24: Vote 1 under Communications Security Establishment, Votes 1, 5, 10 and 15 under Department of National Defence, Vote 1 under Military Grievances External Re-

view Committee, Vote 1 under Military Police Complaints Commission, Vote 1 under Office of the Intelligence Commissioner”.

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

BRAIN INJURY

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a big honour for me to table this petition today. The petitioners recognize that there are approximately 165,000 new cases of brain injury annually in Canada, and that health and community service providers require more education regarding the intersection of brain injury, mental health and addiction.

They note that there have been over 21,000 hospitalizations for opioid-related poisonings that have resulted in hypoxic brain injuries between January 2016 and June 2020 in Canada, an estimated 60% of brain injury survivors suffer from anxiety or depression, their suicide risk increases by 400%, and they face a 200% increase in risk of struggling with addictions after sustaining a brain injury.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling on the government to support my bill, Bill C-277, to develop a national strategy to support and improve brain injury awareness, prevention and treatment, as well as the rehabilitation and recovery of persons living with a brain injury.

* * *

● (1215)

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the government's responses to Questions Nos. 1356 to 1360 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

[Text]

Question No. 1356—**Mr. Alex Ruff:**

With regard to British pensioners living in Canada and impacted by the United Kingdom's (UK) frozen pensions policy, under which the UK government does not index pensions: (a) have any ministers raised this issue with British officials since November 4, 2015, and, if so, for each instance, what were the (i) date, (ii) context, (iii) UK government's commitments to act, if any; and (b) for all instances in (a), which minister raised the issue and with which British official?

(Return tabled)

*Government Orders***Question No. 1357—Mr. John Brassard:**

With regard to government expenditures related to vacations by the Prime Minister outside of Canada, since November 4, 2015, broken down by each vacation: (a) what was the date and location of each trip; (b) for each vacation in (a), what were the total costs incurred by the government, including those incurred by security and support staff, for (i) accommodations, (ii) per diems, (iii) other expenses, broken down by type of expense; (c) what was the total amount of expenses related to the trips, such as flights, incurred by the government that were reimbursed by the Prime Minister; and (d) what number of travellers were represented by the reimbursement amount in (c)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1358—Mr. Fraser Tolmie:

With regard to government expenditures related to the Prime Minister's residence and family that are reimbursed or partially reimbursed to taxpayers, since 2016, broken down by year: (a) what was the total amount spent on (i) food, (ii) cable and internet services, (iii) mobile devices and data plans; and (b) what was the total amount reimbursed by the Prime Minister for expenses incurred on (i) food, (ii) cable and internet services, (iii) mobile devices and data plans?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1359—Ms. Michelle Ferreri:

With regard to the government's child care initiatives: (a) what is the government's estimate on the number of children in the age range to be covered by child-care; and (b) what number and percentage of the children in (a) does the government estimate (i) are currently enrolled in \$10 day childcare, (ii) receive their child-care from other sources, broken down by source (relatives, faith-based daycares, etc.)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 1360—Mrs. Anna Roberts:

With regard to the government's response to the recent increase in violent stabbings in the Greater Toronto Area: what specific measures will the government be implementing before the summer to protect people from the criminals committing these stabbings, and, for each, on what date will the measure come into effect?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

AN ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I hope that Bill C-13 marks the beginning of a change in the Official Languages Act and in federal language policy, arguably the main driver of anglicization in Quebec, which is home to 90% of Canada's francophones. Quebec is also called the heart of the francophonie in North America.

I hope that this is a sign that awareness is growing in English Canada and that it reinvigorates a movement of affirmation of the francophone and Acadian communities and a movement of national liberation in Quebec. To ensure the future of our language, our culture and what makes us a unique people, we must be freed from the yoke of a federal policy that prevents us from making French the official and common language and from exercising our right to self-determination.

It is vital to know the past in order to understand the present. To find our way in the future, we also need to know our history. That is why I am going to talk a little bit about the Official Languages Act first and then move on to Bill C-13 and what we still have to accomplish in the future if we really want to secure our future and counter the decline of French.

Quebec poet and politician Gérald Godin, whom one of my NDP colleagues quoted recently, said this in 1983:

The federal policy on French in Canada can generally be summarized as follows: strengthen French where it is on its last legs; remain passive where there are real chances for it to assert itself and weaken it where it is strong.

Unfortunately, that is still true today.

After a majority of francophones outside Quebec were assimilated by measures taken in all the Canadian provinces, by laws and regulations that outlawed teaching French in school and using it in provincial legislatures, the government of the Canadian majority adopted legislation designed to strengthen English in Quebec and provide not quite enough support for francophone and Acadian communities to stave off their gradual anglicization.

The Official Languages Act primarily seeks to support English in Quebec because Pierre Elliott Trudeau decided that the federal government would support official language minorities in each province, and coincidentally, in Quebec, that is the anglophones. He refused to support André Laurendeau, who proposed special status for Quebec. To Mr. Laurendeau, that was essential. He looked to the Belgian and Swiss models, which are based on the principle of territoriality, but Mr. Trudeau rejected this proposal because of his anti-nationalist ideology.

The territoriality-based approach corresponds to one of the two major language policy models in the world. It seeks to establish an official and common language on a given territory. In contrast, the Official Languages Act is based on the principle of personality or, in other words, it is a policy of institutional bilingualism that seeks to give individuals the right to choose French or English. That is why we say that this type of policy encourages people to choose the language of the majority under the principle of personality.

Guillaume Rousseau, a professor of language law in Quebec, said that “virtually all language policy experts around the world believe that only a territoriality-based approach can guarantee the survival and development of a minority language”. Based on the principle of personality, the Official Languages Act seeks to impose English as the official language in Quebec.

Government Orders

The other main principle underlying the Official Languages Act is the presumed symmetry or equivalence between anglophones in Quebec and the francophone and Acadian minorities. Such symmetry made no sense from the start. It contradicted the scientific observations of the Laurendeau-Dunton commission, which established that, even in Quebec, francophones were disadvantaged from both an economic and institutional perspective.

• (1220)

Francophone workers ranked 12th out of 14 linguistic groups in terms of income. The economic status of francophones in Quebec did subsequently improve. It has come a long way, though not all the way. According to Statistics Canada data, in 2016, the average income of all full-time workers with French as their mother tongue was \$7,820 less than that of anglophones.

There are all sorts of debates, but when we take indicators that are less sensitive to income disparities and that include, for example, a large proportion of immigrants, of course we come up with different results. The fact remains that members of the historical English-speaking community still occupy a very favourable position.

While laws prohibiting French schools did not apply in Quebec, French-language education has long been underfunded and severely restricted in areas such as Pontiac. It is particularly appalling that, in those days, the Official Languages Act and the official languages in education program were designed to support English almost exclusively in Quebec. The injustice was even more blatant for the francophone and Acadian communities that had suffered when French schools were banned.

A study by the Commission nationale des parents francophones showed that, between 1970 and 1988, anglophones in Quebec received 47%, or \$1.1 billion, of the total funding available through the Government of Canada's official languages program for anglophone educational institutions. English second-language instruction in Quebec received 9.5%, and 14.5% went to immersion schools outside Quebec. The Commission nationale des parents francophones said that it was truly astonished to realize that 71.5% of the funds ultimately went to the majority. Only 28.5% of the funds were allocated to French first-language instruction outside Quebec. In the meantime, as the commission's report mentions, a significant number of francophones in every province except Quebec were still being denied access to education in their language and were being assimilated at breakneck speed.

In his statement on official languages, Pierre Elliott Trudeau said that "French-speaking Canadians outside of Quebec should have the same rights as English-speaking Canadians in Quebec". However, his official languages in education program did just the opposite. It reinforced the privileged position of Quebec anglophones and generally left francophone educational institutions outside Quebec sorely disadvantaged.

Today, federal funding is more evenly distributed among the provinces, but the majority of funding continues to go to immersion schools outside Quebec. In Quebec, funding continues to be allocated almost exclusively to English schools.

According to census data, Quebec anglophones appear to exhibit more of the characteristics of a majority than a minority in terms of their linguistic vitality. While mother-tongue anglophones represented 8.8% of the population in Quebec in 2021, 43.3% of anglophones chose to speak English at home. English's share of overall gains through assimilation is 50.8%.

With just under 50% of immigrants choosing to speak French at home in 2021, the proportion of francophones continues to decline in Quebec, as well as in Canada as a whole. We would need about 90% of immigrants to speak French at home just to maintain the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec. This corresponds to the relative demographic weight of francophones and anglophones.

It is not surprising that all of the projection studies that have been done point in the same direction, that is, the decline of French. In 2021, not only did Statistics Canada confirm this trend, but the results also show that the decline of French in Quebec has been underestimated.

• (1225)

Let us recall the founding principles of the Official Languages Act. I spoke earlier about one of them, the principle of the minority status of anglophones, which does not take scientific data into account. At first glance, we can see that this principle is completely ludicrous in terms of political and legal power. As long as Quebec stays within Canada, it will be subject to the will of the Canadian majority, which is anglophone and which elects the federal government, with its predominant legislative and spending power. That is what we are seeing here.

