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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 8, 2024

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1100)
[*English*]

VACANCY

ELMWOOD—TRANSCONA

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to inform the House that a vacancy has occurred in the representation, namely Mr. Blaikie, member for the electoral district of Elmwood—Transcona, by resignation effective Sunday, March 31, 2024.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to paragraph 25(1)(b) of the Parliament of Canada Act, the Speaker has addressed a warrant to the Chief Electoral Officer for the issue of a writ for the election of a member to fill this vacancy.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[*Translation*]

PRIVILEGE

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed from March 22 consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure everyone here sends their best wishes to Mr. Blaikie and his family.

We were debating this question of privilege right before we all left for the two-week constituency break.

I first want to say that the NDP was shocked that Mr. Firth would not answer questions. When asked to answer questions before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, he refused. That is unacceptable in our Parliament. That is why we think it is important that Mr. Firth be summoned to the bar of the House of Commons so that we can ask him questions.

The problem is that the original motion did not include all the steps we would have to follow to question Mr. Firth. The Conserva-

tives' motion is basically an empty shell. It does not explain the process. The last time this process was used was in 1913. That was a long time ago. There was no simultaneous interpretation in the House back then. We did not have microphones in the House, or even television.

The Conservatives' proposal does not provide for any structure, and that is unacceptable. That is why the NDP tried to convene meetings of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs over the past two weeks. We felt it was important to have a framework in place. For the time being, there is no framework. There are ongoing discussions with House leaders. I am optimistic that we will come to an agreement. That is what matters.

At the end of my speech, I will explain how the NDP will contribute to the debate if no agreement is reached. We do think it is important to call Mr. Firth to the bar. The Liberals moved an amendment just before the House adjourned for the two-week constituency break. However, that amendment is not acceptable either because it would be several weeks before we would get a chance to question Mr. Firth.

The Conservatives have not proposed any sort of procedure. The Liberals are proposing an unacceptable timeline. The NDP is proposing something that will shorten the whole process, if we do not manage to reach an agreement by the end of the day. It is important that we ask questions. Given how much money this cost taxpayers, we need to set up a time for those questions to be asked. That is extremely important.

In a few moments, I will explain how other committees managed to ask for and get those answers. Mr. Firth, who refused to provide answers that are extremely important to the committee, to Parliament and, of course, to Canadian taxpayers, must be compelled to provide answers to all of the questions that are asked.

• (1105)
[*English*]

Sixty million dollars is a lot of money. The ArriveCAN app is a controversy that we have been struggling to get to the bottom of. Our representative on the government operations committee, the member of Parliament for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, has done an extraordinary job. When we see all the articles about ArriveCAN, the questions he has asked are the questions everybody has asked.

Privilege

In the past, we have seen these kinds of scandals. I remember the ETS scandal under the Harper government, which cost Canadians \$400 million. Because it was a majority government, there was no opportunity for parliamentarians to get those kinds of answers. It was basically shut down.

In this case, in a minority Parliament, the \$60-million charge to taxpayers needs to be fully investigated. The fact is that Mr. Firth appeared before the government operations committee numerous times and refused to provide the answers that are so important for Canadians to obtain. The Speaker, in his ruling just prior to us rising for the two weeks in our ridings, saw this as a question of privilege, showing a profound lack of respect to parliamentarians. It is not the parliamentarians that count; it is the profound lack of respect to Canadians. When a witness comes before committee and refuses to answer those questions, it is our obligation to put in place a process so that those answers are obtained.

We support the question of privilege. We support the idea of bringing Mr. Firth before the bar of the House of Commons, to oblige him to answer those questions that are so relevant in this scandal, as it was relevant under the Harper Conservatives and the ETS scandal, \$400 million that basically disappeared.

The fact that, in a minority Parliament, we have the ability to do this is fundamental. That is why New Democrats believe minority Parliaments simply govern better. There is more of that ability to get the transparency and to get the answers for which so many Canadians are asking.

We have a \$60-million scandal. We had the half owner of the company GC Strategies come before committee and refuse to answer questions, including from my colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, that were relevant, pertinent and extremely important overall.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, you could ask my colleagues for order. I would appreciate that.

• (1110)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I know that there are a number of conversations going on in the chamber. I would ask that the ones who are close to the hon. member speaking to perhaps take their conversations outside or try their best to speak as low as they possibly can.

The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this is extremely relevant. We need to bring Mr. Firth before the bar, but we need to do it in a way that is structured, not a free for all.

In 1913, we did this at a time when we did not have simultaneous translation in the House of Commons. The French language was not recognized the way it is today. We did not have microphones. We did not have television. In all those evolutions over the course of the past century and more, we have put into place a variety of procedures that help to carry the messages and the discussions we have on the floor of the House of Commons right across the length and breadth of this land.

We cannot agree with the idea that the Conservatives have, which is to simply put it in front of the House of Commons without

any sort of framework. We agree with the principle of bringing Mr. Firth before the bar. We do not agree with the idea that it be done without any sort of structure. That is why my colleague, the member for London—Fanshawe, really pushed to have meetings at the procedure and House affairs committee over the two-week time when we were in our constituencies so that we could have a framework in place. That has not happened yet.

There are discussions among the House leaders, who are all honourable colleagues, and I am hoping that we will come to a resolution through the course of the day. That would be a good thing.

However, the reality is that if we do not come to that resolution about putting a framework in, the NDP is then faced with what we saw originally, a motion that did not provide for any sort of procedural process for Mr. Firth to come before the bar and the Liberal amendment that essentially would put it off for a couple of weeks. Given our House calendar, it would be a month delay before Mr. Firth would be brought before the bar of the House of Commons. That is not acceptable either.

What the NDP would do, if we cannot come to an agreement, is shorten both periods. We would give the procedure and House affairs committee a very short period of four days to come up with the procedure so we could have Mr. Firth before the bar next week, and shorten the period that the Conservatives asked for. In their motion, it is a three-day period before Mr. Firth is convened. We would shorten that to 48 hours.

In both ways, we would be putting in place that framework, doing it in a short time frame that is required, given the extent to which Mr. Firth was unco-operative in the government operations committee, and ensuring Mr. Firth would come before the bar and provides those responses that are so vitally important.

This is not a process that has been used often. Since 1913, we have not seen somebody brought before the bar to answer questions. We had the president of the Public Health Agency brought before the bar to be admonished. This is a step up in terms of procedural complexity in ensuring that Mr. Firth can provide those answers that Canadians are looking for around the ArriveCAN app.

This would allow us to get to the bottom of things in a way that we were not able to with the ETS scandal under Mr. Harper, the hundreds of millions of dollars that were wasted at that time, because of a majority government. The Conservatives simply did not want to get the answers for which Canadians were looking. Now, in a minority Parliament, we have the ability to get those answers, and that is fundamentally important.

Privilege

The role the House of Commons plays and the powers that it has are extensive. It is unfortunate that often, with majority governments, we do not see those powers exercised in the public interest. I mentioned the ETS scandal as one example of that. With the ArriveCAN app and getting to the bottom of those questions, we have the ability now in a minority Parliament to decide, as members of Parliament, to convene Mr. Firth before the bar of Parliament.

I am familiar with another example where it did not come to that because the people who were convened and subpoenaed before committee understood the importance of responding fulsomely to the committee and not try to hedge or stonewall for any protracted period of time. I am referring to the Hockey Canada scandal and the Canadian heritage committee.

• (1115)

The reason I reference this is that last Saturday night, I was fortunate to be the keynote speaker, the guest speaker, for the Burnaby Minor Hockey Association in Burnaby, B.C. Attendees wanted to know all of the details around the Hockey Canada scandal. Members will recall that Hockey Canada was convened by the Canadian heritage committee following the horrific revelations of sexual assault in the spring of 2022. It was an all-party agreement. That consensus was one of the moments in parliamentary history when parliamentarians all worked together for the public interest.

On June 20, 2022, Hockey Canada was convened. Scott Smith, the former CEO, and other members of Hockey Canada were asked to answer questions. They stonewalled the committee, but further revelations came out, for example, the fact that there was a national equity fund that was being used to provide funding not to support the growth of hockey but rather to pay off, with non-disclosure agreements, many of the victims of horrific violations of a sexual and physical nature. The fact that the information came out after the appearance on June 20, 2022, meant that the Canadian heritage committee then reconvened the same witnesses on July 27, 2022. At that point we asked for and received answers that allowed us to identify that the national equity fund had identified and made payments to 20 victims.

There were further revelations following the meeting on July 27, 2022. Members will recall that on October 4, 2022, we convened Hockey Canada for a third and final time. We have the ability as parliamentarians to do that. It was an all-party consensus. We subpoenaed its members, demanding that they come to answer questions. They were forced to reveal information not only on the national equity fund but also on the legacy fund, a second fund that used the money of hockey parents across the country, who scrimped and saved to put their daughter or son into hockey, sometimes at a cost of \$1,000 a year, which is a lot of money. The funds were directed to Hockey Canada and spent in a very inappropriate way. All of that came out on October 4, 2022. Members will recall that on October 11, 2022, the entire board of directors of Hockey Canada and the CEO, Scott Smith, resigned.

That is an example of parliamentarians' coming together in a unanimous way, in the public interest, to ensure that answers are provided to Canadians.

What happened with Mr. Firth at the government operations committee is the opposite. He has been convened a number of

times. He has simply systematically refused to answer the questions. Why is that? One can only speculate. In the example of Hockey Canada, it was because answering the questions fulsomely ultimately led to the demise of the CEO and the board of directors. The fact is that they were making decisions that were untenable.

That is why it is so important that Mr. Firth be convened before the bar of the House of Commons and be obliged to answer the questions. Whether or not they reflect on himself or he is concerned about somebody else, whatever the reason is, he has refused to answer questions that are absolutely fundamental. It is important for Canadians to get the answers, and it is important that we exercise the powers we have as parliamentarians.

Speaking with one voice, as I believe that all members of Parliament will support the question of privilege provided we have the right framework, and hopefully working with the government House leader, the House leader of the official opposition and my colleague from La Prairie, we can come up with a framework that makes sense as to how we structure this somewhat historic precedence not used since 1913, which is extremely important to use today. That is why putting in place the structure is so fundamental.

Canadians were shocked by the Auditor General's report with respect to the \$68 million. A number of members of Parliament, such as the member for Edmonton Griesbach and the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, have contributed to the important work that the government operations committee and other committees have undertaken to get to the bottom of this. However, when there is an uncooperative witness, it is difficult to get the information that Canadians need to have.

• (1120)

That is why the motion before us today, with, if needed, an NDP subamendment that would cut all of the procedural times considerably so we could do this as early as next Wednesday, is an important step forward. Provided that we have consensus, we could move forward with alacrity in getting the answers Canadians are looking for.

[*Translation*]

That is a significant step. It is extremely important that we work together if we want to get answers to the questions Canadians have about GC Strategies and ArriveCAN. Over the course of the day, members will be raising points of debate and asking questions. There will be some debate, but hopefully at the end of the day, we will have a consensus, one way or another, on how to set up this unusual procedure.

The last time this procedure was used was before Parliament had simultaneous interpretation and French had an equal presence here. It was also before proceedings were televised and microphones were installed in the House. Back then, people had to project their voices, which was easier for some than for others. All that to say, it was a long time ago. Now we need to modernize the procedure. Most importantly, we need to summon Mr. Firth so we can get answers and real information, with complete transparency. That way, every Canadian can draw their own conclusions about this scandal.

Privilege

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suspect that those following the debate could appreciate that the government is just as anxious as any other political entity inside the House of Commons is to get answers. We have seen a great deal of transparency coming from the government towards ensuring a higher sense of accountability.

The member is familiar with the amendment that was proposed by one of my colleagues the other day, which talks about PROC, and we are not saying that it has to be PROC. We are very interested in how the House can best ensure a sense of accountability and the privileges of members, and in individuals who come to committee being compelled to be straightforward and more honest with committee members. It is a fundamental necessity in terms of our parliamentary system. The parliamentary success of being able to deal with issues of this nature depends on honest, straightforward answers coming from committees. Could the member give us his thoughts in regard to that?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, there are two parts to that question.

The first part is putting a framework around how Mr. Firth comes forward. I think there is unanimous support for this. Parliament rises to the occasion; it certainly did in the Hockey Canada scandal I mentioned. I think it is doing so here as well and that there will be an all-party consensus to convene Mr. Firth before the bar.

I would hope that we have consensus around how to do it. As I mentioned in my speech, the NDP member for London—Fanshawe tried to convene the procedure and House affairs committee so we would actually be ahead of the ball and the committee could have presented a framework for how Mr. Firth would appear. That did not happen. I am hopeful that discussions today will lead to a unanimous agreement on how to structure it.

Where I think I would be in disagreement with the Liberal amendment is the period of time, 10 more days. In real parliamentary terms, that puts it off for the month. I believe, and I think all members agree, that we need to do this as quickly as possible. I am suggesting next Wednesday. I believe we could meet that. This is something that would allow us to get the fulsome answers that the member is speaking about. We all want the answers from Mr. Firth, and this is the way to achieve it.