In 1982, the federal government and the anglophone provinces imposed a Constitution on Quebec that has never been endorsed by any Quebec government, and pursuant to which the most important enforcement measures of the Charter of the French Language were weakened. Let us recall that 74 of the 75 Quebec MPs were Liberals and that all but one of them voted in favour of that. That speaks volumes about the objective of the Liberal Party at the time.

In an opinion requested by stakeholders on the language of commercial signs in Quebec, the UN Human Rights Committee affirmed in 1993 that English-speaking citizens of Canada cannot be considered a linguistic minority because they are part of the Canadian majority.

I have compiled data from the public accounts of Canada. It shows beyond any doubt that the vast majority of funds allocated to Quebec contribute to anglicization and strengthen the so-called anglophone minority. More than 95% of this funding is allocated to English in Quebec. Since 1969, more than \$3.4 billion has been allocated for English in Quebec, even though the anglophone community was already in a privileged situation with overfunded institutions. This only increased its advantage.

In several areas, such as post-secondary education and health and social services, English institutions are also significantly overfunded by the Quebec government. In addition to programs that support the official languages, the federal government heavily overfunds English institutions, such as universities and health care facilities, through its infrastructure projects and research funds.

As Frédéric Lacroix has pointed out, the institutional network is a zero-sum game. The anglophone and francophone networks both serve the same population and are both funded from the same budget. What one group gets, the other must do without. Several anglophone lobby groups have said it is not a zero-sum game, but if anyone tries to touch their budget, all of a sudden it does become a zero-sum game, and they react quite aggressively.

In 2017, nearly 40% of federal university funding went to English universities. This institutional overfunding of anglophone establishments contributes significantly to the anglicization of newcomers, including allophones and even an increasing number of francophones in Quebec.

The federal language policy can be regarded as the blind spot in Quebec's language debate. Rather than challenging the Quebec government directly by constantly opposing its efforts to make French the common public language, the feds prefer to encourage anglophone lobby groups to form. It has even helped shape and finance them. These organizations intervene to weaken the Charter of the French Language through legal challenges funded by the federal court challenges program, which was established, coincidentally, in 1978, after Bill 101 was enacted.

● (1230)

These organizations have a very important impact. We must not minimize that. For example, they constantly favour services in English and institutional bilingualism, which makes it really difficult for the Government of Quebec to make French the common and official language.

For example, when speaking in support of French signage, René Lévesque said that, in a way, every bilingual sign tells immigrants that there are two languages in Quebec, French and English, and that they can choose whichever one they like. It tells anglophones that they do not need to learn French because everything is translated. We saw it with the official languages action plan. This is still happening.

The government really needs to rethink that funding. We saw it with the support of federal institutions that define anglophones using the criterion of first official language spoken, which includes 33% of immigrants. These organizations work to diminish the place of francophones with the support of the federal government. We also know that the Quebec Community Groups Network, or QCGN, and the 40-some organizations that are directly affiliated with it often use speech that blames francophones and victimizes anglophones. Josée Legault referred to this as xenophobic speech, and it is very effective in influencing the public opinion of the anglophone majority in Canada and abroad.

We saw many examples of just that in the challenge to Bill 96 and here in the debates over Bill C-13. The member for Mount Royal showed up with opinions that essentially echoed those of the QCGN. This former president of Alliance Quebec argues that services in English for English-speaking immigrants are a fundamental right. We also saw another member repeat the QCGN's disinformation, which said that Bill 96 aims to prohibit health services in English, which is absolutely not true.

Government Orders

The fact remains that there are positive aspects to Bill C-13, which acknowledges that “Quebec's Charter of the French Language provides that French is the official language of Quebec” and that “the goal...is to protect, strengthen and promote that language”. In addition, there were all the last-minute amendments, following a compromise between the Quebec and Canadian governments to amend the new law on the use of French within federally regulated private businesses. Those amendments included significant changes in favour of the asymmetry between French and English.

These amendments ensure that the federal legislation incorporates several clauses inspired by the Charter of the French Language, such as generalizing the use of French at all levels of a business. There are other clauses that aim to protect the right to work in French in Quebec. It is an asymmetrical measure that applies in Quebec and in regions with a strong concentration of francophones, which corresponds to the territorial model Bill 101 was based on. It could also apply in other regions, alongside other language planning models for francophones outside Quebec.

Since culture and the French language are at the heart of what makes Quebec a nation, the Bloc Québécois is working very hard and being pragmatic to achieve every possible gain. The recognition of the Charter of the French Language and the asymmetrical elements included in Bill C-13 represent as much progress as we believe possible for the time being. That is why the Bloc Québécois will be voting in favour of Bill C-13.

The fact remains that the Official Languages Act will continue to exert an anglicizing influence on Quebec. We will continue to work to amend the Official Languages Act to make it no longer apply to Quebec, so that we can truly make French our common and official language. We will take the Official Languages Act out of the blind spot where it hides in public debate in Quebec.

I think people will have to face facts: Unless we get results fast, the only solution is for Quebec to become its own country.

● (1235)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that you look quite dashing in that chair.

I would like to thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for his speech. I would also like to thank the Bloc Québécois for supporting Bill C-13, which will really make a difference in communities across the country.

I have a specific question for my colleague.

Recently, we have seen great collaboration between the federal and Quebec governments. It has been unprecedented, especially on the official languages file. Minister Roberge and I worked very hard to reach an agreement on the issue of federally regulated private businesses. Jean-François Lisée said he never thought the federal and Quebec governments would reach an agreement.

Could my colleague talk a little about what he thinks of the great collaboration between Ottawa and the Government of Quebec?

Government Orders

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I thank our good friend, the Minister for Official Languages. I hope she will be as co-operative, so that the action plan for official languages supports this asymmetry that is recognized in the law on the use of French in federally regulated private businesses.

Even Quebec's minister of the French language was surprised that there were no measures for French in this bill. We were talking about \$137.5 million allocated to projects already identified to support English in Quebec. That is more than \$800 million over four years. I think it is unacceptable to continue funding English in Quebec when the government has recognized that it is the French language that is under threat. I hope the minister will be open to the idea of making the action plan and the principles set out in the bill more consistent. We are going to work very hard on that.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we can see how much the Liberals care about the Official Languages Act. There are only three government members present to listen to our speeches. That is disappointing.

• (1240)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague opposite, but he spoke about the number of members who are present on this side of the House. I will not confirm that number, but I can guarantee that the number is the same on the other side. Let us show some respect in the House. We are not allowed to mention, either directly or indirectly, whether members are present in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: That is true. We do not refer to the presence or absence of members in the House.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier on a point of order.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I would simply like to remind my colleague that we cannot do what we are not allowed to do either directly or indirectly. I want to apologize if I made a mistake. I am passionate about the French language.

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming questions and comments.

The hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the speech by my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île. I had the pleasure of working rigorously with him to improve Bill C-13. I would like to thank him for mentioning Gérald Godin. I think if someone were to dive into my family tree, they would likely find a connection between him and I in terms of passion for official languages and French, but not so much when it comes to our respective views on independence.

I would like to ask an initial question related to what we saw in committee. I would like to hear my colleague's comments on the NDP's attitude, it being a member of the NDP-Liberal coalition. The NDP members prevented the bill from being improved. One thing they refused to do was to give all of the powers proposed in the bill to the Treasury Board as a central agency, as well as the rights holders. I think it is important to count the rights holders outside of Quebec rather than simply estimating their numbers.

My second question is along the same lines as the Minister of Official Languages. What are my colleague's thoughts on the disap-

pointment that Minister Roberge expressed when he discovered that far too much money was being given to English-speaking minorities in Quebec, when the common language of this province is French and English in Quebec is not in decline?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. We did indeed work well with him. I think we have done everything possible in the circumstances. We could have gone farther, by naming the Treasury Board as the central agency in charge of implementation, for instance. Many of the amendments sought by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, fell by the wayside.

The Liberal-NDP coalition seems to have been fairly effective, although I concede that the NDP supported the amendments we managed to table, because it took the combined efforts of all the opposition parties. However, we could have gone a lot farther. The NDP's Sherbrooke declaration and support for Quebecers' self-determination did not seem to count for much during the committee debates.

To get back to Minister Roberge, I think the people of Quebec made their own calculations. It was not what they had asked for. They wanted control of language planning and wanted the Charter of the French Language to take precedence. They even suggested excluding the concept of an anglophone minority altogether. Although they did not get these things, they still secured significant changes in the Official Languages Act in relation to federally regulated businesses.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for pointing out that the NDP was the first party to support Quebec's right to self-determination. What he did not mention, of course, is that the NDP is the only political party in Canada that promotes the French language in the provinces it governs and here in the House of Commons.

As the member well knows, in British Columbia, it was an NDP government that put in place the network of primary, secondary and post-secondary schools throughout the province. More and more children are studying in French throughout their school years.

Although the sad history of francophone rights in Canada, which the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île mentioned, is true, it is in the past. Today, we are seeing more and more progress. I am rather optimistic about the future of our beautiful language, because I see that, in the coming years, there will be 500 million francophones in the world.

Is my colleague ready to come to British Columbia to see the British Columbian francophonie?

• (1245)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I am definitely ready to go. However, I would like to point out that post-secondary education in French is broadly lacking in western Canada. Some huge challenges remain, which is preventing western Canada from having decent French-language educational institutions.

Government Orders

I want to point something out regarding the right to self-determination. If Quebec is considered a nation, it should have control over what makes it a nation and over its language. The Charter of the French language should take precedence over the Official Languages Act. We should have a say in the hundreds of millions of dollars in grants that are awarded to support English. The NDP has not always supported these proposals, but it has supported some of them.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank and I congratulate my friend and colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île for all the work he is doing to defend and promote French in the House within our party, but also for all the work he has done all his life with various organizations. He has made this his life's mission, and I salute and thank him for it.

Bill C-13 contains some good measures for Acadians and francophones outside Quebec. We welcome that, and we support it. For the first time, the government is recognizing that French is under threat, including in Quebec. That is a first, so we applaud it. However, at the same time that the government is saying that French is threatened in Quebec, it is spending \$800 million on English to encourage the anglicization of Quebec.

Does that not expose the utter hypocrisy of the Liberal government?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I could not have put it better myself. The Bloc Québécois certainly supports francophone and Acadian communities. We think what has been happening for the past few years is totally unacceptable. There was a strategy that led to the presentation of action plans on official languages that promoted that. Again, it is the same thing.

A journalist asked a question and a senior official answered on condition of anonymity. That is how we were able to find out that \$800 million was going to be allocated to English in Quebec. I found out because I combed through the public accounts. I think that Quebecers do not agree with this. Francophones from Quebec do not agree, and we are going to make it known. If we get enough people to rally behind the Government of Quebec and the Bloc Québécois, the federal government is going to have to change this. Otherwise, as I said, we will soon have to resume marching toward Quebec's independence.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House today to speak on behalf of the NDP at third reading of Bill C-13, an act to amend the Official Languages Act. This bill has our unequivocal support.

Today is a historic day. No changes have been made to the Official Languages Act for 30 years, but we finally managed to do it. The work was sometimes hard, but it was important for the francophone, Quebec, Acadia, Franco-Manitobans and all of the other francophone communities across the country.

On a personal level, it is important for me, for my children, for all of our children and for our future. I am a proud francophile. I was born in Thompson, in northern Manitoba. I am the daughter of immigrant parents. My mother tongue is not English or French. It is Greek. I understand how lucky I am. My parents understood the importance of speaking both of Canada's official languages, and it is thanks to the battle waged by francophones across the country,

teachers and allies, that I had the opportunity to study French through a French immersion program.

In Manitoba, many francophones fought for their rights and for public investment in French education. In the 1980s, a Manitoba NDP government, of which my father, Steve Ashton, was a member, fought against discrimination and defended the right of francophones to have access to services and legislation in their language.

I knew from a young age that we cannot take anything for granted. We have to fight to move forward. I also know that generations of young Canadians are able to communicate in our two official languages thanks to the dedication of our teachers, our schools and our communities and, above all, their passion for the French language.

In my last speech, I paid tribute to almost every teacher that my generation of students and I had at our immersion school, Riverside School, in Thompson. It was through teachers, particularly in my immersion experience, that we learned not only French, but also about francophone culture. We now have unique insight and a richer understanding of our country and our world.

I want the same thing for my two children, Stefanos and Leonidas. They are now five and a half years old. They are in kindergarten at École La Voie du Nord, a French-language school in the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, or DSFM, in Thompson. My children are part of the next generation. For them, the world has become a little smaller, but it is a world where French is in decline in Canada. We must stop this decline and fight for this next generation.

I want to point out that the work we did in committee was historic work. I am proud of what we accomplished at this committee. I want to mention a few important changes that we made to Bill C-13 to strengthen it and to better address the decline of French in our country.

First, I want to mention that changes were made to the bill concerning immigration. We must ensure that we have ambitious targets that recognize that we must accept francophone immigrants and francophone families to enrich our communities across the country and address the decline of French.

I recognize that this is also a priority in the government's action plan, but let us remember that ambitious targets are not enough. We also need to invest in consular services, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. We need to invest in settlement services here in Canada, and we need to ensure that we have a well-organized and carefully targeted system to recruit the people that we need. I especially want to emphasize the recruitment of early childhood, elementary, secondary and post-secondary educators.

Government Orders

● (1250)

The reality is that there is a major shortage of French teachers both in immersion and in the francophone network outside Quebec. We need to find solutions to this labour shortage. We need to acknowledge that the Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals has said that an extra 10,000 teachers are needed to meet the current demand for French immersion and French as a second language.

How are we going to resolve these labour shortages and attract the professionals we need to maintain public services in French-language and immersion schools and day cares? We need to strive to meet the ambitious targets in Bill C-13 with targeted investments and with a real plan to welcome the people we need to be able to educate the next generation of young people in French across the country.

I have to say that this is personal for me. I have mentioned in committee several times that my own children were on a waiting list for more than a year to get a spot at a French day care in my community because of the labour shortage. Many efforts were made to resolve this problem, including an initiative to bring people with early childhood education experience to Canada. Despite all these efforts, the problem could not be resolved. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada did not provide enough help. The result is that several children, including my own, were unable to attend day care in French.

We have to be able to make these crucial investments in education in order to educate the next generation in French.

This step forward in the bill is also linked to one of the other changes we were able to make, of which I am very proud. It was the NDP that pushed to include the negotiation of mandatory language clauses in agreements between the provinces and the federal government. Our aim is to ensure that every agreement between the federal government and the provinces includes language clauses so funding can be given to francophone and anglophone minority communities, to ensure they receive their fair share. Be it for health care, employment services or day care, we absolutely need to include language clauses in our agreements with the provinces to ensure that francophone and anglophone minority communities have access to adequate services and opportunities.

I would also like to point out that we were able to make changes to increase the Treasury Board's powers regarding the enforcement of Bill C-13. We were also able to give more powers to the Commissioner of Official Languages. We were able to make changes that a number of stakeholders had requested, particularly with respect to access to justice. I would like to mention that Manitoba's francophone jurists clearly indicated that Bill C-13 should address the importance of access to justice in French and ensure that Manitoba francophones can go to court in French. Of course, the same right will apply to English-speaking minority communities. With all our colleagues around the table, we were able to ensure that people will have access to justice in French outside Quebec in provinces like Manitoba.

I would also like to talk about another change we made. We insisted on the issue of access to federal lands for francophone school districts.

● (1255)

This is something of utmost importance for many school boards that need to grow to meet increasing demand yet do not have the space to do so. Bill C-13 provides that opportunity.

Finally, I am very proud of the work we have been able to do. I want to once again recognize organizations like the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, and its president, Liane Roy. The FCFA is the national voice of 2.8 million French-speaking Canadians living in nine provinces and three territories. It represents the voice of francophones across Canada. It has played a key role and was crucial in ensuring that the President of the Treasury Board would have greater responsibility for implementing Bill C-13 and that francophone immigration will be supported. It is also thanks to that organization that we pushed further on the issue of language clauses and succeeded in giving more powers to the Commissioner of Official Languages.

I also want to recognize the work of the FCFA member organizations working on the ground, including here in Manitoba. They are the true defenders of the French language. I want to commend them for their hard work on Bill C-13.

The last major reform of the Official Languages Act was in 1988. It was clear that there were gaps in the act. It was not easy for our youth to receive all their education in French, from early childhood to post-secondary education. There was a lack of francophone staff. Access to justice in French was difficult. Emergency alerts and information on health and public safety were not available in French.

I believe that Bill C-13 is a big step in the right direction. I want to acknowledge the committee's cooperation during our work. I want to thank all the committee members who moved amendments to the bill. I know that we did not always see eye to eye, but we all had the same goal of protecting the French language in Canada and defending the rights of official language minority communities in Canada. The amendments that were adopted by the committee are essential. We hope that the Senate will respect them.

The reality is that this bill will change the federal government approach by recognizing that French is a minority language throughout Canada and North America. The government's actions will have to reflect that.

We must recognize that the sharp decline in the number of francophones in Canada is a serious problem and that we must take action in whatever way we can. We are all familiar with the statistics. The French language is in decline across our country. In 1971, the demographic weight of francophones was 25.5%; today, it is less than 23%. If we do not defend our services and institutions, if we do not defend French education in French and immersion schools, the decline will continue.

Government Orders

Today, we are moving forward with a national project, a project rooted in the recognition of first peoples and indigenous languages. It is a project that recognizes our two official languages and the fact that we must work to protect French in Canada. It is a project that recognizes the diversity of our country, the multiculturalism of our country. It is a project that recognizes the fact that there are many Canadians like me, whose parents came from other countries and who want to raise their families and contribute to our country in both official languages, perhaps even in their mother tongue, and thus contribute to a bilingual country, a multicultural country, a country that respects the first peoples of Canada.

I strongly encourage all my colleagues in the House to vote in favour of this historic bill so we can continue the work needed to defend French and support official language minority communities.