• (1125)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the key concerns that was raised by the Auditor General in the ArriveCAN report was the lack of documentation. The Auditor General herself said that the most surprising thing for her was what she did not find: documentation. She did not find copies of contracts confirming this.

However, the other thing that has come out of the investigation is the idea and the concept of double dipping, where active public servants are also securing contracts, sometimes with the department they actually work for. Last week at the public accounts committee, we heard from CBSA officials who said that, yes, they had contrac-

tors working for them who were also public sector employees, but they could not really give us an answer.

I wonder whether the member for New Westminster—Burnaby shares our concern about double dipping and whether we need further answers from the public service on the number of double dippers in the public service.

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I have worked with my colleague before. Concern around double dipping is something that the member for Courtenay—Alberni and the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley have raised repeatedly. It is a concern. There is a broader concern as well, which is that with a dedicated public service of people who are very qualified in their positions and who do terrific work on behalf of Canadians, we are increasingly contracting out. It is certainly something that started with the Harper government, has continued under the current government and seems to be increasing every year.

I believe, as the Auditor General has pointed to, that what we see is that often money ends up going to the corporate sector when it should be more properly invested in building the kind of public services that Canadians can depend on. We have a public service that is incredibly dedicated, and I think the member would agree with me on that. We see people each and every day who are profoundly loyal to this country and put in enormous amounts of time and effort and contribute their talents and labour to the country. Why are we farming out functions that should properly be done by the public service to corporations that often are inflating their prices? We are not getting value for money for the taxpayer.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, highlighted the ETS scandal of the previous government, a \$400-million scandal that dwarfs the current scandal by a factor of six. It is important to underline that, because the Conservative Party likes to look back just eight years, but during its time in government, it demonstrated quite clearly that it was just as capable of running roughshod over basic principles of parliamentary democracy, basic accounting principles, and fairness and accountability for taxpayers. The member was here during that time, so he has first-hand knowledge.

I am glad that during his previous intervention, the member touched on the problem that the current government and many governments have had with consultants. We do have a dedicated public service, but we have many consulting firms that are really acting like vampires, leaching off billions of dollars every single year for items that the public service, a very dedicated group of people, could do. I was hoping my hon. colleague could expand on that a bit further because this is obviously a systemic problem that both Liberals and Conservatives have had to deal with and have not properly fixed. Does my colleague have any ideas about what an NDP government would be able to do, and the principles that we bring forth when dealing with this very important issue on behalf of taxpayers?

Privilege

• (1130)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I want to sing the praises of my colleague for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. He has been doggedly determined in every role that he has taken on to ensure that Canadians get value for money and that Canadians get the services they really deserve. I want to congratulate him on being our long-time agriculture critic, and for fighting the good fight against corporate CEOs, who have been dramatically inflating food prices, as our food price critic. He has just been named public safety critic, so he now has three hats, but I know he will perform each role extraordinarily well.

Coming back to the issue of food price inflation, I note that we have seen the tendency of both the Liberals and the Conservatives to rely on lobbying and have seen their refusal, really, to call on the big supermarket chains for the grossly inflated food price gouging taking place. I know the member has played a preponderant role in fighting back against that.

In B.C., we have an expression: “Liberal, Tory, same old story”. Tragically, the ETS scandal, which was one of the most egregious scandals in Canadian history, was never really fully investigated because the Conservatives had a majority. I think it is fair to say that the Liberals have been in a minority Parliament and have been more amenable to getting to the bottom of the ArriveCAN app, which is really important. However, it is \$60 million, not \$400 million, but it is still important. Every million dollars that is misspent is a million dollars that cannot be spent on services to provide support for seniors, for families with kids and for a wide variety of people with disabilities. We need to ensure that we are effectively using our resources, and this is where my colleague for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford hits the nail on the head.

More and more, we are farming out money to corporate consultants at massive expenditures. When the corporate sector takes things on, we see wildly inflated prices. We see this with food price gouging. We see this with gas price gouging with a 30¢ a litre increase over the last few weeks, which is unjustified. However, because there is only a small number in British Columbia that actually provide gas to the market, they can do that with impunity.

The member asked what an NDP government would do differently. We are not beholden to lobbyists, unlike the two old parties. We believe in absolutely ensuring that the public gets the best possible services and the best possible supports, including consumer support.

The Deputy Speaker: Before proceedings to the next speaker, I want to mention that, on Friday, one of my old colleagues, the Speaker of the Nova Scotia legislature, decided to announce her retirement. I just want to wish Karla MacFarlane, Nova Scotia's first female Speaker, a happy retirement and to thank her for the hard work that she has done for the Nova Scotians in the beautiful riding of Pictou West.

Resuming debate, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to approach today's privilege motion in a couple of ways. The first is to deal with the seriousness of what has

been raised over the last couple of days. I like to consider myself, first and foremost, a parliamentarian and someone who truly believes in the parliamentary process.

Winston Churchill often spoke about how difficult things can be at times in a Parliament, but I believe, as he believed, that it is the best system in the world. When I think about what we do here in Ottawa, it is not just what takes place on the floor of the House of Commons. We have a number of standing committees that meet on an ongoing basis and that do a great deal of positive, encouraging work. It does not happen all the time, but I would suggest it happens quite often. Through that, the committees do a great service for Canadians.

The NDP House leader made reference to the price of groceries. As a government, we are concerned about the issue of affordability for Canadians. It is one reason we wanted the big five grocers to go before a standing committee. Standing committees are a wonderful mechanism and can be utilized in many different ways, such as budgetary issues, legislative issues or issues of interest to a particular standing committee.

Let us put this into the perspective of what took place during the pandemic itself. When we had the worldwide pandemic, the Prime Minister made it very clear to all Canadians that we would have their backs going through that difficult time. There was a great deal of tax dollars being spent. At the beginning, it could be seen that there was virtually unanimous support for the government on a good portion of those expenditures.

We have, arguably, the best civil service in the world. We were able to put programs in place, such as the Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, to provide disposable income for Canadians in every region of our country. We were able to develop programs such as loan subsidies, wage-loss programs, supports for seniors, supports for individuals with disabilities and supports for organizations that were helping Canadians through a very difficult time during the pandemic. There were hundreds of millions of dollars, billions, being spent. It was a whole lot of money to ensure that the civil servants, the contractors and the places we were acquiring the products from, like vaccines and masks, could protect the health and interests of Canadians and our economy.

An overwhelming majority of the work, I would argue that it was over 95%, was done in such a manner that we can all take a great deal of satisfaction in how the Government of Canada stepped up to the plate. By doing that, Canada was one of the first countries not only to get out of the pandemic in decent shape, but also to rebound to the degree to which we have seen well over a million jobs generated, which is higher than the pre-pandemic levels. That was because we had the backs of Canadians.

Privilege

• (1135)

When that kind of money is spent and those types of programs are developed, one can anticipate that there are going to be some mistakes. We have before us an excellent example of where there has been abuse. We now have, through ArriveCAN, a high level of interest from members on all sides of the House. I am concerned about it, and I am a Liberal. All members are concerned about tax dollars.

Quite frankly, if one reads the speech by the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, then one would think that the Government of Canada, the Prime Minister and the ministers are 100% at fault and are to blame. The member likes to tie the word “corrupt” to it, if one were to read his speech. I would argue that he did a disservice to the House.

Let me give a good example of that. I want to talk about the ETS scandal that the NDP House leader raised. For those who are following the debate, we need to appreciate that within the civil service there are protocols and processes put into place to protect the taxpayer. There is nothing new there. In fact, not only did we have those types of protocols in place but so did Stephen Harper. One will find that those are put into place to protect the interests of not only the taxpayers, but also, in fact, all Canadians. The ETS scandal took place around 2007, and we are talking again about the public service and contracts to the tune of \$400 million.

I liked it when the NDP House leader made reference to the fact that there was a majority government under Stephen Harper, versus the minority situation that we are in. In a minority situation, a party has to have a majority in order to get things through. It does not mean that we are not interested in getting accountability. Whether we have a majority or a minority, I think the interest level is still there. It is a good comparison to look back at 2007. Where were the Conservatives back then when they had, using their words, a \$400-million scandal at the time? One company in particular had thousands of dollars in bid-rigging fines.

That was a Harper scandal. I could stand up and say “Harper scandal” enough in the hopes that it would get portrayed. It is a little unfair, quite frankly. I do believe there should have been a public inquiry on the issue, given the very nature of what had taken place. When some companies are being fined literally thousands and thousands of dollars, and there is an admission of bid rigging, then, I think there is some justification for an inquiry. The former prime minister, at that time, rolled over it.

Here is the reason I wanted to bring that up. If we look not that long ago in our history, the current leader of the Conservative Party was actually the parliamentary secretary to the president of the Treasury Board during that \$400-million scandal. We have the leader of the Conservative Party today being critical of the government of today, and he was responsible, at least in part, as the Treasury Board parliamentary secretary, and chose to do absolutely nothing on the \$400 million. That \$400 million, in 2007, was worth a lot more than \$400 million today.

Take a look at the overall expenditure in terms of contracts back then compared to today and what we did during the pandemic. This issue came up as a direct result of the government being genuinely concerned and providing the types of services that were necessary

to have the backs of Canadians. Then, the Conservatives find this issue that we want to get to the bottom of, and we will get to the bottom of it.

• (1140)

At the same time, the lead critic, the leader of the Conservative Party, feels that he can go out and about, calling this a \$60-million scandal and trying to tie it directly to the Prime Minister. I suggest the member is living in a glass house. He should go to the wash-room, where he might find a mirror. He should look at his reflection and think about what he did when he was the parliamentary secretary of the Treasury Board, which provides the rules, at least in good part, that ensure things of this nature do not happen. What did he do at that time? I would love to hear the Conservatives talk about the ETS scandal and remind the House what their leader did and what his contribution was.

I did not get a chance to look over Hansard from back then. I would not be surprised if today's Conservative leader said no to looking into the matter at hand at that time, although he supported it going through the court process, no doubt. I do not know that for sure. As I said, I have not gone back into Hansard.

Hansard will show how many times I have stood in the chamber to say that the Conservative Party's sole focus is not about Canadians or having the backs of Canadians. It is about character assassination and looking for bumper stickers for votes. That is the Conservative Party of today. If members doubt what I am saying, they should read what the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes had to say when speaking about this motion for privilege.

We have what is arguably the best civil service in the world, with many countries around the world looking to Canada for ways they can duplicate many of the wonderful things that our civil servants provide to our citizens. However, I think we need to recognize that, sadly, we have some bad apples at times. We see that every so often. At times, unfortunately, that can lead to a substantial cost to the taxpayer.

The issue is what to do when that information becomes available. What I have seen is a government, at least in good part, wanting to get to the bottom of the issue. Whether it is from the individual minister, the many different caucus discussions that take place, or the debates that take place either here or at the standing committees, I can tell the House that the interest is there.

I started off talking about what I believe as a parliamentarian and the importance of the institution. When someone is invited to provide testimony before a committee, the expectation of every member in the House, all 338 members, should be that the witness will tell the truth and avoid playing games. We all know that politicians will play games at committees. At the end of the day, we want to ensure that those people who come before committees are providing nothing but the truth. There is clear evidence that that has not been the case in this situation, so what should we do as a House?

Privilege

● (1145)

As I indicated earlier, the government is genuinely open to how we could best resolve the issue. Unfortunately, once again, this is costing taxpayers a great deal of money. We want to see justice on the issue. It goes beyond the issue of the day to include where we go from here.

The last time something of this nature was brought up was over 100 years ago. As has been pointed out by the NDP House leader, we did not have the modern chamber that we have today.

It is important that, if we are calling someone to the bar in a situation of this nature, we afford an opportunity for questions and answers. That is the reason we are looking for a way to ensure that there is strength in the precedent we are setting, whether for tomorrow or 10, 15 or 20 years from now, and that we have a much more modern process to ensure the importance of our standing committees and the House itself.

I want to see Mr. Firth called to the bar. I want members of Parliament to be able to ask questions and feel confident not only that those questions would be answered but also that the answers would be truthful.

I just want to emphasize that, at the end of the day, unfortunately, things of this nature do take place, and there is a need to have corrective action. That is what we are looking for.

On the issue of contracting out, for those who are following the debate, all legislatures, every province and all political parties, whether it is the national government or provincial governments, rely in part on contracting out. We all have mechanisms in place, protocols and so forth that need to be followed.

When a violation takes place, there has to be a certain level of comfort in knowing that there is going to be accountability for that. This is something that I want to see and that I know the government wants to see. At the end of the day, we look to the Speaker and, hopefully, the House leadership teams of the respective political parties to come up with some sort of consensus.

Let us put the Parliament and the interests of Parliament ahead of the politics. Even given my earlier comments, I believe that we can do that. On this particular issue, we need to start focusing on how we could improve the system. Unfortunately, things of this nature have happened in the past, and there is no absolute guarantee that we can prevent them in the future. However, there are actions we can take to ensure that any future non-compliance or violations could be marginalized or minimized. I am very interested in that, because every tax dollar is an important tax dollar, from my perspective.