• (1300)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, with whom I am fortunate to serve on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. As she so rightly pointed out, everyone worked really hard to send this bill back to the House, and here we are. All of the official language minority communities are asking that Bill C-13 be passed as quickly as possible. We recently commenced a study on francophone immigration, more specifically francophone immigration from Africa.

My colleague and I do not have access to French child care, so I would like her to explain how important it is to identify the needs of our communities. Bill C-13 provides for the adoption of a francophone immigration policy, and we established a threshold of recovery to 1971 levels.

How important is it to identify the needs of our communities and how will Bill C-13 help with that?

• (1305)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his work on this historic bill.

Bill C-13 contains some strong language regarding the need to restore the demographic weight of francophones. We believe that the 4.4% target does not go far enough. We agree with the stakeholders, like the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, who have said as much. We need an ambitious plan to support our communities.

As my colleague said, specific areas need to be targeted, areas like education, including early childhood education. We need to ensure that the necessary work is done in this country to recruit, educate and support French-language educators. However, let us be honest. We also have to welcome people from outside Canada to help fill these jobs. These people must be able to come here to contribute to Canada and benefit from the advantages of living here, as many immigrant families have done, including mine.

We hope that Bill C-13 will mark the beginning of a new chapter. We have a lot of work to do.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank my colleague from Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, with whom I had the privilege of

working on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Indeed, we are unanimous and we have all worked towards the same goal, albeit in different ways.

My colleague said she was proud of the result. I, for one, think we only got half the job done. We could have done a lot more, even though, as the saying goes, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. It had been a long time since the legislation had been modernized, so we should have used more aggressive means to obtain more immediate results.

I had the opportunity to work with my colleague. In her speech, she often talked about access to education, but there is one amendment in particular on which I would like to hear her opinion. Why did she vote with the Liberals on the enumeration of rights holders?

This is important because it gives us much more precise data than an estimate. We proposed an amendment to do what was provided for in the 2021 census and to put it into law so that future governments would be required to paint the most representative picture of reality possible, which has an impact on investments.

Why did my colleague vote against this?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, first of all, Bill C-13 is a strong measure that gives us the tools to address the decline of the French language. It is a huge step in the right direction, but it is not enough, obviously. Of course, we must address the decline of French, be it in education or in other fields. We must make the necessary investments and recognize that we need clear and targeted plans to support our communities, especially outside Quebec, where we are seeing a fairly serious decline.

We certainly need to have the right information. Of course, we want Statistics Canada or any other government agency to be able to collect the necessary information to ensure that our children, our schools and our school districts have the data they need to support education in French.

As I said, we have a lot of work to do to end the decline of the French language, but I believe that Bill C-13 represents a big step in the right direction.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her co-operation and work on the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I would like to know if she considers Quebec to be a nation with French as its official and common language, and if she recognizes Quebec's right to self-determination.

If so, does she think it is okay for the federal government to swoop in and spend hundreds of millions of dollars in areas of Quebec's jurisdiction to support English?

• (1310)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, yes, we recognize the Quebec nation. It was very important for us to work with the Government of Quebec in developing Bill C-13.

Private Members' Business

We were very happy to learn that an agreement had been signed between the Government of Quebec and the federal government to advance shared priorities. It is obvious that such an agreement is crucial to ensure Quebec's self-determination in many key areas, and that the federal government must be a part of the solution to protect the French language and stand up for official language minority communities.

From the beginning of the debate on Bill C-13, I have been very clear in saying that French is in decline. We see it here, in western Canada, and we know that it is obviously the case in Quebec. The federal government must keep this in mind not only in the context of this bill, but also, more specifically, when it invests and plans for the future.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question for my colleague. I was asking her about rights holders earlier. Now I have a question about the Treasury Board.

The FCFA, which represents several organizations across Canada, asked that the Treasury Board be extended to the entire legislation.

Why did my colleague vote with the Liberals again in the NDP-Liberal coalition?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, first I would say that this is not the time to give a course on Canadian politics. The NDP is not in a coalition with anyone. I know that is the message Conservatives like to use to raise funds, but it is not true.

I believe that the FCFA's statement is clear about the fact that they are very pleased with the final bill. The federation certainly fought hard, and we all collaborated to advance their priorities. I am proud that we were able to improve the bill by giving more powers to the Treasury Board. As I said, this bill is a big step forward.

Clearly, we will have to continue our work to meet the objectives of the bill and invest in what our communities need to protect French and official language minority communities.

Finally, I would add that I appreciate that my colleague is raising this priority with respect to the bill, but I have many concerns about the Conservative leader, who talks a lot about cutting funding to Radio-Canada, an organization that is vital to the protection of French, especially in western Canada.

I have concerns about the Conservative leadership, and I question why they do not want to protect French in minority situations in various ways.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion.

● (1315)

[English]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes the motion be carried or carried on division, or wishes to request a

recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, I would request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 23, 2022, the division stands deferred until Monday, May 15, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. deputy whip for the government.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find that there is unanimous agreement to see the clock at 1:30 for Private Members' Business.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

AMENDMENTS TO THE STANDING ORDERS

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP) moved:

That:

- (a) the House recognize that,
 - (i) it is a prerogative of the Crown to prorogue or dissolve Parliament at its pleasure,
 - (ii) the circumstances surrounding a prorogation of the House may bear on whether the government enjoys the confidence of the House,
 - (iii) the confidence convention is an important cornerstone of the Canadian political system,
 - (iv) the confidence convention has never been clearly codified and this has sometimes led to confusion among members and the general public as to the nature and significance of certain votes,
 - (v) governments have sometimes abused the confidence convention to reinforce party discipline or influence the outcome of a vote that is not explicitly a matter of confidence or that would not be considered a matter of confidence by convention;
- (b) in the opinion of the House,
 - (i) the House itself, not the Prime Minister, should be the final authority as to whether the government of the day enjoys the confidence of the House,
 - (ii) when the House assembles following a general election, the government shall be called upon to demonstrate it enjoys the confidence of the House,
 - (iii) before a prorogation occurs, the House ought to have an opportunity to express its confidence in the government,
 - (iv) the means by which the House may pronounce itself on a question of confidence should be explicit, clear and predictable so that all members know well in advance when and how the confidence of the House will be tested,
 - (v) once the House has determined such means in its Standing Orders or in legislation, the government should not seek to circumvent the process established by the House by declaring a vote to be a matter of confidence if the rules of the House would not otherwise designate that vote as a matter of confidence, and any attempt to do so constitutes a contempt of Parliament,
 - (vi) a question of confidence is a serious matter and should not be used as a pretext for dilatory tactics by either side of the House;
- (c) effective from the 20th sitting day after the adoption of this motion or at the beginning of the next Parliament, whichever comes first, the Standing Orders be amended as follows:
 - (i) by adding, after Standing Order 53.1, the following new standing order:

Private Members' Business

“53.2(1) The government must enjoy the confidence of the House of Commons. The House may express its confidence, or lack thereof, in the government by adopting a confidence motion in one of the following forms:

- (a) “That the House has lost confidence in the government”;
 - (b) “That the House has confidence in the government”.
- (2)(a) Notice of a confidence motion pursuant to section (1) of this standing order shall meet the requirements of Standing Order 54, provided that four sitting days shall be given prior to the motion being placed on the Order Paper. Such notice shall be signed by the sponsor and 20 other members representing more than one of the recognized parties.
- (b) Notwithstanding Standing Order 18, the House may pronounce itself on the motions listed in section (1) of this standing order more than once.
- (c) Only one confidence motion pursuant to section (1) of this standing order:
- (i) may be placed on notice in each supply period;
 - (ii) shall be sponsored or signed by the same member of the House in a session of a Parliament.
- (3) At the expiry of the notice period pursuant to section (2) of this standing order, an order of the day for the consideration of a confidence motion shall be placed on the Order Paper, be considered at the next sitting of the House and take precedence over all other business of the House, with the exception of a debate on a motion arising from a question of privilege.
- (4) When the order of the day on a confidence motion is called, it must stand as the first order of the day. The confidence motion is deemed to have been moved and seconded and shall not be subject to any amendment.
- (5) Private Members' Business shall be suspended on a day any such motion is debated.
- (6) No dilatory motion shall be received during debate on a confidence motion pursuant to section (1) of this standing order and the provisions of Standing Orders 62 and 63 shall be suspended.
- (7) The proceedings on the order of the day on a confidence motion proposed thereto shall not exceed one sitting day.
- (8) No member shall speak for more than 20 minutes at a time in the debate on a confidence motion. Following the speech of each member, a period not exceeding 10 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses thereto. Any period of debate of 20 minutes may be divided in two pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 43(2).
- (9) When no further member rises to speak, or at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, whichever is earlier, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and the question shall be put and forthwith disposed of, notwithstanding Standing Order 45.
- (10) Any matter of confidence so designated beyond those provided for in Standing Orders 50(8), 53.2(1), 81(18)(e), and 84(6)(b) may be called to the attention of the Chair and the member may ask that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. As the case may be, the matter shall automatically be referred to the said committee.”
- (ii) by adding, after Standing Order 53.2, the following new standing order:
- “53.3(1) Following an expression of intent by the Prime Minister to recommend prorogation to the Crown, a minister of the Crown may place a confidence motion on notice that does not count for the purposes of Standing Order 53.2(2)(c).
- (2) This motion shall proceed pursuant to Standing Order 53.2, except that the notice period required by Standing Order 53.2(2)(a) shall be one sitting day, instead of four, and the notice need only be signed by a minister of the Crown.
- (3) During an adjournment period, when a confidence motion is put on notice pursuant to paragraph 3(1) of this standing order, the Speaker shall recall the House to meet at an earlier time, and thereupon the House shall meet to transact its business as if it had been duly adjourned to that time, provided that at least 48 hours' notice shall be given for any sitting held pursuant to this paragraph.
- (4) In the event of a prorogation occurring prior to the question being put on a confidence motion, the House shall, as its first item of business of a new session, consider a confidence motion pursuant to Standing Order 53.2, which shall be deemed placed on the Order Paper for that purpose.