At the end of the day, the government's expenses during the pandemic were well-justified, even recognizing the hope that we can get some of that money back. Canadians, as a whole, have been a beneficiary because of the government, and I should not just say "the government", because we did have the support of other political entities for much of the expenditure we put forward during the pandemic.

● (1150)

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of confusing to me, in a way, to hear the parliamentary secretary talk about perhaps moving this into different areas.

It was in front of a parliamentary committee. The committee exercised its obligation and its will to get to the bottom of what Canadians are now seeing as a significant and gross misuse of public funds. Public opinion is in agreement with that.

Even during committee and with the obligations of committee members to get to the bottom of this and the privilege they have exercised to get to the answers, we heard that Mr. Firth did not respond.

What was the next step? It was an unusual and historic step, which was to ask the Speaker to rule on a matter of privilege. The Speaker did. The expectation is that, now, based not just on the debate that we are having today but also on the ruling of the Speaker, that we will have Mr. Firth come before the bar.

I am not as confident, perhaps, as the hon. member that we are going to get to the bottom of this and have Mr. Firth answer questions unless he is brought to the bar and answers those questions directly. Does the hon. member feel that parliamentarians on that committee, exercising their obligations to have those questions answered, are best answered here in the House of Commons, with Mr. Firth called to the bar, or back at committee?

● (1155)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would look at it in the sense of the broader issue. Ultimately, by the actions Mr. Firth has taken, he has insulted not only a particular committee but also all members of the House of Commons. There is a great deal of merit to having Mr. Firth appear at the bar, and I suspect that it is only a question of time.

The real issue is how we design or have a mechanism ensuring that, when we have Mr. Firth at the bar, it is not going to be a wasteful venture, we can protect the parliamentary institution and we can get a higher sense of accountability on an issue that we are all concerned about.

As I had pointed out in my comments earlier, I suspect that many parliamentarians would have liked to see a different level of participation in committees when there was a majority government a number of years ago, during the \$400-million ETS scandal.

In a majority situation, it was actually quite different. Today, we have an opportunity, through the Speaker's chair, to ultimately develop a process that would do Parliament and the institution a service.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with a comment on the ArriveCAN situation. I wonder if the current government would have shown such indignation if not for the objections from the opposition parties, which pointed out that something was wrong long before the Auditor General of Canada. The Auditor General of Canada issued a scathing report on management, which, I would remind members, is the government's responsibility.

Privilege

I hear the parliamentary secretary tell us that the government wants to strengthen and improve the system and close any loopholes. Have the parliamentary secretary and his government set aside funds for this in the upcoming budget, rather than sinking money into things that are none of their concern?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the government very much supports the initiatives and thoughts coming through the AG's office. I would be very surprised if there were not already some actions taking place to protect the taxpayer by looking at the ArriveCAN issue and how we can learn from it and looking at ways we can ensure there is a sense of justice for our taxpayers.

I would emphasize that, when we look at the overall contracting that was done, we have to put it in the perspective of time. There was a great deal of money being spent. A vast majority of it was supported by the Bloc party because we wanted to have the backs of Canadians in every region of the country. Unfortunately, there were things that went wrong, and ArriveCAN is an excellent example of that.

We need to learn from that and fix the problem. It is not the first time that we have had something of this nature take place. I made reference to the ETS scandal of \$400 million. At that time, the leader of the Conservative Party, who was the parliamentary secretary for the Treasury Board, chose to do nothing. We are taking action and we will see more justice on the issue.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is often the case in the House that we get into these debates regarding scandals. We are always talking about people and particular situations. I would put to the member, as I am sure my hon. colleagues the member for Barrie—Innisfil and the member for Brantford—Brant would attest, that the ethics committee is seeing a very troubling trend. We have seen the same trend and witnessed it at the Emergencies Act review committee.

People seem to have lost the seriousness of our ability to call for people, evidence and documents. In fact, I would say that the current Liberal government has been one of the least transparent governments in recent history. We only have to look at the way it uses secret orders in council, redactions and all types of other things. In an age when our democracy is undermined, our institutions are under attack and conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation run rampant, it is safeguarding our democratic institutions and our parliamentary privileges to call for people, to get evidence and to do the work of our standing committees.

I would like the hon. member, who uses his parliamentary privilege probably more than most to speak in the House, to reflect upon and comment on this particular instance, this egregious refusal to provide testimony at a committee given how serious the nature of the allegations are. Can he comment on how that not only undermines that committee but in fact the collective parliamentary privileges of all standing committees, all parliamentarians and, as reflected on in earlier debates, the Canadian public at large?

• (1200)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I guess if I had the opportunity to sit down with some wise people to talk about how we could reform our Standing Orders, one of the standing order

changes I would love to see would be how parliamentary committees need to work more on a consensus basis as opposed to a hard vote. The reason is that there is a completely different attitude in a majority situation versus a minority situation. In minority situations, opposition will often combine and work together on issues.

As I pointed out and we have to be aware of it, the Conservative leadership and that regime have been on character assassination since the current Prime Minister was first elected back in 2014 as leader of the Liberal Party. We can even look at when we were the third party and the criticism that occurred. Character assassination has been the Conservatives' primary objective and a lot of that objective is carried out through some of the standing committees. That is why, if we really want to see more positive outcomes from the standing committees in the modern era, I think we need to look at how we build consensus as opposed to using hard votes.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, it seems like the hon. member is very confused because, just a moment ago, he talked about how he enjoyed minority settings. This idea of a consensus is completely irrelevant to the discussion because, at the end of the day, there needs to be accountability out of government. There needs to be accountability at our committees by the public, by people providing testimony.

Does he not agree that in minority settings accountability, the checks and balances in place, needs to be protected by our parliamentary privileges so that people like Mr. Firth cannot thumb their noses at Parliament and stick it to Canadians?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I think that in certain situations, like we have with Mr. Firth, we can build a consensus, and there is a consensus: Everyone is saying that we want to have the individual at the bar. However, I think the member underestimates the importance of recognizing majority versus minority. I would refer the member to my home province of Manitoba, where I could talk about the Crocus file and others. There is a difference in a majority—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): We are way out of time.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Perth—Wellington.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Madam Speaker, in a moment I will speak more specifically about questions of privilege in this place, but I want to start off more broadly on the privileges and the rights of this institution. Indeed, our House is founded on centuries of precedent, and that precedent is interpreted and applied by the protector of the House, the Speaker of the House.

Privilege

Before I go into the details of my speech, I do want to rise and pay tribute to the late Hon. John Allen Fraser. Mr. Fraser passed away this Saturday at the age of 92, but he served in this place for more than two decades. He served as Speaker of the House of Commons from 1986 until his retirement at the 1993 election. I note this because Mr. Speaker Fraser was the first Speaker to be elected in the House by a secret ballot after the 1986 report of the McGrath committee, which made its recommendations as a committee, I might add, working on a consensus basis. Mr. Fraser served as minister of the environment prior to being Speaker and as minister of fisheries and oceans in the early days of the Mulroney government. I join all Canadians in expressing our condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr. Speaker John Allen Fraser.

Before us today is a question of privilege. Now, questions of privilege are often like solar eclipses, as they do not happen very often, but here we find ourselves today debating one on the same day as a solar eclipse. I want to begin by thanking the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for bringing forward this important question and saying that I will be voting in favour of the motion but not in favour of the amendment moved by the Liberal government.

For more than a year and half, the House and multiple parliamentary committees have been seized with the ArriveCAN scandal, or as it has come to be known, “arrive scam”. From the first indications of concern in 2022 to the damning Auditor General's report in February 2024, week after week, meeting after meeting, new evidence has been slowly unveiled that shows a pattern of deceit, cover-up and potential corruption.

We know that through an opaque network of contractors and subcontractors, the cost of ArriveCAN was slowly driven up and that a small group of select people enriched themselves while performing little to no work. We do not know yet exactly how they achieved this or who within government assisted them. One of the reasons we do not know all of the details is that there was such an apparent lack of documentation and accountability. So few records were found by the Auditor General that she was unable to determine the exact cost of the app. Indeed, the \$60-million figure we have been citing could even be too low. We just do not know, because the Auditor General herself said that what was most surprising about her audit was what they did not find. They did not find the documentation to confirm the work that was completed. However, we know who benefited. It was a company of two people operating out of a basement: GC Strategies.

Just this past week, last Thursday, April 4, at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, we were told by the multi-billion dollar, multinational firm KPMG, who I might add has 10,000 employees, that they were told by a senior government official not to contract directly with the government. Instead, they were told that they must work through a two-person company that has no IT experience. We learned that KPMG was paid \$400,000 for the work it performed through GC Strategies and that GC Strategies took \$90,000 on top of that. This was \$90,000 that went to GC Strategies for no IT work performed. We know that these two people, effectively operating out of a shell of a company, have done all they can to avoid accountability for their actions and to deliberately mislead Parliament, committees and all Canadians on this issue.

• (1205)

That is why the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, more commonly known as the mighty OGGO, reported to the House that, “the committee was unable to ascertain certain facts from Mr. Firth, who repeatedly refused to answer questions”. The OGGO report goes on to state, “Additionally, some of the witness testimony provided by Mr. Firth was called into question as being misleading or false.”

As the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes rightly pointed out, Mr. Firth has, on several occasions, refused to answer direct questions when he was asked and refused to answer and has been caught providing misinformation to Canadians. One specific issue is that he has refused to disclose whose testimonials are on his website. The website quotes senior government officials giving glowing reviews of GC Strategies, yet Mr. Firth, as of yet, has refused to indicate who those senior government officials are.

The House cannot and must not tolerate the disrespect and the degrading of the authority of Parliament and its committees. Witnesses who are summoned to testify must answer questions truthfully and not withhold information that is duly requested.

As the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes thoroughly explained on March 20, there is a long and vital history both within Canada and in its Westminster counterparts showing that a refusal to answer questions before a committee is indeed a contempt of the House. As much as I enjoy referencing and quoting from previous Speakers' rulings, from Bosc and Gagnon, from *Beauchesne's* sixth edition, from *The Power of Parliamentary Houses to Send for Persons, Papers & Records* and indeed from Erskine May, I will indeed spare the House from once again hearing me repeat some of the passages that have already been quoted by other members.

However, spoiler alert, I will in a bit quote from Sir John Bourinot, one of the older authorities of the House, dating back to the early part of the last century.

I will, however, point out that, in the eight and a half years that I have had the privilege and honour of serving as a member of Parliament, I have found that on far too many occasions the House has had to deal with breaches of parliamentary privilege, including the rights of the House collectively or the rights and immunities of individual members. Far too often, we have seen those rights and privileges violated, and the slow erosion of the rights and privileges of Parliament is not a small matter; it is indeed an absolute threat to our democracy.

Privilege

I will recall that on June 17, 2021, in what turned out to be one of the final days of the previous Parliament, members of all three opposition parties made the wise and appropriate decision to pass a motion on a question of privilege. With the passage of that motion, we called the president of the Public Health Agency of Canada to attend the bar of the House for the purposes of receiving, on behalf of the agency, an admonishment delivered by the Speaker for not delivering the documents ordered by the House. That motion was an important step in pushing back against the loss and disuse of the powers and privileges of the House of Commons. It is unfortunate that 147 Liberal members of Parliament voted against that motion.

Moreover, I would also point out that the federal agency at the centre of that scandal, the Winnipeg lab scandal, is also at the centre of this scandal today: the Public Health Agency of Canada. There is clearly a problem with the governance and accountability at both the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canada Border Services Agency. Everyone responsible, including cabinet ministers, public servants and outside contractors, must answer for their actions or inaction in relation to these scandals.

I would recall for the House some of the testimony that we heard from senior government officials at the public accounts committee, including the president of the CBSA. The president of the CBSA stated that the organization just did not know who approved the ArriveCAN application. It just did not know. It reminds me of an old *Saturday Night Live* sketch in which O. J. Simpson was going around the golf course, trying to figure out who the real killer was. The president of the Canada Border Services Agency could not tell the committee who approved the ArriveCAN app, despite being the president of the agency and having full, unfettered access to all documents and people within the agency. It is simply mind-boggling that this was the testimony we heard.

● (1210)

We also heard from the president of the CBSA that she could not find any evidence of the company Deloitte being “in the penalty box”. Once again, it is not shocking that she may not have been able to find the written evidence, but there is no question that she could have talked to the public servants within the agency to find out the reasons that it was. Perhaps some of the emails may no longer have existed because we know now that one of the key, central players in this scandal had permanently deleted all of the emails. We learned last week that to delete emails is “surprisingly easy”, which is another dark mark against this institution.

As well, last week we heard from a vice-president of the Canada Border Services Agency who indicated that there were as many as six or seven outside contractors who were also employed by the Government of Canada, but when pressed for further information, he waffled and gave four separate answers to this very simple question. I think he thought the British sitcom *Yes Minister* was an instructional video rather than the comedic genius it actually was. There were four different answers to that one simple question, but never once did we get the truth about that double-dipping within the Canada Border Services Agency.