53.4 At the opening of every Parliament, immediately after the Speaker has reported on the attendance of the Commons to the Senate, a motion pursuant to Standing Order 53.2(1)(b) shall be deemed moved and seconded, and be otherwise governed pursuant to Standing Orders 53.2(6), (7), (8) and (9).

(iii) in Standing Order 45(6)(a), by adding, after the words “An exception to this rule is”, the following: “the division on a confidence motion pursuant to Standing Order 53.2(9) and”;

(iv) by adding, after Standing Order 50(7), the following:

“(8) If the main motion is defeated, the government has lost the confidence of the House.”;

(v) by adding, after Standing Order 67(1)(p), the following:

“(q) for the consideration of a confidence motion”;

(vi) in Standing Order 81(13), by adding the following:

“They cannot contain explicitly worded expressions of confidence in the government.”;

(vii) by adding, after Standing Order 81(18)(d), the following:

“(e) After having disposed of any opposed item, if the motion to concur in the main estimates is defeated, the government has lost the confidence of the House.”;

(viii) by renumbering Standing Order 84(6) as Standing Order 84(6)(a),

(ix) by adding, after Standing Order 84(6)(a), the following:

“(b) If the main motion is defeated, the government has lost the confidence of the House.”;

(x) in Standing Order 99(1), by adding, after “52(14).”, the following: “53.2(5).”; and

(d) the Clerk of the House be authorized to make any required editorial and consequential alterations to the Standing Orders, including to the marginal notes, as well as such changes to the Order Paper and Notice Paper, as may be required.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is one of the most powerful people in the country, and that is a function of the Prime Minister's Office, which includes a number of serious powers.

Foremost among those is the power to decide, at any time, that Parliament is done, that the work of Parliament is finished and that we are going to have an election. It is the power to decide that Parliament's work can be put on pause, and the important work that is happening at committee could be, not just put on pause, but stopped. It would have to start up again in another session of Parliament.

We have seen this power used appropriately over the course of Canadian history, and we have also seen it be abused. One of the most recent examples of the abuse of this power was in the summer of 2020, when the government was embroiled in the WE charity scandal, with many committees studying what had happened. They were calling for witnesses for, and papers and evidence about, what was going on in the government and how the scandal arose. The Prime Minister decided to say that Parliament was prorogued. All that work stopped. Members of Parliament were not able to come to this place or to work together to do the work that we are elected to do, which is to hold the government to account.

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We saw that happen in the summer of 2020. It was a controversial decision to prorogue. I think many Canadians were rightly upset about that. I was part of an effort at the procedure and House affairs committee to get to the bottom of why it was the Prime Minister chose to prorogue. One of the real frustrations in that sitting was that the Prime Minister himself refused to come to that study. In fact, we watched Liberal members on that committee filibuster for months on end to avoid a simple invitation to the Prime Minister to come to explain his own actions.

That was certainly an example where we saw the power of prorogation abused. I would say, arguably, just the next year, in 2021, we saw the same Prime Minister abuse a similar power, which was to dissolve Parliament and declare our work finished, and then we went to the polls. We have fixed election date laws in Canada. Unfortunately, there is no way to punish prime ministers for ignoring those laws, as the Prime Minister did in the fall of 2021 when he called an election while we were still in the midst of a pandemic. In fact, the procedure and House affairs committee was in the process of looking at a government bill designed to make accommodations for the pandemic at election time.

Instead of respecting the work of that committee and the many voices across the country who were saying that Canada was not ready to have an election during a pandemic, the Prime Minister pulled the plug and held the election anyway. It was an election that no one but him wanted, and that was very clear. It was made very clear to all of us on the doorsteps over the course of that election. Nevertheless, it was the Prime Minister, through the power of his office, who was able to do that, without any meaningful accountability.

I want to go back to an example from much earlier, but folks would be relieved to hear it is in this century. I am not going all the way back to the 19th century. In 2008, former prime minister Harper effected the most egregious abuse of the power of prorogation when he knew that opposition parties were going to bring a non-confidence motion forward to say that the members of this place did not believe that he should govern. Instead of facing the House and facing that vote, which would have been the honourable thing to do, he chose to abuse the powers of the Prime Minister's Office and prorogued parliament, so opposition members could not bring a motion of non-confidence to the House.

Some hon. members: Shame.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: It was indeed a shameful thing.

Mr. Speaker, up until now, there has been a lot of discussion about this, but I do not think there have been real proposals to try to do something about it. It is difficult to do something about it because, in our Constitution, dissolving or proroguing Parliament is said to be a power of the monarch, of the Queen, or now the King. Really, it is a power of the Prime Minister because it is only on the Prime Minister's advice that this is done. Because this is a power that is granted to the monarchy, we need a constitutional amendment to do anything about it, or so we have been told.

Let us consider all the important institutions that make up the very foundation of Canadian government. We could think about the

monarch, the executive or the government, and we could think about the House of Commons, the judiciary and the Senate.

• (1320)

Actually, only one of those is directly elected by Canadians, and that is the House of Commons. The monarch certainly is not elected; we have all been bearing witness to that process recently. The Senate is not elected. Judges are not elected, and I do not think that is a bad thing; we need accountability in the process of their appointment, so they are not elected. The executive is not directly elected; it is actually the House of Commons that ultimately decides who sits in the Prime Minister's chair, or not, based on what happens at election time.

I think that the House of Commons, both as the democratically elected component of the Canadian government and as the institution with the job of holding the government to account, should be the one to decide whether the work here is paused in a prorogation. The House of Commons, as the democratically elected chamber, should be the one to decide if we are done before fixed election date laws say we would be done and to have an early election. No simple motion in the House of Commons can change the Constitution, which is as it should be. Therefore, within the constitutional context that we are in, this motion would allow us, the members of this place, to assert our rightful role in having a much bigger say on when our work begins, when it ends and whether it is stopped or paused by a prime minister. That is a decision that should be in the hands of Canadians.

If we want to talk about gatekeeping in Canada, one of the biggest gatekeeping powers that exists is the power of the Prime Minister to get out of accountability to Parliament. Anyone who is concerned about fighting inappropriate gatekeeping in Canada should be concerned to constrain that power by the Prime Minister.

That is what this motion is really about. It is about making it more difficult for prime ministers to prorogue Parliament to get out of facing accountability on a confidence vote. It is about making it more difficult for prime ministers to get out of accountability for scandals like the WE Charity scandal or the question of Afghan detainees by telling members of this Parliament to go back to their ridings and not come back until the Prime Minister decides he is okay with having them back. It is about ensuring that the Prime Minister does not get to inappropriately influence votes in this place by suddenly declaring something that has nothing to do with confidence and everything to do with covering his own behind or a special pet project in order to try to force members to vote for something that they would not otherwise vote for. That is what this motion is about, and that is why it is so important that this motion pass.

It is about time that the House of Commons started pushing back on those other unelected parts of the Canadian governance structure and assert its own authority and its own decision-making power, especially in regard to our ability to sit in this place and to hold governments to account.

Private Members' Business

How would it constrain the power of the Prime Minister? As I said, there is no perfect solution without a constitutional amendment. However, it would mean that a prime minister who wanted to prorogue would have the option of first having a confidence vote in the House of Commons before a prorogation. If the Prime Minister did not do that, it would guarantee that the first order of business when parliamentarians came back would not be the Prime Minister's Speech from the Throne, where they get to frame the issues however they like; it would be a debate and a vote of confidence in the government after it made a decision to prorogue.

I say that would have been especially important in the case of the Harper prorogation, because he prorogued in order to avoid a confidence vote. We know that the next way for opposition parties at that time to have a confidence vote would have been on an opposition day motion. Who decides when to have opposition day motions? The government decides when to have an opposition day motion. Therefore, that does not really work as an accountability mechanism. If the Prime Minister can prorogue for as long as they want and then delay an opposition day motion for just about as long as they like after we come back, then opposition parties do not have the ability to hold the government to account in the appropriate way.

What this motion would guarantee is that there would be a moment of accountability at the beginning of every Parliament, with a confidence vote. There would be a possibility of a prime minister doing the right thing and testing the confidence of the chamber before prorogation; if they do not, it would guarantee that the first order of business when we came back would be a confidence vote to have that accountability for the House of Commons. It makes it clear for members how they can go about initiating a confidence vote. It lays out a process for that. I will spare folks the details; they are in the motion.

• (1325)

Another thing it does, which is also quite important, is that it specifically says what votes would be votes of confidence. Traditionally, by convention, the Speech from the Throne is a vote of confidence. This motion would simply add that into the Standing Orders so that it would no longer be a question for which we have to call in a whole bunch of constitutional experts who have studied the history of Canada since 1867 to weigh in on it. We would know because it would be written in the Standing Orders that it is a vote of confidence. We would know that the budget vote is a vote of confidence because it would be written down in the Standing Orders.

We would know that the main vote on estimates is a confidence motion. That matters because there have been many times where we have voted all night on the estimates, on every line item, and it is always a debate. We see the media questioning if the government could fall on any vote. Some people say it could. Others say that it cannot; it is complicated; maybe it would; maybe it would not; maybe it would lose that vote and the next day it would have to come to the House for a more explicitly worded motion of confidence; or maybe the Prime Minister would decide.

We are a 21st-century democracy. How is it so unclear whether the only elected chamber, the only elected part of our Constitution,

would sit or not sit, have confidence or not have confidence, have an election or not have an election? These are things we should be able to put our heads together on to sort out so it is crystal clear to Canadians, who should not have to get a Ph.D. in Canadian constitutional history to understand what the heck is going on in this place. It is something we should be able to teach in a grade 12 civics class and be proud of. The idea behind this motion is to make it a heck of a lot more clear so that we can do exactly that. To have a lack of clarity around these issues that are so central to the proper functioning of our democracy is to invite the kind of toxic debates and intractable disputes that we see too often now in western democracies about whether this was a power grab or if the government acted appropriately or not. The way to defend this is to seek the maximum amount of clarity before we are in a crisis.

Already this year, there has been speculation in the media about whether a motion in the House would be a confidence or non-confidence vote. The government House leader refused to comment, so it hung in the air. It should not be that way. We should know clearly whether something is or is not a vote of confidence.

There have been rumours around prorogation already in this Parliament. We should know that, if a prime minister is going to prorogue and we think it is a bad decision, the House of Commons itself will have the opportunity to pronounce on whether the government is making an acceptable decision or not. That is something the House ought to be able to do because we are the only ones who are elected with a mandate to make those kinds of decisions.

It is not the Prime Minister or anybody else. It is certainly not a King or Queen who has the ability to make that decision. It is not a decision for the Senate, where senators who have all been appointed by previous prime ministers to make that decision. This is the place that decision ought to be made. That is how we put democracy before gatekeeping. That is what this motion is about. That is why I encourage all members of the House to give their support to this motion.

• (1330)

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech and for putting this together. He has obviously thought it through. I appreciate him going over how in some ways the current rules could be abused.

He is a thoughtful guy, and I am sure he has thought about the other side. Has he considered any ways this change in procedure could potentially be abused, and if so, has he thought about ways to mitigate that, or are there no ways in which this could be abused?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I think Canadians would agree that politicians are often disappointing and find ways to abuse things that ought not to be abused, so I certainly would not make the claim that anything that comes out of this place is beyond abuse. One hopes that it has enough clarity and instruction behind it that folks would find it hard to abuse.

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One of the ways I was concerned this new way of presenting a confidence motion might be abused is as a dilatory tactic, so one of the provisions in this motion is that, to move a motion of non-confidence or confidence, as the case may be, there are two ways to present those motions. One would need a mover and 20 other members from at least two recognized political parties to sign onto it. That is one way I have sought to ensure this new type of motion would not be used continuously as a dilatory tactic.

I can say more about that. If members read the motion in its entirety, they will find that there are some other guardrails in there as well because of that. In fact, what the Speaker read in the guiding principles is exactly that, that this should not be seen as a dilatory tactic or some other way to conduct funny business. What we want is for members of Parliament to have lots of notice when votes of confidence are coming, a full day of debate and a vote at the end of that day so that it is a clear process that is hopefully not open to abuse.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona certainly brings a lot of knowledge on questions of procedure.

My issue with the motion is largely one of the process that the member has chosen. Many aspects of his motion are seemingly novel, in terms of what he is proposing. I am curious as to why he chose this route of two hours of debate rather than inserting a clause into the motion to refer this to the procedure and House affairs committee for a more thorough study.

• (1335)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, the issue of confidence has been studied a number of times. It has been studied in the House and outside the House. The reasons why I chose not to refer it to the procedure and House affairs committee are twofold.

The first is out of respect for the work that it is doing currently on foreign interference and a number of important issues, and an issue of privilege, actually, after the last day, with respect to the member for Wellington—Halton Hills.

The other reason is that I think it is high time we just got this done. I do think there is enough time to examine the content of the motion. I think that this would be a significant improvement on the current state of affairs.

I want to make change and one cannot make change without doing something novel. I do not hide from the fact that there are novel ideas in here. I think they are good ideas and I welcome the debate that is to come.

I hope that members here will fall on the side of asserting the power of the House of Commons over these decisions and making a change to something that has been open to abuse now since Confederation and that it is high time we did something about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by congratulating the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona on his important motion and on the very compelling speech he just delivered.

Accountability is important. We need to limit the concentration of power, and I think this motion contributes to that. We know that concentrating power almost systematically leads to abuse.

My question for my colleague is about the government's present attitude toward votes taking place in the House. When the House votes on motions or bills, we see that the Prime Minister does not always respect the will of the House when what has been proposed does not come from him.

For example, my colleague moved a motion on tax havens. Even though it had support in the House, the government did not introduce the measures that the motion called on the government to introduce. Another colleague had a bill passed to provide 50 weeks of EI sickness benefits to people with cancer. The government never followed through, even though it was the will of the House. A bill by one of our Conservative colleagues was passed about the family transfer of businesses. The government would not implement it.

What does my esteemed colleague think of that?

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: I do believe that all too often, the government does not take the work that we do in the House of Commons and its committees seriously. That is why I think that we as members of Parliament must take measures to ask for that respect. This is about targeting the Prime Minister's important powers and saying the elected chamber should have more say in these decisions. We can get the federal government to take us much more seriously.

[*English*]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to speak to Motion No. 79, sponsored by the member for Elmwood—Transcona, which proposes a permanent change to the Standing Orders respecting confidence motions.

Before I speak to the content of the proposal contained in Motion No. 79, I would like to discuss some important principles that should guide our work when contemplating changes to the Standing Orders, especially when the changes would be permanent changes to the rules of the House. There is a long-standing tradition of the House in considering changes to our Standing Orders. This tradition includes two important principles. The first is that any change or suite of changes should benefit from a thorough study by the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The second is that any change to the rules that govern our deliberations should be done on a consensual basis.

The importance of having changes to the Standing Orders considered by the procedure and House affairs committee seems to be self-evident to most members of the House. These are our rules; they guide all the work we conduct in this place, and any change must be well understood by all members of the House. As a result, the procedure and House affairs committee plays an important role in studying the Standing Orders as they are, as well as proposed changes before they can be considered by the whole House.

In fact, Standing Order 51, chapter VII, which deals with the special debates that the House make take up and is the subject of the proposed amendment contained in Motion No. 79, provides a mechanism that requires the House to study the Standing Orders at the beginning of each Parliament. Standing Order 51 provides that the government, through a minister, must designate an order of the day for the consideration of a motion to take note of the Standing Orders and procedures of the House, which has precedence over all other business. The debate on the designated day is then permanently referred to the procedure and House affairs committee for study. Having these debates permanently referred to the procedure and House affairs committee allows the committee to take up studies over the course of the Parliament to review and consider changes to the Standing Orders.

The purpose of Standing Order 51 is to allow members to bring forward ideas on changes to the Standing Orders, which can then be studied by the procedure and House affairs committee. During the committee's study of the Standing Orders, the committee can hear from expert witnesses, including the Clerk of the House and other senior procedural clerks, to bring to the attention of the members possible adverse consequences that may result from certain changes. This expert testimony ensures the members of the committee consider changes to our rules by using an evidence-based process. Witnesses may also suggest changes to the proposed standing order changes to ensure consistency and alignment with the Standing Orders and practices of the House.

I believe that the procedure and House affairs committee plays an essential role in reviewing the Standing Orders, and I know the members on that committee take this work very seriously and with a great deal of pride. We must always keep in mind that changes to our Standing Orders affect every member of the House, and we not only need to get it right, but we also need to know and appreciate the long-term consequences of such changes. When we make changes in a majority context, we need to appreciate and understand how these changes will operate in the minority context, and the inverse is just as important.

I would now like to turn my attention, and that of the members, to Motion No. 79. The member for Elmwood—Transcona has selected, as his item of Private Members' Business, Motion No. 79, on confidence motions. The motion would create a new scheme in the "Special Debates" chapter in the Standing Orders dealing with confidence motions.

The preamble of Motion No. 79 states, in part (a), that "(i) it is a prerogative of the Crown to prorogue or dissolve Parliament at its pleasure", and that "(iv) the confidence convention has never been clearly codified and this has sometimes led to confusion among members and the general public as to the nature and significance of certain votes".