There is before the House an amendment that I, frankly, believe would lessen the importance of this motion. Nearly three years ago, we heard about the Winnipeg lab documents, and that motion was

passed. It is clear the amendment, as proposed by the Liberal member for Kingston and the Islands, who serves as the deputy House leader of the Liberal government, must be disregarded. Indeed, if this amendment were to pass, it would not only belittle the seriousness of the situation, but also lessen it. It would also ignore the importance of the rights and privileges of parliamentary committees and significantly delay any meaningful accountability on this matter until May, at the very earliest.

I believe strongly that the supremacy of the House, of Parliament, must be preserved. By sending this off to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for as long as two weeks, we would once again delay accountability. We must uncover, as is said, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is what the original motion intends to do and why we must pull back from the amendment.

I recognize that the act of calling a person to the bar to be admonished by the Speaker and compelled to answer the questions they were previously unwilling to answer is a very rarely used power for Parliament, but I strongly disagree with the member's argument that this is a reason not to use this power. To the contrary, the rarity of this motion shows just how unacceptable the actions of Mr. Firth and GC Strategies are. Just because an action has not been used recently, there is no question that it is nonetheless appropriate in the House.

As promised earlier, I will now cite from Sir John Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, fourth edition, 1916. For those following along at home, it is pages 70 to 74.

Bourinot writes:

A witness who neglects or refuses to obey the order of the house will be sent for in custody of the sergeant-at-arms. Any person refusing to obey this or any other order, or aiding any witness to keep out of the way, may be declared guilty of a contempt of the house and brought before it in custody that he may be dealt with according to its will and pleasure. Witnesses who refuse to answer proper questions will be admonished and ordered to answer them. If they refuse, they may be committed until they express their willingness to answer.

However, that is not the only authority. I would also draw the attention of the House to *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, fourth edition, 1958, at citations 329 and 330; *Beauchesne*, second edition, at citation 701; and of course Erskine May, 18th edition, 1971, at page 672. I will not read those into the record, but I know hon. members will seek out those citations later today.

It brings us back to the fact that, while we may not have used these powers in the past or in recent times, they are nonetheless important to the matter at hand. The fact that these extreme powers are used only in extraordinary circumstances should serve to express and underline the seriousness of the situation we find ourselves in.

● (1215)

Indeed, I would remind the House that the report from the OGGO committee was a unanimous report of all members of the House, and it was concurred in by the House unanimously.

What is often referred to as the grand inquest of the nation would only be effective if we were to receive the needed answers. To choose not to pass this motion would be to choose to not exercise our powers in this case. It would be to choose to willingly weaken the House as a democratic institution. I do not accept that option.

Based on the evidence collected thus far by committees in Parliament and others outside of Parliament, including journalists, and evidence collected through other accountability mechanisms, it has become clear that GC Strategies has used individuals within the federal public service to wrongfully win government contracts and to enrich themselves while performing little, or no, IT work for the Canadian people.

The system of bidding and contracting between these organizations and the federal government has become so corrupted that this two-person firm was able to decide on the contract conditions for a contract that, surprise, surprise, it ended up winning. This organization even uses the name GC Strategies, standing for “Government of Canada strategies” to grant itself a fake sense of authority and legitimacy.

As committee meetings have proceeded, these two individuals, Mr. Firth and Mr. Anthony, have been unco-operative, evasive and dishonest. On multiple occasions, they refused committee summons and invitations, and only appeared most recently before the OGGO committee on threat of arrest by the Sergeant-at-Arms. Only when the Sergeant-at-Arms was ready to place these individuals under arrest by the authority of Parliament did they finally appear before the House.

When Mr. Anthony did eventually appear, he was, at worst, evasive and, at best, completely oblivious to the business of his own firm, despite having the titles of partner and chief security officer. He let on that he knew very little about this company of which he was a partner.

When Mr. Firth eventually appeared, he was, again, unco-operative and, frankly, dishonest. Mr. Firth refused to answer basic questions, including whether he had lied to a parliamentary committee before and whether he had lied about meeting government officials outside of government offices. He also refused to tell members of Parliament the names of the public officeholders with whom he had met outside of government offices, the names of the government officials he had worked with to get over 100 contracts and which senior government officials gave endorsements on the company website. He lied about providing hospitality to government officials.

Here we are, with key facts still being hidden. The people's representatives in this place must be able to hold the government and its contractors to account for this web of deception and fraud. We need to know who else benefited from this scandal and how it was allowed to carry on for so long.

Canada is a parliamentary democracy. The powers invested in the House derive from the Constitution Act, 1867. The duly elected representatives in the House must be able to get the information we need to uncover the truth as we pursue our role in parliamentary democracy. When an individual does not comply, he or she must be held to account.

Privilege

That is why Mr. Firth must be called to the bar of the House to be admonished by the Speaker, and he must be required to answer the questions that Parliament needs answered to get to the truth behind the ArriveCAN scandal. I urge the House to quickly pass the motion in its original form, rather than that of the delay tactic introduced by the Liberal government.

I commend these thoughts to the House.

• (1220)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government has been fairly clear in recognizing that what took place in committee is not appropriate. Ultimately we are to see Mr. Firth come before the bar. It is important for us to establish that, as opposed to the false impression Conservatives are trying to give.

When the member starts making accusations about this government and tying it to a scandal, I wonder if he could reflect on the ETS scandal, which involved \$400 million. His own leader of the Conservative Party was the parliamentary secretary for Treasury Board then, which was, in good part, ultimately responsible for it. Does the member think the leader of the Conservative Party should have done more when he had the opportunity to deal with issues like those we are debating today?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, if we are going to go back nearly 18 years in history, let us remember the very first action of the former Conservative government.

Bill C-2, the very first bill introduced by the Conservative government in 2006, was the Federal Accountability Act, an act that directly came as a result of the Liberal sponsorship scandal of the previous Liberal government.

That is the action the former government took to root out corruption and third parties getting rich off of government contracts. We will take no lessons from the Liberals on actions to root out corruption because the first thing the former Conservative government did when it came into power was to put in place the Federal Accountability Act, something that the previous Liberal government failed to do.

• (1225)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have been around the House for a number of scandals. I remember Jean Chrétien's golf balls. I remember Brian Mulroney's bag of money in a brown paper bag in a motel room. I remember Nigel Wright's \$90,000 secret cheque to Mike Duffy to help pay off whatever.

The issue about what we do at committee is vitally important. We do not have the power to find guilt, but we do have the obligation to get evidence and to present it to the House to make a finding.

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I have sat on committees where we have talked about issuing subpoenas and summons, and while these are tools we do not often use, the government does not like us using these tools. They should only be used very rarely, but if we were to not use them ever, we would lose those tools.

Given what we have seen of the refusal of these witnesses to present and respond to fair questions, this would seem, to New Democrats, to be a good time to use this tool. Does my hon. colleague agree?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I wish the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay well. I know that he will be around for a little bit longer, but I do wish him well on his announcement of his forthcoming retirement from active politics. I am sure he will be involved in other ways.

To his question, he is right. If we do not use the more unique and rare tools the House possesses, they will fall into a pattern of disuse, which is why we, as parliamentarians, must exercise them when the need arises. This is a perfect example of when that need has arisen.

We have witnesses who have shown themselves to be uncooperative at committees and unwilling to attend committees when they have been summoned, which a very strong power. They have only attended when they were threatened with arrest by the Sergeant-at-Arms.

This is a very clear example of the necessity of using this rarely used but nonetheless legitimate tool of the House of Commons to call Mr. Firth before the bar of the House to answer questions on behalf of parliamentarians and, through us, on behalf of all Canadians.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the things that my hon. colleague talked about was the decline in democracy and the diminishment of Parliament.

We all recall, in 2015, how the Prime Minister said that this was going to be the most open and transparent government by default. We found that, since then, nothing has been like that. The member talked about the Winnipeg lab scandal, where they actually called an election so that the information would not come forward.

Could the hon. member speak to the decline and the diminishment of this Parliament and the power and supremacy of Parliament under the Liberal government?

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil for the excellent work he is doing as chair of the ethics committee, which has been working overtime these last number of months to root out scandal and corruption.

He talks about the decline in democracy and the challenges that we as parliamentarians face in getting information. The concept of “open by default”, that we should be able to see the documents and the information on what this government is doing, is laughable now after over eight years.

The ATIP system is broken. We see examples of years upon years of individuals waiting to get what should be fairly simple documents from the government. We see committees being given the runaround when requesting fairly simple information. We see

this across the board in all aspects of parliamentary life, where parliamentarians, who are sent here to do their jobs, are unable to do them because of the lack of information.

Open by default, eight and a half years later, is now closed by default. We are not getting the information that we need, as parliamentarians, to do our job.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Speaker, I think the important thing to remember is that the Conservatives created GC Strategies by giving millions of dollars in contracts to the executives of what was then called Coredal Systems Consulting. We found this out from the Journal de Montréal.

What right do they have to make recommendations and get up in arms? Furthermore, they are attacking the Bloc Québécois for no good reason. They always vote against everything without asking any questions.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what the hon. member wants to know. Obviously, the official opposition party wants answers from GC Strategies.

It is important to know what that group received from this government. We need to know who in the government helped GC Strategies win millions of dollars in government contracts. We need to know these facts.

As the official opposition, we will continue to demand answers from this government.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in response to my question, the member indicated that Stephen Harper first brought in the Federal Accountability Act, Bill C-2, and he was very proud of that fact.

A couple of years later, the current leader of the Conservative Party, then the parliamentary secretary to the president of the Treasury Board, was at least in part responsible for a \$400-million scandal known as the ETS scandal. Members can look it up and see that it is true. I am wondering if he would reflect on that and say that the leader of the Conservative Party made a big mistake back then.

I am wondering if the member would agree that we should be focusing, contrary to what I just finished saying, a little more on the bar question, and that it is a good thing.

Mr. John Nater: Madam Speaker, let me first say I do agree that we need to focus on the issue of calling Mr. Firth to the bar, because we need answers.

My colleague brought up the member for Carleton, the leader of His Majesty's loyal opposition, so let me be very clear about where the member for Carleton stands here today. He stands on axing the tax, building the homes, fixing the budget and stopping the crime. Those are the issues that we, in the official opposition, are committed to, and that is what our leader, the member for Carleton, will deliver for Canadians in the next election, whenever that next election may happen.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to address the House today. Yesterday, common-sense Conservatives announced our demands for the upcoming federal budget.

We called on the government to axe the tax on farmers and food by immediately passing Bill C-234 in its original form. We called on the government to build the homes, not bureaucracy, by requiring cities to permit 15% more homebuilding each year as a condition for receiving federal infrastructure money. Finally, we called on the government to cap the spending with a dollar-for-dollar rule to bring down interest rates and inflation. We said the government must find a dollar in savings for every new dollar of spending.

These were the three common-sense Conservative demands for the budget: axing the tax on farmers and food; building homes, not bureaucracies; and instituting a dollar-for-dollar rule. Of course, Conservatives in government would go further to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

Under the NDP-Liberal government, we see how spending is completely out of control. Under the Prime Minister, Canada will spend \$46.5 billion this year to service the debt. That is more than the federal health transfer. The government is spending more on servicing the debt than it does on the federal health transfer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. When the budget comes out, the member will be provided a wonderful opportunity to talk about the budget. It will be coming up very soon, but today we are debating about an individual, Mr. Firth, coming to the bar.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member knows there is a lot of leeway in how we introduce subjects. I am expecting the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan to get to the heart of the motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, the member opposite was enthusiastic about hearing the rest of my speech, and I invite him to hear it now.

The Prime Minister is responsible for \$46.5 billion this year in debt service costs. That is more than the federal government will transfer in health care. Astronomical amounts of money are being given to bankers and bond holders for the Prime Minister's out-of-control debt. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost, the crime or the corruption.

Today, as the member pointed out, we are not debating the budget directly. We are discussing a question of privilege that relates centrally to government spending, to how the government spends taxpayers' dollars and the lack of controls associated with that spending. The point I want to emphasize is that this arrive scam

Privilege

scandal is intimately linked to overarching questions about how taxpayers' dollars are spent.

The government spent \$60 million, according to the available data, on the arrive scam app, but that is a drop in a much larger ocean of contracting out to government insiders. The arrive scam scandal is illustrative of this larger problem of abuse, corruption, at best extremely generous contracting out, which has led to so much waste of taxpayers' dollars. The government will try to convince people that all of its spending is necessarily associated with meeting immediate needs that Canadians face, but that is very clearly not true.

We need to understand this picture of how government procurement is being abused under the NDP-Liberal government, how costly it is for taxpayers, and what an opportunity this presents for us to do better, to save money for taxpayers and focus, instead, on the core needs of our country.