● (1340)

I would like to spend part of my remarks on the Crown's prerogatives. Page 43 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states:

An essential feature of parliamentary government is that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet are responsible to, or must answer to, the House of Commons for their actions and must enjoy the support and the confidence of a majority of the Members of that Chamber to remain in office. This is commonly referred to as the confidence

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convention. This complex constitutional subject, a matter of tradition that is not written into any statute or Standing Order of the House....

Members can see that royal prerogatives are not found in any statute or in the Standing Orders. There is, however, one reference to confidence in the Standing Orders, that is, in Standing Order 6, in relation to the election of the Speaker. Precedents are clear that this provision is unnecessary and outdated, since the House itself elects the Speaker of the House, and the executive no longer plays any formal role in the election of the Speaker.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, at page 43, goes on to articulate the point that confidence is not a matter of parliamentary procedure. It says, "What constitutes a question of confidence in the government varies with the circumstances. Confidence is not a matter of parliamentary procedure, nor is it something on which the Speaker can be asked to rule."

There was a time when there were references in the Standing Orders to motions of non-confidence in relation to the consideration of supply. Page 44 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* sets out how the Standing Orders were modified in this regard and when these changes were removed:

When the Standing Orders respecting supply were amended in 1968, it was specified that, in each of the three supply periods, the opposition could designate not more than two of the motions proposed on allotted days as motions of non-confidence in the government. This was the first time the notion of confidence found expression in the Standing Orders. This rule was modified provisionally in March 1975 to remove the non-confidence qualification; the motions would still be brought to a vote but the vote would not automatically be considered an expression of confidence in the government. The provisional Standing Orders lapsed at the beginning of the following session and the term found its way back into the 1977 version of the Standing Orders. No further changes were made until June 1985, when the Standing Orders were again modified to remove the non-confidence provision with regard to supply.

For 43 years, there have been no operative Standing Orders that deal with confidence. There is a good reason for this. Since many Crown prerogatives have been superseded by statutes, there are still royal prerogatives that are not found in statutes, including but not limited to foreign affairs and treaty making, and the powers to prorogue or dissolve Parliament.

Now that I have addressed the notion of the Crown's prerogatives in relation to the prerogatives to prorogue or dissolve Parliament, I would like to speak of the mechanics of how Motion No. 79, if adopted, would operate.

I have not made up my mind about whether I will support this motion or oppose it. I will say, however, that I think this motion would benefit from study at the procedure and House affairs committee. The committee could really dig into the interplay between the role of the Standing Orders and the Crown prerogatives, and whether the scheme that is proposed in Motion No. 79 is acceptable in the context of our rules, given the informal nature of non-confidence motions in the Standing Orders.

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● (1345)

Finally, I do not think that two one-hour debates are sufficient to fully understand the implications this motion would have on the procedures and practices of this House. That said, I will continue to have an open mind about the proposal because I have great respect for my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona and the views of other members who will speak in debate on this motion.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Motion No. 79, introduced by the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona. The motion would make substantial changes to the Standing Orders pertaining to confidence votes and the prorogation of Parliament.

With respect to confidence votes, it would make significant changes in a number of different ways. Perhaps less of a change is that it would seek to amend the Standing Orders to expressly provide that votes on the main estimates, the budget and the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne be treated as questions of confidence. By convention, for all intents and purposes, these votes are treated as questions of confidence. It would, indeed, be difficult to imagine a scenario in which a government could survive losing any such vote.

Even more, however, this motion would significantly regulate and limit the ability of members to bring forward and put on notice motions of non-confidence in the government. It would do so in three ways. First, in order to put such a motion on notice, the signatures of at least 20 members of Parliament from more than one of the recognized parties would be required. Second, only one such motion of non-confidence could be put on notice per supply period. Third, members would be limited to either sponsoring or signing such a motion once per session.

With respect to prorogation, this motion would require that the government put on notice a confidence motion upon the Prime Minister expressing the intention to advise and consult the Governor General with respect to prorogation.

The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona is a learned member. He brings a great deal of institutional knowledge and a good understanding of matters of procedure, and I have a lot of respect for him. I appreciate, in that regard, the spirit in which the member is seeking to make changes to the Standing Orders. However, I will be unable to support this motion, primarily because of the process that the member has proposed in making changes to the Standing Orders.

Two hours of debate, nothing more, nothing less, is the process that the member has chosen. There would be no study or consultation. Why is this? It is because that is the process for private members' motions, and it is the way in which the hon. member has embarked upon amending the Standing Orders. I would submit that, with regard to the substantial changes that are being proposed, two hours of debate would be completely inadequate under the circumstances.

I would submit further that it is all the more inadequate given the fact that many aspects of this motion are seemingly novel, as the hon. member conceded when I put a question to him earlier. Although much ink has been spilled on, for example, the subject of

prorogation, and although the procedure and House affairs committee has undertaken multiple studies in recent years on prorogation, what the hon. member is specifically proposing has not been studied. This is that the government should put forward a confidence motion upon the Prime Minister expressing the intention to prorogue Parliament. Similarly, the significant way in which the hon. member is proposing to limit the ability to put on notice other motions of non-confidence in the government has not been considered either.

The hon. member is quite right to say that he is not ashamed that some of these ideas are novel ones. It is good to come up with new ideas. All hon. members should make an effort to bring fresh ideas, but new ideas need to be tested.

● (1350)

What would have been better is if this motion had contained a clause referring the items and the changes proposed to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That would have provided an opportunity to hear from witnesses, including experts, to better understand the implications of the many changes that the member is proposing. Had the hon. member included such a clause in the motion, I would have been very open to supporting the motion. It is unfortunate that the motion does not contain such a clause. On that basis alone, I am unable to support the motion.

The need for study is further underscored by the fact that the motion could have constitutional implications as it pertains to prorogation. The Governor General derives the authority to prorogue Parliament pursuant to section 38 of the Constitution Act of 1867. More specifically, section 38 provides the Governor General with the authority to summon Parliament and therefore, by extension, to prorogue it. The authority of the Governor General is exercisable according to unwritten constitutional convention upon the Prime Minister providing advice and consulting with the Governor General. It is the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister alone who consults the Governor General on the question of prorogation.

By prescribing that a motion of confidence be put before the Prime Minister goes to the Governor General limits the discretion of the Prime Minister to seek prorogation. Moreover, the motion proposes to insert a wedge between the Prime Minister and the Governor General and that, in turn, could impact upon the manner in which the Governor General responds to the advice of the Prime Minister. I would note that, on the question of constitutional implications, section 41(a) of the Constitution Act of 1982 provides that any change respecting the Office of the Governor General requires a constitutional amendment.

All of this is to say that there are a number of considerations that need to be studied and considered, and on that basis, it would be premature to adopt the motion at this time.

● (1355)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 79, moved by my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona, whom I thank, by the way, for his excellent speech.

Despite the fact that I still consider myself a young politician, perhaps less so in age than in years of experience, I feel that I have learned a lot about procedural matters during my three and a half years in office. I had the pleasure of participating in the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, particularly when it came time to set up a hybrid Parliament during the pandemic. Although I stopped sitting regularly on the committee after that, I followed its work from a distance. Among that work was the study on proroguing Parliament during the summer of 2020. This was the first time that the government was required to justify its use of prorogation after the fact. As I will explain, this did not solve the problem of partisan use of prorogation.

Today's motion just happens to touch on the framework of prorogation, along with the definition of a vote of confidence. I want to quickly review these two aspects of the motion, which are in some ways intertwined.

With respect to prorogation, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs had the opportunity to read and analyze the "Report on the Government's Report to Parliament: August 2020 Prorogation—COVID-19 Pandemic" and produce its own report on that report. That report noted the various times in history when the government has used prorogation for what could be described as partisan purposes. I would like to take a moment to read part of that report. It is rather enlightening.

The first example is from 1873:

Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald requested and received a prorogation from Governor General Lord Dufferin when facing a loss of support in the House of Commons during a political scandal that would be dubbed the Pacific scandal. The Committee heard that the 1873 prorogation ended a committee inquiry into the matter but that the controversy over the scandal resumed during the subsequent parliamentary session. Sir John resigned a few weeks after Parliament resumed.

The next example is more recent. It is from 2002:

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien requested and received a prorogation from Governor General Adrienne Clarkson at a time when details were emerging of a political scandal that would be dubbed the sponsorship scandal. The prorogation prevented a report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts on the sponsorship scandal from being presented in the House.

The next example is from one year later, in 2003:

Mr. Chrétien prorogued Parliament until February 2004. This delayed the tabling of the Auditor General's report on the sponsorship scandal, which was due to be tabled that November, until after Mr. Chrétien left office.

Here is an example from 2008:

Prime Minister Stephen Harper requested and received a prorogation from Governor General Michaëlle Jean in December 2008. The prorogation occurred at a time when a global financial crisis had recently begun. However, the prorogation also enabled the government to postpone a non-confidence vote in the House that was being sought by the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party, who had proposed a coalition, and the Bloc Québécois, who had agreed to support the coalition under a supply and confidence agreement. It was noted that the Governor General granted the request for prorogation but only after several hours of reflection. By the time the House resumed sitting in January 2009, the opposition coalition had collapsed. One witness referred to these circumstances as being driven by a breakdown in good governance within the Liberal caucus.