Specifically on the arrive scam scandal, we had, according to the Auditor General's report, a rigged process. We had a process in which specifications were put in place that do not appear to make any logical sense but served the result of giving this one company, with only two people, the ability to access this contract. GC Strategies got the contract for the arrive scam app and subcontracted it. That company alone, according to estimates, got some \$20 million. It did not do any work, other than a very sort of perfunctory activity of going to LinkedIn and finding others who might be able to perform the work.

A simple way of understanding what GC Strategies did and did not do would be if I were hired to paint your fence, Madam Speaker, for \$100. I then hired the member for Winnipeg North and paid him \$50 to paint the fence. He painted your fence and got \$50. You paid me \$100 and I just got \$50 for facilitating the deal. Maybe I went on LinkedIn to find out that the member for Winnipeg North could paint fences.

He might be looking for job opportunities like this after the next election, so this may be a relevant example.

In that process, the middleman, the person who got the contract and passed it on, did not actually do anything. They did not add any value, yet they were able to collect, big time. The nature of this scandal was that GC Strategies, this so-called staff augmentation firm, which I think is the lingo that was used, took the contract, subcontracted the work out and got a whole bunch of money in the meantime for doing nothing.

● (1235)

The process that allowed GC Strategies to get this contract was a rigged process. In fact, the Auditor General revealed how GC Strategies, in one case, sat down with government officials and set the terms of the contract that they would then bid on.

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We heard at the Standing Committee on Public Accounts over the break that KPMG was told to go through GC Strategies by government officials. They said that if KPMG wanted to be part of this work, then they had to go through GC Strategies. The government was aware of other companies that could do this work, yet they directed those companies to go through GC Strategies. There was clearly something of a special relationship whereby members of the NDP-Liberal government were keen to see GC Strategies cashing in big time, for reasons that remain somewhat unclear.

GC Strategies is also a company that doctored résumés they were submitting to the government. This is something that we should be teaching children not to do. It is not appropriate or ethical to be doctoring your résumé in order to access an opportunity that you would not otherwise qualify for. It appears that GC Strategies was doctoring résumés systematically.

During his earlier appearance at committee, Kristian Firth said they change the résumés to make them compliant with the requirements of the contract. Then they go back to their resource and ask if it is okay. If I am applying for a government contract, and I have five months of experience when I am supposed to have five years of experience, then GC Strategies would cross out “months” and write in “years.” Then they would send it back to me and say, “We made this little change. Is that okay?” Then they would send it off to the government afterward.

Kristian Firth admitted that this was not something that they did just once. Adjusting résumés to meet the requirements of the contract and then checking if that was okay before sending them in was their process. What a wild and broken system this was.

We have rigging of the process and systematic cheating, things that young children should know are highly unethical and that seem to have been happening systematically in the government. Despite these obvious problems with GC Strategies, the Liberal-NDP government was keen to push other companies to work through GC Strategies. Then we have obfuscation in committees and accusing people of lying. These are some of the particular issues around the arrive scam scandal.

Thinking about this in the context of the budget and the overall fiscal situation, we have been digging more on the arrive scam and asking what the procurement practices are that allow this sort of thing to happen. What is happening more broadly inside of the government that allowed \$60 million to be spent in this case and for nobody to seem to notice or care?

First of all, this process of contracting to people to contract other people was not just a one-off. It was not something that happened just in the case of ArriveCAN. We found that there are 635 companies that do IT staff augmentation for the federal government. There are 635 companies whose job it is to receive contracts and then contract out.

I think there are cases where contracting out is likely legitimate, although I am very skeptical of the idea that there is any value in contracting out to those who subcontract and perhaps further subcontract after that. The general contractor project management function should be able to be performed inside of government, yet we have 635 companies that do IT staff augmentation only. They

act as these middlemen, these middle companies that receive contracts and contract out.

There are 635 of them in the IT space alone. That is not just a one-off. That is not just the arrive scam app. This is a larger issue with how the government treats money overall. The larger issue is systematic growth in contracting out and contracting out to those who just do this “staff augmentation” piece. We have seen how, in the midst of dramatic growth in spending on the public service, there has also been dramatic growth in spending for contracting out.

● (1240)

The government was spending tens of billions of dollars in contracting out. Some of it was for management consulting, and we have talked about the enormous growth in spending on McKinsey, and some of it was for those who further contract out. We are spending more inside of government and we are also spending dramatically more outside of government. We would expect those things to be inversely related in that if we are spending more growing public service then we should be contracting out less, or maybe if we are contracting out more, that should correspond to having a smaller public service. However, the government is growing the size of the public service and contracting out more at the same time.

The NDP-Liberal government clearly has a profound lack of respect for taxpayer dollars. Then it will try say that the Conservatives want to fix the budget and that the money will come from cuts. However, when we look at how broken our contracting system is and when we look at the 635 companies doing staff augmentation in the IT space and the tens of billions of dollars being spent on contracting out, pretty clearly there is a lot of room to get the budget under control. We can stop giving money to those outside companies that are abusing the taxpayer and providing no value and we can instead provide tax relief to Canadians who need it. We can instead axe the tax, build homes and cap spending. We can get out budget under control if we fix these grotesque abuses in government spending.

One key aspect of this scandal we need to ask about is where the minister was in all of this. It is right and important that we demand answers from these contractors. Canadians elect members of Parliament from which emerge a cabinet and a government, an executive branch, that are supposed to be accountable for the decisions that the government makes. They are supposed to be providing oversight and policy direction. Of course, ministers are not involved in the minutiae of every decision, but they are responsible for the culture and the policy frameworks that are established.

I asked the minister of procurement what he was doing in the midst of this arrive scam scandal. Actually, there have been a number of different ministers. I think four ministers just in the period since the pandemic have been responsible for procurement. Therefore, there have been many hands that should have had an opportunity to impact this process, yet all of those ministers, and anybody who speaks from the government, would have us believe that they were just there, that something happened in the department that they were supposed to be in charge of, but that they had no accountability or responsibility for it. That is absurd.

Ministers should take responsibility for what happens in their departments. They should establish clear expectations in terms of accountability, ethics, respect for taxpayer dollars. When costly criminal corruption is occurring under the watch of a particular minister, then the minister should have some responsibility and some response to what she or he is doing in order to address those concerning events. However, when the current Minister of Public Services and Procurement was before committee, I asked him when he was briefed and what did he do. He said that he had received a briefing and that he provided no directive in terms of action in response to this scandal. That is unbelievable.

The descriptions by public servants are that ministers receive briefs, remain apprised of or seized with what is going on, but then ostensibly do nothing and have no role in actually shaping policy outcomes, which is just unacceptable. At best, the government has been a disinterested passenger in the midst of declining respect for taxpayer dollars. That is an overly charitable description. The government has itself shown flagrant disregard for taxpayer dollars and has been complicit in various corruption scandals over the eight long years that it has been in power.

● (1245)

Even in its defence, the government says that the minister had nothing to do with it. We have someone in the government whose title is “Minister for Public Services and Procurement”, yet when there is one of the biggest procurement scandals in our country's history, the government says that we cannot expect the Minister of Procurement to have anything to do with a scandal in procurement. It is just in the name.

At committee, I proposed, and it elicited points of orders and maybe it will today, that we could replace the Minister of Public Services and Procurement with a potted plant and we would have the same result. A potted plant could receive briefings, naturally. A potted plant could be apprised of events, though it would obviously not take any action in response to those events.

Ministers were in the room, received briefings, but did nothing. They would want us to believe that the role as a minister of procurement is to simply be there, to hear things, to be interested in those things and to receive updates. Again, we could save a drop in the bucket in comparison to other money that could be saved, but we could at least save a minister's salary if we replaced the current procurement minister with some such inanimate object.

I want to underline that the arrive scam scandal, as bad as it is in and of itself, is a drop in this larger ocean of government waste and corruption. Tens of billions of dollars are being spent on contracting out. There was clearly a basic incontinence associated with

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government spending. The money just flows out for no discernible reason. The processes are rigged. There is obfuscation and unresponsiveness at committee.

The latest is that we have seen how the indigenous procurement rules are being abused by insiders, insiders who feel they have no obligation to bring about any benefit to indigenous communities through their access to indigenous procurement. A lot more work needs to be done to understand the abuses of the indigenous procurement process that have been happening under the government. Very troubling information has come out, for instance, David Yeo saying that the point of the program is not to benefit indigenous communities, it is just to benefit him as an entrepreneur. I do not think that is the point of the policy.

We see costs, corruption and crime happening under the government. This privilege motion is one key piece of getting to the bottom of what happened, demanding answers from Kristian Firth that he was unwilling to give at committee. This would help us suss out, in detail, all the crime, corruption and the cost that we are seeing under the NDP-Liberal government.

Enough is enough. Canadians are looking for an alternative that will respect taxpayer dollars, that will restore probity in spending, that will bring it home.

● (1250)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member said that the \$60 million for ArriveCAN was a record in Canada. That is just not true. All the member needs to do is take a look at the ETS scandal, which was \$400 million, and \$400 million is more than \$60 million. The parliamentary secretary at the time is the leader of the Conservative Party.

The member made reference to ministers and parliamentary secretaries being plants. I would suggest that maybe the leader of the Conservative Party is a dandelion, one of those yellow weeds that we pull all the time. I think the leader of the Conservative Party might be a little offended by his colleague calling him a plant.

I wonder if the member would like to retract those words and, at the same time, maybe indicate how he believes people who are called to the bar should be questioned.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of some of the long-tenured, historical events about which the member is speaking. I am a relatively young member of the House, so events before a certain date are before my time.

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It is pretty rich for the Liberals, after eight years in power, to always want to draw our attention to things that happened in decades past. The fact of the matter is that since 2015, the national debt has more than doubled. More than half of our national debt is the responsibility of the Prime Minister. That is why we are now spending more on debt servicing than we transfer for health care. It is outrageous, out-of-control spending under the government. The \$60 million for the arrive scam scandal is important, but it is part of a larger pattern of cost, crime and corruption. I mentioned some of these numbers in my speech, such as over 600 companies just doing staff augmentation. It is out of control.

• (1255)

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, moments like this give me much joy, because the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan spoke of the parasitic private class sector of consultancy, in which he perfectly describes Marxist historical materialism, outlining, quite effectively, I might add, the central role of capitalism's use of exploitation of the workers.

What the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan referenced is the Marxist theory of surplus value of labour, wherein those who actually create the value are exploited by their employers in which, through unpaid labour, is pumped out of their direct producing, so that the capitalist consultant class gets the opportunity to basically profit on work that it does not actually create value in.

For my new Marxist comrade from the Conservative caucus, what other sections of *Das Kapital*, Volume III would he like to reference for the good and welfare of the House?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I was greatly amused by the member's question. I thank him for bringing joy and levity to the House. Of course, we are speaking about the predatory, unholy mixing of the elite consultant class with the state.

The member could reflect on how this procurement scandal really speaks to the negative effects on workers of big government trying to take more and more control, a government that is in bed with a few well-connected consultants, and that this kind of state capital, as opposed to a true free market system, is what is undermining the well-being of Canadians.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member talked about \$46 billion in our national debt servicing. This money is going to service a record debt. The Prime Minister has doubled the national debt. I am just wondering if the member has any hope that this debt will be paid off within his lifetime or the lifetime of his grandchildren.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, it is hard to predict the timeline, but I have a great deal of hope about the critical steps that a Conservative government would take to fix the budget, and that includes establishing a dollar-for-dollar rule. This is common sense, that if a government is going to spend a dollar on something new, it should be able to explain where that dollar is coming from.

Those NDP-Liberal coalition partners are keen to announce all kinds of new spending initiatives, but they never explain where the money is going to come from. Clearly, in all of these new spending proposals, and, in many cases, I do not think they are serious about doing them, they promise new spending that will kick in at some

distant point in the future. In every case, where the money is actually spent, it is digging us further into deep debt.

Beyond that, we have this flow of wasteful spending, the middleman consultants, the management consultants who have done so well under the government.

If we instituted a dollar-for-dollar rule, this will get us back on track to understand that if we are going to spend a dollar on something, it has to come from somewhere.

• (1300)

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I have to reflect on this. We cannot let him off the hook. I know that when the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni was on OGGO and when I served on it, we got into this stuff. The truth is that the Conservative government also has a long and storied history with the Deloittes of the world, the PricewaterhouseCoopers and all of these others.

I am keenly interested in this. Does the hon. member believe in the value of public sector workers doing public sector jobs with public sector accountability and, if what I am hearing is correct, is it his position today in the House and in this debate that a Conservative policy would be to eliminate the bloat of the parasitic private sector consultancy class, yes or no?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, very clearly, under the NDP-Liberal government, contracting out is out of control. There has been a ballooning of external contracting, as well as significant growth in the public service.

Do I think it is never reasonable to contract out? No, I do not think that. I think there are cases where contracting out is legitimate. However, we have seen an excessive use of management consulting and the use of unethical companies like McKinsey. There are contracts to contract, to subcontract and so on. I think our position is a reasonable and balanced one, which is that we need to have proper accountability and spending controls.