The last example is from 2010:

Prime Minister Harper requested and received a prorogation from Governor General Michaëlle Jean, from January 2010 to March 2010. The reason for the three-month duration of the prorogation was to allow Parliament to recess for the Winter Olympics in Vancouver. However, the prorogation also postponed the exam-

ination by the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan into alleged mistreatment of Afghan detainees while in custody.

The 2020 prorogation was no exception to the list of prorogations that were requested for partisan purposes. Although the government invoked the pandemic as a reason, in the eyes of several witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, there was some doubt about that justification. The fact that the government was mired in the WE scandal, that the prorogation lasted for a long time, five weeks, and that the government's report was biased, led the committee to conclude that reforms around the prorogation of the House and votes of confidence needed to be clarified.

Essentially, while the legislative change in 2017 was intended to make the use of prorogation more transparent after the fact, the goal was not met. In a way, the purpose of Motion No. 79 is to make the use of prorogation transparent upstream instead of downstream, after the fact, when it is too late. Essentially, Motion No. 79 would allow, prior to a prorogation of the House and after the Prime Minister expresses an intention to recommend such a prorogation, a motion of confidence to be moved, in which case the motion should meet a range of criteria.

● (1400)

It will have to be tabled with four days' notice and to be signed by 20 members of the House representing more than one recognized party, which removes some of the partisanship from the initiative.

To avoid abuse, there are safeguards in place. Only one such motion can be placed on notice per supply period and only one can be sponsored or signed by the same member of the House in a session of a Parliament. The text of the motion can either be, "That the House has lost confidence in the government" or "That the House has confidence in the government". Both are quite clear and unambiguous. It cannot be amended. The time of the debate is limited to a maximum of one ordinary sitting day and a maximum of 20 minutes per member and 10 minutes for questions and answers. Consequently, no stalling tactics are possible. Once the four days have passed after notice was given, the motion takes precedence over all other business of the House. It is debated and then voted on.

Linking prorogation to a confidence vote will hopefully make a government that wants to use it not only think twice about the risk of being defeated and triggering a general election, but also consider whether it has the grounds to seek prorogation with the assent of other parties in the House.

We must remember that the prorogation of a session puts an end to all the business of Parliament, with some exceptions. Every committee, with the exception of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, stops its work when prorogation occurs.

Every time there is a partisan prorogation, it is the taxpayers, the citizens, who pay the price, since many bills that affect their daily life die on the Order Paper.

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In a political context where we can expect more and more governments to be elected with a minority, making prorogation increasingly likely, Motion No. 79 provides a framework that is entirely justified and welcome.

As for the confidence vote aspect, how does a confidence vote work? How do we define what constitutes a confidence vote?

Actually, it is not always particularly clear. I would refer members to what the parliamentary website tells us. Currently, matters of confidence are regulated by constitutional convention. The website states:

As the confidence convention is an unwritten parliamentary practice, it is not always clear what constitutes a question of confidence. Motions that clearly state that the House of Commons has lost confidence in the government, motions concerning the government's budgetary policy, motions for the granting of supply, motions in relation to the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, and motions the government clearly identifies as questions of confidence are usually recognized as such.

This convention is subject to interpretation, so some uncertainty needs to be cleared up in terms of the definition of "vote of confidence". That is what Motion No. 79 seeks to do.

Professor Hugo Cyr had this to say to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs:

It is essential to understand that it is up to the House of Commons itself to determine whether it gives and maintains its confidence in the government. There is sometimes confusion in this respect, as prime ministers sometimes state that a vote on a particular bill or issue will be a confidence vote.

This undue pressure on parliamentarians could be considered a form of blackmail, and that has no place in a democracy. The government should never be able to hold an opposition responsible for defeating a government, for example, on an issue that should never have been a matter of confidence.

For all these reasons, both with respect to prorogation and the framework for votes of confidence, I commend the work of the member for Elmwood—Transcona on Motion No. 79. It lines up with the recommendations the Bloc Québécois made during the drafting of the report on the prorogation of the summer of 2020.

I hope, despite what I just heard in the last two speeches in the House, that Motion No. 79 will receive the support of the House.

• (1405)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me start off by thanking the member for Elmwood—Transcona for bringing forward this motion. When we are allotted our private member's business, it is done by lottery. I say this to make sure viewers understand. He was fortunate enough to be up near the top, and he has generously donated his time and his space to give parliamentarians this important opportunity. I really see this as important because I think this is an opportunity for colleagues from all parties in the House to start really, truly thinking about what it means to be a member of the House.

We are members of Parliament, first and foremost, no matter what position we hold. We got to this place legitimately because we captured the attention and the confidence of our constituents in our respective ridings. Every person in this House has earned their spot

because of the democratic mandate given to them by the people of their constituency.

That comes before all else, whether one holds a position as Leader of the Opposition or a parliamentary secretary or one is promoted to become a minister of cabinet. First and foremost, one is a member of the House. I see today's debate on Motion No. 79 as an opportunity to reassert ourselves as members of the House and to more clearly understand the rules by which we operate.

Today's motion, of course, is centring on the confidence convention. For constituents of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford who may be watching today's debate, when we start talking about procedure and the Standing Orders, I know it starts to sound like inside baseball. However, there is a reason these debates are important. The Standing Orders and how they are interpreted, how they are written and how they operate allow an elected member of Parliament to do their job properly.

The government has all kinds of resources at its disposal, but for members of the opposition in particular, the rules of the House put us on an equal footing with the government. The rules are particularly important to members of the opposition because of that very fact.

When it comes to the confidence convention, we know that, generally speaking, confidence votes come in a few different forms, but they have never really been clearly spelled out. We are attempting to spell them out today. We know that, for example, anything involving the spending of funds, whether it is a budget implementation act or appropriation bills, would be a motion of confidence. Also by convention, anything else that the government states is a matter of confidence can be interpreted in the same way.

This entire conversation is also rooted in the conversation that we need to have about responsible government. This is because, of course, in our Westminster system, responsible government means that the executive branch owes its responsibility to Parliament and not to the monarch.

We have to understand that we went through centuries of turmoil and fighting to arrive at this democratic ideal. If we look at the history of England, especially during the 1600s, the civil wars, the establishment of the Commonwealth, the Restoration and the Glorious Revolution were all taking place. It was a tumultuous time. Here in our own country of Canada, as well, we have had rebellions. We had the Durham report, which resulted in a pathway towards responsible government. These are important concepts that we have to understand.

In the Standing Orders, there have been references to the confidence convention in the past. It was mentioned back in the 1960s, but through the 1970s and, again, in the 1980s, the provisions were modified several times so that those provisions were actually removed.

Let us turn now to Motion No. 79. Boiling it down, it would essentially require that we hold a confidence vote to take place at the start of every new Parliament or following an expression of intent by the Prime Minister before that person prorogues. There are two very important things here. It would essentially establish, for members of Parliament, for the benefit of members of the House and for the general public, a standardized, streamlined format.

• (1410)

One of the things that we look at when we look at Motion No. 79 is, for example, the requirement that, if a member of the House were to bring forward a motion of confidence or non-confidence, it would have to be signed by 20 of his or her peers, and they would have to be representatives of more than one party. This makes sense because, if a confidence or non-confidence vote is going to succeed, it is obviously going to take more than one party. This would take away from anything frivolous happening. The motion would place this in the existing Standing Orders right after section 53(1), the chapter that outlines how special debates are to happen.

I have heard members of Parliament from the Liberals and the Conservatives, in preceding speeches, wondering about how this would impact the prerogative of the Crown. They need only look at the preamble of the motion, which states right away that it is a prerogative of the Crown to prorogue and dissolve Parliament at its pleasure. We cannot take away from that fact. However, what we can do, as members of the House, is amend our own Standing Orders to provide for a road map on how the House can formally voice its opinion on whether the government of the day continues to have the confidence of the House. This is extremely important because prime ministers have abused that power.

I look at the previous Conservative speaker's speech on this when he said that he could not support this motion because it deserved further study. It is quite shocking that apparently the Conservatives need to study the issue at the procedure and House affairs

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committee to figure out if they need to limit the prime minister's power.

• (1415)

Mr. Peter Julian: Highly suspicious.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: It is highly suspicious.

Mr. Speaker, what we are seeing here with the Liberals and the Conservatives, if they do end up voting against this motion, is their own naked self-interest because, for them, the current system works. They are the status quo parties, and we are not going to see a meaningful push for reform against the Standing Orders because they want to have the opportunity for their executive to use that power and to not in any way be constrained.

Therefore, I implore all members of the House to remember how I started my speech. First and foremost, members are a member of the House, and this is a real opportunity to stand up not only for their rights in this place but also for the rights of the constituents who sent them here, to codify that and to make sure that we have a clear pathway laid out for how confidence is tested in this place.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak.

I want to thank again the member for Elmwood—Transcona for giving us the opportunity to debate this. I very much hope that members will find it in their conscience to support this important amendment to our Standing Orders.

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

It being 2:15 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:15 p.m.)

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