The NDP is very disingenuous. It continually votes confidence and supply to its Liberal partners to allow them to pursue the same policies the member claims to denounce. If the member wants to actually see any kind of reform, if he wants to see us move away from the kind of excessive contracting out and the waste we have seen under the Liberal government, I would challenge him to put his money where his mouth is and to vote no confidence in the government.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, as always, it is an honour to be able to enter into debate, as it is now on something that speaks to the heart of, the critical aspect of, what this place represents. In particular we are talking about somebody who came to committee and misrepresented at best, or outright lied, as is mentioned in the motion.

My question for the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is very straightforward. I am curious whether he could reflect on how important it is that the principles of parliamentary privilege and supremacy are carefully stewarded to ensure that this sort of running roughshod over the public purse and over the rights of Canadians can be kept under control.

Ultimately this, among many other issues, has eroded the trust in our institutions. The erosion of trust has been led by a Prime Minister and government that seem to care little about governing and more about politics, pressers, photo ops, and their agenda that does not necessarily result in actionable items.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question from my colleague. We are seeing democratic decline in this country and a lack of respect for our democratic institutions.

The Prime Minister recently announced that the government is spending millions of dollars to look at the link between democratic decline and climate change. If he wants to learn more about democratic decline, my suggestion is that he just buy a large mirror, though he probably already has a few of those. He can learn a lot about democratic decline if he just buys a large mirror.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is, as always, an honour to stand on behalf of the people of Battle River—Crowfoot and enter into debate on the important subjects that come before this place.

For those people who are watching and are wondering what a debate on privilege is, let me unpack that for a quick moment. “Privilege” is a word that is often used in society, but it has a unique meaning in this place. It ensures that, ultimately, Canadians have the full and supreme power to control the affairs of the nation, including the government. The reason it is called “privilege” is that each member of Parliament, when they are given a mandate by the people, is endowed with the authority to make decisions. It is this body of 338 members of Parliament, individuals who represent every square inch of the incredible country we have from coast to coast, that is the only true representative entity in the nation and that has the ultimate authority to determine the future of our nation.

The reason a privilege debate is so very important is that it speaks to the very heart of ensuring that the rights of members of Parliament to represent their constituents, Canadians, are not infringed upon. It comes back to the fundamental tenet of parliamentary supremacy, which is something that is unique to the Westminster system and something that I would suggest sets us apart in terms of the power we have.

In fact, looking around this place, we see the history that lends itself to this being the supreme law-making agency of the land. There are things like the mace; although there is a ceremonial purpose when it is walked into the House in a parade, a lot of people may look at it and say, “What is the big deal about that?”. It is the transference of the authority of the Crown to the democratically elected government of the people. There is the fact that we are given the opportunity to speak to motions, the fact that members cannot be silenced, the fact that there are votes when there is a conflict as to who can be heard, and the fact that confidence motions exist. All of these things speak to the privileges that members of Parliament have in this place.

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For those people who are watching and wondering what the big deal is about a privilege motion, it speaks to the very heart of what our democracy is, which is ultimately that the people, Canadians, are the ones who get to choose a path forward. That is why, when it comes to the issue at hand, I will dig into some of the details as to the astounding revelations that have come out of some of the committee meetings. Whether it be the relationship that this place can and should have with committees, or whether it be the host of other concerns we have that are related to the motion on the question of privilege before us, it ultimately comes down to a defence of democracy and our democratic institutions. If we do not have that, we risk losing our democracy.

My fear is that over the last number of years, we have seen a continual erosion of that. I think that most Canadians would give a tremendous amount of latitude for the first few weeks of COVID. Nobody around the world knew what was going on, and certainly that can be litigated. However, the government brought forward an omnibus spending and taxation bill. The fundamental tenet of the idea of privilege, of Parliament's being the ultimate decision-maker for the land, is that taxation and spending are the prerogative of this place.

Yet it was the Prime Minister, exceptional circumstances or not. Not even during wartime, when the world was at war two times over, did the government bring forward motions that would have given unlimited taxation and spending authority. However, there has been the roughshod attitude that the current government seems to care little about our history and our institutions but rather is far more interested in pursuing its political agenda in the pursuit of power. It is not the pursuit of power that a government should be interested in; it is the pursuit to serve Canadians.

We have seen the balance that should exist in this place turned absolutely on its head. We have heard about it from my colleagues in the Conservative Party who spoke today and prior to the last constituency break. They have emphasized how there has been a democratic decline. The Liberals are quick to say it is due to factors outside their control. The New Democrats are quick to say it is factors outside their control. However, ultimately, it needs to come down to an empowering of the citizenry of our country, and that is safeguarded through what we call privileges in the House.

• (1305)

If we lose those things, if we see those things eroded, then we face a grave challenge to being able to do the solemn duty that has been entrusted to all of us as members of Parliament, at a time when there has been a substantial erosion of regular Canadians' being able to trust that their government has their best interest in mind. I hear about this all the time, whether I am travelling across my constituency or visiting communities in other parts of the country, whether I am in airports or other places, when I have a chance to visit with amazing, regular Canadians, not the academic class of people who have a whole host of letters behind their name. Regular Canadians wonder what the deal is. They wonder whether they can trust.

I will get to the substance of the motion in just a moment.

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It used to be that although someone might not have liked the Prime Minister, they still respected the office. Increasingly today there are many Canadians who have simply lost respect for the office of the Prime Minister and so many of our democratic institutions, like our justice system. I could give numerous examples of how the justice system is failing Canadians. When the justice system fails Canadians, for which the laws are passed by this place as the ultimate arbiter of the land because we have a principle of parliamentary supremacy safeguarded by parliamentary privilege, it is incumbent upon us to take action. However, we see increasingly that the Liberal government is unwilling to do so.

“Privilege” is not a flippant term that can simply be glossed over, saying it is not a big deal or that it is the responsibility of committees. It comes down to the very fundamental ideas of what our democratic institutions are and what they should be. I hope that sooner rather than later there will be a Conservative government, led by the member for Carleton, to do hard work of restoring the trust in our institutions that has been broken. We can do that. It is going to take tough work. The member for Carleton, the leader of the Conservative Party, often says that it is time for the government to focus on doing a few things well, as opposed to doing everything poorly.

That is the place we are at. Nothing seems to be going well in this country. The solution that the Liberals seem to be so quick to propose is that they will simply spend more money. We saw that during COVID and with a host of other issues, a laundry list of things. They seem to be quick to spend more money, and they say that is the answer, yet it is Canadians who are then suffering. It is Canadians who are seeing the impacts. The Liberals want to deal with an issue they find is very important: the environment and climate change. What do they do instead of actually proposing solutions? They simply punish Canadians. It is that flippant attitude that is causing the erosion of trust in our democratic institutions.

We are debating a question of privilege that is about something that is hard to believe. It almost sounds comical. It is something someone would read about in the synopsis of a Saturday night political drama. Two individuals in a firm received what we think was a \$20-million contract. It might have been more; there is not good documentation to prove exactly what the number was. The individuals were called to testify before a parliamentary committee, but their testimony was lacking in facts, to put it lightly. What we can see in the motion is a clear disregard for fundamental tenets.

As a member of the ethics committee and as a person who cares deeply about the institutions and infrastructure of our government, I have seen the flippant nature of the Liberals, who are being propped up by their partners in the NDP. They approach these things with little care about the impact they have on the trust in our institutions. We saw that with an app that was supposed to cost several hundred thousand dollars but that ended up costing more than \$60 million. We do not even know what the full cost of it was. This is the sort of stuff one would read about in a Hollywood political soap opera or drama. However, it is being played out in reality, in the House of Commons in our country.

The Liberals have responded to this by saying, “Yes, maybe something went wrong, but it wasn’t us.” When it comes to questions surrounding committees, they say it is because committees

have become dysfunctional. It has nothing to do with a scandal. It has nothing to do with mismanagement. It has nothing to do with the fact that it is the job of MPs to actually get answers. It has nothing to do with the fact that committees have a core and fundamental purpose that is guaranteed through the processes that have been laid out in the Parliament of Canada Act and in the Standing Orders to study specific things.

● (1310)

They do not take any of that seriously. They say, “Oh well, it’s simply partisanship.” However, I have noticed something, which is an observation that I offer to all Canadians who are watching this important debate. The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, among other members of the Liberal cabinet and members of the NDP leadership, are really good at this. However, it seems as though there is a dramatic decline in the number of NDP members in the House currently, so I wonder what that will look like after the next election. However, when it comes to the fundamental tenet of working for the best interest of Canadians, the only time we hear the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and other members of the NDP-Liberal coalition talk about team Canada is when it has been coupled with failure. It is tragic, quite frankly.

Housing is a little separate from the issue at hand but still closely related. If we take housing, we see that the Liberals take housing seriously all of a sudden. They forget that they have been in power for close to a decade, that housing costs have doubled under their leadership and that the inflationary crisis that has led to the diminishment of the purchasing power of Canadians is a result of their mismanagement of the economy. However, they are now saying, “You know what, it requires a team Canada approach.” In terms of the vernacular, I do not disagree, but the challenge is that it is only when the Liberals have failed and Canadians are feeling the consequences of that failure that the Liberals say a team Canada approach is needed.

What is the consequence of that? They have weaponized that very phrase, and what it should mean for Canadians, to accomplish their political objective: to retain power at all costs. It is absolutely shameful. The erosion of trust in our democratic institutions is hurting our country, the building in which we stand and everything that it represents, and every aspect of what government should stand for. Therefore, it is time that this country have a government that is willing to roll up its sleeves and do the hard work of governing and prioritize not photo ops but the administration and management of government.

We see practical solutions being proposed, often by the member for Carleton and the incredible team of Conservatives that we have in the House right now. I often speak to candidates who are looking forward to running in the next election. There was an opportunity to run in a carbon tax election confidence vote, when all other parties showed exactly where they stood. They are in favour of bankrupting Canadians and having an extremist ideological agenda as opposed to letting Canadians actually make a choice. However, we see an incredible team that is bringing pragmatic practical solutions forward and that is willing to roll up its sleeves and get that work done, because we have seen the antithesis of that under the Liberals, and it is hurting the very institutions that we need to work so hard to steward and defend.

It is a couple of weeks ago now, because of the Easter break, that my colleague for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes moved this privilege motion, after the Speaker's finding. However, we have a clear opportunity here. I would note that I support that; I have some concerns about the amendment that was moved by the member for Kingston and the Islands, because it seems that instead of actually getting to the root of the issue, in an unsurprising manner, the Liberals would simply rather study it some more. They would reduce the urgency with which Conservatives, certainly, take this fundamental issue, where our democracy is at stake.

As the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes said after moving this motion, calling somebody to the bar to demand accountability is “Using an extraordinary remedy to an extraordinary problem”. It would basically signal or flag to the nation that we take seriously the job we have to do here and that one does not run roughshod over democracy. Now, it is unfortunate that there seem to be backbenchers from both the Liberal and NDP parties, and, I would suggest, often the Bloc Québécois, who do not take this as seriously as they should. However, it is that running roughshod over democracy that is so troubling and speaks to the urgency of the issue before us.

Again, it was an \$80,000 original price tag on this app. I think there is a lot of discussion that needs to happen about how the Liberals ran roughshod over the fundamental rights of Canadians.

• (1315)

This app that the Liberals said was so important when they mandated it sent tens of thousands of people into quarantine. It restricted the constitutional ability of Canadians to not only enter the country but also, by virtue of this, exit the country. There are a host of things they never seemed to have concern for, such as the implications of the policy decisions they made. They will say, and I can hear it now, that it was because of extraordinary circumstances. However, that does not excuse the need to take great care and steward the administration of government and the freedoms that we have.

My colleague, the shadow minister for ethics, outlined very clearly the long history over the course of close to 160 years of our parliamentary system. It is not quite there but is getting close. Of course, there is further reference to the opening words of the British North America Act, or the Constitution Act, 1867. It even mentions how it would be a government in a similar format, and I am para-

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phrasing here, to that of the United Kingdom. In his remarks, he referenced some of the precedent from long before the foundation of our country to ensure that the privileges and, ultimately, the democratic rights of Canadians are protected.

We see how, over the course of the committee testimony, GC Strategies, specifically, was misleading in its name. A lot of people would look at its website and think that it must be the Government of Canada. I would not blame them. The Government of Canada is GC. In fact, the emails of all MPs have “GC” in them, so it is misleading at best.

Then there are a whole bunch of little things, such as the unnamed public servants who gave glowing recommendations about the services that can be provided; they are not willing to say who gave those. It turns out that this is not actually part of the procurement process. There is the fact that, the other day, it was revealed in testimony that KPMG was told to go and talk to GC Strategies in order to get a contract. It is the pinnacle of absurdity, yet it seems to be the culture we find ourselves in under the Liberal Prime Minister and the NDP-Liberal coalition, which continues to vote confidence and back him and that corruption up in this place.

I would simply highlight a couple of—

• (1320)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. member. The parliamentary secretary is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I rise only because I know a number of members have made reference to “GC” being the Government of Canada. I do not know to what degree that has been substantiated, and it is a bit of a concern. I do not want to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I think the hon. member was actually making a point about it not being the Government of Canada. I will let him pursue his speech.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, whether intentionally or by accident, the member just proved the point. The fact is, we have an entity that received \$20 million in funding on an app that was originally supposed to cost \$80,000, and the company that was contracted is named GC Strategies. The confusion that it has endeavoured to throw at this seems intentional in what we see as an exponential explosion of contracting by the Liberal Party, which was backed by the NDP every step of the way.

That is exactly the point. It manipulated the facts and the truth for its political agenda so it could get contracts or so, when somebody looked through a procurement list, they would see GC Strategies and maybe think that it must be another department under Treasury Board or something like that. That speaks to the exact point, I would suggest, that we need to be making here.

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I would reference as well that the Auditor General has done some incredible work in outlining some of the egregious accounting, to say the least, when it comes to this. That is only one more thing on the laundry list. It would be one thing if this were an exceptional circumstance under the Liberal Prime Minister, but the government seems to be quick to run roughshod over accountability, our institutions and, ultimately, over the privileges that are the fundamental backbone of preserving our democracy. Therefore, many Canadians are simply saying that they do not trust the Prime Minister or the government.

It is not an exceptional circumstance. It seems that, every single day, there is a new scandal, a new controversy or something that the government has mismanaged that has led to corruption. One can only jump to this conclusion: It seems that this rot goes from the bottom all the way to the top, and change needs to happen. I will close with that.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I take some exception to what the member is saying.

When I think about the leader of the Conservative Party, I think it is “do as I say, not as I do.” When the leader of the Conservative Party was the parliamentary secretary for the Treasury Board, there was a \$400-million contract scandal with ETS. I am sure the member is aware of it. His leader was the parliamentary secretary at that time.

When he is critical of the government and blaming ministers on this side, does he not realize that he is also reflecting on his own leader? What did the leader of the Conservative Party do back then on a \$400-million scandal?

● (1325)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I find it interesting that the Liberals are quick to pivot, deflect and divert when it is under the member's leadership and his Prime Minister, supported by the NDP and the leader of the NDP, that we have seen a doubling of contracts going through the course of the government. This is exceptional in terms of the number in and of itself. What is also exceptional is the seemingly exponential increase in the cost of the simple expenditures of running government. I believe it is 43%, but do not quote me on the number.

We are seeing an explosion in the ability for contractors to intentionally mislead, whether it is what the company does at a two-person firm run out of somebody's basement; what its name stands for, in terms of GC versus Government of Canada; or even the plethora of other contracts that the government seems to be quick to throw money at. They are throwing money out like one would not believe.

We need accountability and answers, and it seems that the member and the Liberals refuse to even allow the conversation to happen. That is why—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Speaker, with respect to my Conservative colleague, in his remarks, he presented an incredibly myopic view of history.

In my time in this place, one constant feature of the House of Commons has been both the Liberals and the Conservatives pointing the finger over who was worse in government. It is like an extreme parody of pot meet kettle in this place about who had the worst record with scandals.

If we look at the Conservative record, the ETS scandal of \$400 million was mentioned, but let us not forget the extreme outsourcing with the Phoenix pay system. If we remember, it was supposed to save the Canadian public \$70 million and ended up costing over \$2 billion. There are members of the Conservative caucus, who were present during the Harper government, who displayed such flagrant disregard for basic accounting principles that they do not have a leg to stand on.

It is clear that both the Liberals and the Conservatives have equally dirty hands when it comes to outpricing to consultants and flagrant disregard for taxpayers' money.

Given that the Liberals and Conservatives have both displayed such flagrant disregard for taxpayers' money, it is obviously a systemic issue. What proposals do the Conservatives have to fix a mess that both Liberals and Conservatives are equally guilty of making and have thus far been unable to fix?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, it is fascinating that the member is talking about a myopic view of history. It is the member's leader and the members of the NDP who support, at every turn, the corruption of the Liberal Prime Minister and his cabinet, as well as the Liberal backbench. I find it a little rich.

It is time for a government that is willing to roll up its sleeves and do the hard work of administering and stewarding what Canadians expect their government to do.

I am happy to unpack the many practical ways that the member for Carleton has proposed. He has proposed a path forward to increased accountability with a dollar-for-dollar law in terms of spending and ensuring that the government spends within its means to make sure that we are doing what Canadians expect their government to do.

I will not take any lessons; when I point fingers, I am pointing them at a coalition that has propped up one of the most corrupt governments, if not the most corrupt government, in Canadian history. It is time for a change, because that is what Canadians are demanding. They expect the government to work for them and that is certainly not what they are getting from the Liberals and the NDP.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's theatrics. He is borrowing an end flare of self-righteous rage and indignation.

I also know this member from committee. Is it his position here today that, as a New Democrat at the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, and other committees that we are on, I am not actively working with them to help hold the Liberal government accountable?

The member would know that at every step along the way, New Democrats are in a confidence-and-supply agreement. We hold the Liberals accountable in the House and at committees. Yes, there are about 26 points in which we are fighting and using our power to win for Canadians, things like dental care, pharmacare and yes, indeed, housing. We are going to win for workers. Those are set aside.

I am taking this personally. To the hon. member, is it his position that at committee, as a New Democrat, I am not working as an opposition member? If that is the case, then he could see a new me at the next committee.

• (1330)

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, I would encourage the member to bring the message to his leader, that it is essential to actually do the work of an opposition party, whether it be in this place or in a committee.

While we disagree on many things, I remember an earlier conversation I had with that member. He shared that at least he could respect Conservatives because he knew we stood for something, whereas he did not know what the Liberals stood for, ever. I would encourage the member to bring that message to the NDP leader. There is no question that the current leader of the NDP has run roughshod over democracy and has supported corruption in a way that makes him just as complicit as every single member of the Liberal Party.

In the circumstances that we find ourselves in the House today, I hope the member will have the intestinal fortitude to vote “no confidence”, and let Canadians make the choice about who should be leading this country forward to do the tough work of actually leading a government that works for all Canadians.

Mr. Matthew Green: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to return a reply.

Speaking of leaders, I want to see if the member has the intestinal fortitude to stand up today and to unequivocally denounce the crackpot, right-wing nut job Alex Jones and his ringing endorsement of the member's dear leader. In the House, the way in which the Conservative caucus kowtows to its leader would make Kim Jong Il blush. It would make the hardest of dictators blush, the way in which they set up their majesty, the hon. member of the opposition.

Will he unequivocally denounce, today, the crackpot conspiracy theorist, mass shooter-denying Alex Jones in the House, or will they continue to cater to the most extreme factions of the right wing within their caucus?

Mr. Damien Kurek: Madam Speaker, why are the NDP member and those within the Liberal Party so obsessed with American politics? They are obsessed with American politics, yet a former American presidential candidate spoke at the NDP member's last party convention. It was a failed presidential candidate who spoke at the NDP's convention.

Absurdity comes out of their mouths, whether they are supporting a terrorist group like Hamas or being endorsed by Communists around the world. The Liberals are buddies with dictatorships, like the Communist dictatorship in Beijing with its pet nickname of

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“Little Potato” for the Prime Minister. We will denounce absurdity because that endorsement is an absurdity. The trifecta of the left in this country is that they are obsessed with American politics and they are trying to bring that sort of Americanization of our political discourse to Canada; it is an embarrassment.

I would suggest that the Liberals should spend more time talking to Canadians. That is what I am doing, and that is what I know the member for Carleton is doing. It is Canadians who are giving a ringing endorsement to the change that is necessary to bring accountability and to bring home a Canada that actually works for the people of this nation.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House on behalf of the good citizens of Calgary Midnapore.

Who is Kristian Firth? Kristian Firth is an individual who is at the centre of this debate here today, an individual who has been called, in contempt of this Parliament, to come and to make amends by providing information that he has not provided to committees, to this House and to Canadians.

Who, really, is Kristian Firth? Kristian Firth is one half of a company called GC Strategies that in 2018 ranked fourth of the fastest-growing companies in Ottawa. The products it offers are IT solutions and consulting. It had a three-year revenue growth of 676.4%. It is no wonder why when we see the scandal of the arrive scam app, a \$60 million app that could have been created at a fraction of the price by a group of university students over a weekend.

This individual is wanted here, before the House, for not getting answers for Canadians. I am sure when Mr. Firth started his enterprise, he was like any other well-meaning entrepreneur who wanted to make a dollar to support his family. He has cited incredible stress since he undertook this role, with the scrutiny that he and his partner have come under.

Before I continue, I just want to point out that I will be sharing my time with the wonderful member for Edmonton West, who is also the chair of the government operations committee.

The things Mr. Firth did were certainly unscrupulous. For example, he falsified résumés. He essentially did what we have come to know in the government operations committee as the “bait-and-switch”, where a certain set of information is provided, a contract is won, and then the vendors are switched out, and those individuals who would be completing the work are switched out. He certainly inflated the prices. He has made \$19 million on arrive scam, an unbelievable amount. As I said, it was a \$60 million app, but it may in fact be even more than that. The Auditor General was not even able to confirm that it was just \$60 million, as a result of incomplete documentation. In addition to the bait-and-switch, the falsified résumés and the inflated prices, he made relationships with bureaucrats that many would consider not above bar and, in fact, subject to strong ethical scrutiny.

Kristian Firth is an individual, one partner in GC Strategies, who started a business, who got \$19 million in funding for arrive scam, who has now been called in contempt of the House and who has done some extraordinary things. Why is Mr. Kristian Firth being called before the House?

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It is evident that it is the incompetence and the unethical conduct of the Liberal government. Without a doubt, that is the real reason Kristian Firth is being called in front of the House. The current government is incapable of taking responsibility for anything it does. It simply cannot say it is the government's fault. Sadly, it is a combination of incompetence and unethical behaviour. It is incompetence that it has had eight years to fix the procurement policy, which the procurement ombudsman said was an absolute shame, an absolute failure, and it allowed this scandal to happen.

It is an ethical breach, as we have seen at every single layer and level of the Liberal government, to the Prime Minister, three times, with nothing more than a slap on the wrist. It is no wonder that Kristian Firth thought he could get away with those types of atrocities and that he is being called forward to the House.

We have seen several instances where the current government has not taken its responsibility seriously, or at all, with dismal results and with terrible consequences for Canadians and, in fact, for members of its own party as well.

● (1335)

We recall Jody Wilson-Raybould, the former justice minister, who tried to do the ethical thing with the Liberal government. When shuffled out of her position as minister of justice and given the lesser cabinet position of minister of veterans affairs, she later told Canadians that the Prime Minister's Office had attempted to put pressure on her to intervene in the SNC-Lavalin case. We see that no one has a chance with the current government, not even the justice minister. In a letter, Ms. Wilson-Raybould later thanked constituents, saying she was stepping down from cabinet and looking forward to serving her constituents at that time. However, in her book, she later on came out and said, "I wish...I had never met you." Those are the words she said about the Prime Minister, who leads the unethical government, who leads an incompetent government that has brought us to this position with Kristian Firth having to come in front of the government here today. In fact, on her way out, Ms. Wilson-Raybould said to the incoming justice minister, David Lametti, "Be careful, all is not what it seems."

As I said, it is a government that does not want to take responsibility and does not want to have accountability. We see this again with the calling of Kristian Firth. Where else did we see this? We are seeing it with the dismissal of the two lab scientists out of the Winnipeg lab where we had, first of all, a CSIS investigation that showed information such as an X-ray of a package containing vials of a substance that was later found to be mouse protein, but they were labelled as kitchen utensils. As well, there was a trip to China that was a personal vacation. Even a CSIS investigation was not enough for the Prime Minister to insist that all the documents be released around that scandal. That is another another example where we see how the current government does not take responsibility.

It is unethical and does not even have the competence to right the wrongs it makes. It has no capacity to fix this policy, even though it has had eight years. It has no capacity to follow the recommendations of independent investigators of Parliament such as the procurement ombudsman or even the Privacy Commissioner, as we saw in the government operations committee this morning.

Worse than incompetent, the government is unethical. It attempts to cover up its unethical behaviour and to place the blame on other individuals, as the Prime Minister did with the former minister of justice, Jody Wilson-Raybould; as he did with the former parliamentary secretary to international development, Celina Caesar-Chavannes; and as he did with Jane Philpott, and the list goes on and on. Do members see former minister Lametti in the House today? No. He was lucky; he jumped off the bus before he could get run over. That is what the Liberal government does. That is what the unethical government does.

Where else did we see this? If we look at the chair you are sitting in, Madam Speaker, it is the chair of the Speaker. The Prime Minister could not even accept responsibility for inviting a Nazi into the House. Instead, he got rid of the predecessor to that chair.

The government is incompetent and unethical. It cannot take responsibility for anything. It throws everyone and anyone under the bus, and this is the latest victim. It is certainly as a result of his own doing and of his own terrible inaction of not responding to the House. However, it is the Prime Minister who throws those people under the bus. Who perpetuates these lies? In fact, it is the Prime Minister and all the ministers around him. It is all the ministers who showed up in the government operations committee and indicated that they did not know how this happened. It is their deputy ministers. It is Erin O'Gorman, who is just there covering up for the unethical government.

Do members know what makes me the most mad? My colleagues and I, in the next government, after the next election, will have to fix this pattern of unethical behaviour and have to fix all the policies. It is the member for Edmonton West, the member for Barrie, the member for Calgary West and the member behind me for Sarnia—Lambton, who are going to have to come in and clean up this mess.

That is because even though it may be Kristian Firth who is coming to the bar today, in contempt, for refusing to provide answers, it is fundamentally the responsibility, the fault and the blame of the unethical Prime Minister and of the incompetent Liberal government. Frankly, Kristian Firth is just the latest victim in this train wreck in this parade of victims of the Prime Minister and his team.

● (1340)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting. The government has been very clear in terms of its position. It wants to see more transparency and accountability. In fact, we are supporting Mr. Firth's coming before the bar. There is the question of a mechanism to ensure that there is a sense of accountability through questioning, but the member does not necessarily address that issue. She wants to go on the political side, so let me go on the political side.

Can she tell me why her leader, while he was the parliamentary secretary for the Treasury Board, allowed and denied any sense of accountability for a \$400-million ETS scandal. He was in a position to do something and he chose to do nothing.

Does she think the leader of the Conservative Party should have been more responsible with Canadian tax dollars when he had the opportunity to do so? If not, why not?

• (1345)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, as I stated in my speech, the government has had eight years to attempt to clean up its act and to right its wrongs, yet it has refused to do so. It just keeps throwing people under the bus, whoever is expedient and opportune to maintain its power, along with its coalition partners, the NDP, who are jumping ship at a rapid rate.

It is just so incredibly rich to speak of times 10 years ago, when the Liberals have had 10 years not only to fix policy but to set an example for Canadians. Guess what: They failed and Canadians are speaking to that. I look forward to a referendum on not only the efficacy of the government but also the ethical standards of the government, which is coming soon.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy the synthetic outrage I hear in the House. Certainly, I remember some great Conservative moments. Do members remember when Tony Clement took \$50 million of border security money to buy fake boats and gazebos in Muskoka, the ultimate pork barrel scandal? There was Nigel Wright and the \$90,000 cheque to Mike Duffy, one of the most unworthy political figures we have ever seen in this country but he was a bagman for the Tories.

The issue here is the role of Parliament and the necessity of Parliament to maintain its ability to get evidence. That is what we are here to do. I want to speak of the need to use the tools we have. We do not have the power to find guilt at committee. Our job is to gather evidence and bring it to the House. We are here at the House now on the issue of those who failed to provide the evidence that was required of them. We will certainly support getting this motion through as quickly as possible.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Timmins—James Bay for relieving us of our misery and announcing his resignation. I thank him so much. I truly appreciate that. We are all going to really miss him on this side of the House, or not.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I share my colleague's concern with the number of scandals that are going on. I wonder about the cost to Canadians when we add up the \$60 million on the arrive scam, the \$150 million missing from the sustainable green fund and the \$172 million that went missing under Catherine McKenna.

How do we quantify this for Canadians?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her leadership and mentorship to me during the seven years since I was elected. My seven-year anniversary was April 3. I am truly grateful for that.

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The reality is that the price is incredible. We are at a \$1.2-billion deficit in government across Canada at this point. We saw a \$40-billion deficit in the most recent update of the government. Frankly, I am terrified of the budget and what this means for Canadians. I have no doubt the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will be attempting to buy off Canadians once again. We know that it is not going to work.

What I do know is that it will take my son and the member for Sarnia—Lambton's children and grandchildren generations to pay this back. I am very sorry for that, but I am grateful for her.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is great to see that the gallery is filling up. I am sure it is for my speech today and not for question period.

I am pleased to rise again on the question of privilege following the tabling of the 17th report from the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, also known as OGGO. To be up here speaking to this is particularly troubling, and it is part of a troubling pattern we have seen in committee. Witnesses, whether parliamentary witnesses, government officials or not, are ignoring the rights, powers and privileges of parliamentarians to act as the grand inquisitors of the nation.

This particular issue is around the witness Kristian Firth, someone doing business with the government and not answering to the committee. I have to ask, honestly, why would he?

If he has spent any time watching any of the committees on TV or especially watching estimates and operations on TV, he would see that witnesses do not actually have to answer. He would see government witnesses refusing to answer. He would see ministers refusing to answer. If Kristian Firth was watching, he would have seen the Prime Minister's own department, the Privy Council Office, in committee, repeatedly ignoring the laws of the land, repeatedly ignoring orders of Parliament and repeatedly ignoring committee orders to produce documents.

Making up excuses as to why PCO and other departments can ignore the will of Parliament seems to be a very active program within the government. If the government and the Prime Minister's own department, the PCO, can be so blatantly cavalier with committees, it is not surprising that others would do so as well; hence we end up with this privilege debate. There is no doubt that Kristian Firth has seen how government officials appear in committee and has based his conduct on that.

Lines need to be drawn. Parliament's dignity and the will of Parliament must be defended. Parliament and its committees cannot continue to be seen as mere toothless entities to be ignored when questions become inconvenient or embarrassing or damaging to the government or to the witnesses.

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I want to clear up a bit of misinformation that has been pushed out there about this witness. It has been stated that he provided all of the information the committee demanded. That is not quite accurate. He provided some of it. Some of it was late, which is fine, because he still provided it, but there was a very specific question he refused to answer, and it is at the crux of the ArriveCAN “arrive scam” scandal.

He had been accused of helping write the work requirements for a contract that he himself then won on a sole-source basis. Mr. Firth was asked to provide this information. I am going to read from the Evidence.

The member from Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek asked:

For greater clarity, I'm looking for the individuals or individual that you would have met with in developing the criteria...I'm asking, who did you sit at the table with to develop the criteria for this contract?

Mr. Firth then said that, because it is under RCMP investigation, he refuses. He was sworn in. He was warned of the consequences of not answering questions at the committee. This was his third appearance, so he knew the rules.

Later, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan stated, on a point of order:

I'd like the chair to put the question to you [Mr. Firth], and you have an obligation to answer it, whether you want to or not, because of the rules that apply to Parliament, to its committees and to witnesses who come before it.

...could you put that question to [the witness]...?

I, as chair, stated to Mr. Firth that we would appreciate an answer. I later stated that it was a fair question, and “Would you please provide an answer?”

Again, it came back from Mr. Firth:

...I really appreciate the opportunity...you've laid [it] out clearly, but at this point, we're still remaining with our stance that there could possibly be a pending...investigation.

He refused. In this case, we see, very clearly, that Mr. Firth was given the opportunity to answer the question. He was advised that he had parliamentary privilege, so that he could say what he wanted. He also was aware, as it came up in the committee, that he, at that time, had not even been contacted yet by the RCMP. He was not sure that he was actually under investigation, but he still refused to answer.

● (1350)

I mentioned earlier the government's conduct in dealing with committee orders and privileges and how it leads to such actions. In the McKinsey & Company's study in OGGO, the committee, so the Liberals, the Bloc, the NDP and the Conservatives, passed unanimously a production order for documents from McKinsey and government departments, demanding all contracts, reports, invoices and emails between McKinsey and government.

McKinsey 100% complied with the order. This is the same McKinsey & Company that had a book written about it called “When [the Devil] Comes to Town”. It is the same McKinsey that helped turbocharge the opioid crisis in the U.S., which it paid close to \$1 billion Canadian in fines for. It is the same McKinsey that quite happily works with despotic regimes around the world. It is the same McKinsey that actually worked both sides of the coin on the

harms and sales of tobacco, working with governments to sue the tobacco companies while working with the tobacco companies to get around government and push more tobacco sales. It is the same McKinsey that is considered one of the most evil companies in the world.

However, McKinsey complied 100% with the order from the committee for documents. Guess who did not provide the documents as ordered. Guess who comes in second place to McKinsey in following the rule of the land in this country. It was government departments, and I will list them quickly: the Business Development Bank; the Border Services Agency, which is, of course, tangled up in ArriveCAN; the Canada Pension Investment Board; Canada Post; Citizenship and Immigration; DND; Natural Resources; Export Development Canada; the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's own department, which came second in complying behind McKinsey; Atomic Energy of Canada; Canada Development Investment Corporation; Employment and Social Development Canada; the Department of Finance; Veterans Affairs; Public Sector Pension Investment Board; and Trans Mountain Corporation.

Three times we brought in the Library law clerk and he explained to these departments the supremacy of Parliament, but they could not understand. McKinsey & Company, which is arguably responsible for the opioid crisis across North America, does understand and did comply, but the Government of Canada not so much.

Here is what some of the officials had to say.

Mr. Matthew Shea, who works for the Privy Council, again, the Prime Minister's department, said that there are privacy acts and information acts that apply above the supremacy of Parliament. He also stated that they are guided by the open and accountable government policy, and that he thinks that personal information and the Privacy Act are something he has to be very sensitive to. Here we have the Prime Minister's own department stating that the Privacy Act and internal policies trump the supremacy of Parliament.

He goes on to say, “A big part, with any of these requests, is the importance of, as a government, our working with the committee to try to find solutions.” It is not actually obeying the rule of law and not actually obeying the supremacy of Parliament, but finding solutions together.

One of my colleagues asked him, “Are you aware that Parliament is supreme in its ability to call for documents?” He said, “I respect the role of Parliament”, but again he has “time-honoured traditions” he has to follow. It is not the law, but honoured traditions.

When asked whether he believes several previous rulings confirm the supremacy of Parliament. PCO's Matthew Shea said, "It's not about whether I agree with the ruling or not. This is the government position". The government position, as stated by the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's own department, is that we do not obey laws and we do not obey the supremacy of Parliament. He then told Parliament that he could hide basically everything he wants because it could possibly be tied to confidential advice to cabinet.

I realize I am running out of time, so I just want to conclude quickly that it is very clear that the position of the government is leading other witnesses to ignore the supremacy of Parliament. The government enforces the rules. The government must set an example and follow the rules of Parliament. The government must recognize the supremacy of Parliament.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1355)

[Translation]

INCLUSIVE DIAGONALE DES FOUS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a group of athletes from my region who have huge hearts. These individuals will form the first team from the Americas to take part in the "Diagonale des Fous", a trail running ultra marathon, with a person with a disability. This wild adventure will play out in October 2024 on Réunion Island, following several months of training.

During this legendary race, the captain, Samuel Saucier, who has Louis-Bar syndrome, will lead a team of runners who will have to overcome a number of technical and human challenges. Imagine a person with a disability, determined to live life to the fullest, competing in one of the toughest races in the world in an all-terrain wheelchair called a Joëlette. Imagine 20 or so runners covering a 100-kilometre trail with an altitude difference of more than 5,000 metres. By tackling this monumental challenge, the participants hope to demonstrate that, together, we can ensure that our society offers equal opportunities to all, regardless of their physical status.

Congratulations to the entire Réseau Autonomie Santé team, who serve as an example to us all. They are so inspiring.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

RWANDA

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, yesterday, April 7, marked a solemn occasion as we observed the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. This year, we also commemorated Kwibuka 30, the 30th anniversary of a tragedy where over 800,000 Tutsi were killed in 100 days of unimaginable violence.

Kwibuka means "to remember". It is a call to honour the victims, support survivors and educate us and others about the history and

Statements by Members

impact of the genocide. This day reminds us of the devastating consequences of hatred and intolerance, and urges us to reaffirm our dedication to preventing such atrocities.

Let us renew our commitment to a world where the lessons of the past guide us toward justice, compassion and a future free from such horrors.

* * *

CITY OF OSHAWA

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to recognize the 100th anniversary of the City of Oshawa. As we reflect on a century of growth, resilience and community spirit, we are proud of the tapestry of achievements and shared experiences that have shaped our city.

Oshawa, a name first chosen to represent the original settlement near Harmony Creek, received city status on March 8, 1924. We are the proud home of automotive prowess and pioneering spirit. From the assembly lines of General Motors to our vibrant cultural scene, Oshawa has continued to thrive, fuelled by the passion and dedication of its residents, the true architects of our success.

It has been an honour to serve as Oshawa's member of Parliament since 2004, and I look forward to sharing representation of our city with the new Conservative member for Durham.

Let us continue to nurture the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship that has defined Oshawa for generations, fostering a dynamic environment where dreams can take flight and possibilities are limitless.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, kids who are hungry at school are not focused on learning. We can and we are going to fix this with a national school food program so that over 400,000 kids across Canada do not go hungry at school. It will give parents peace of mind and help kids reach their full potential with healthy lunches.

I thought this would be one idea that we could all agree on, but the opposition just cannot seem to get on board with helping kids out. We are here for parents and kids. The Canada child benefit has already helped lift over 100,000 kids out of poverty, including supporting over 7,300 parents in St. John's East who receive an average of \$5,800 a year.

I cannot wait to see the incredible impact of the school food program. There is no better investment for our government than in young Canadians.

*Statements by Members**[Translation]***BENOÎT PELLETIER**

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last week we were sad to learn of the passing of the former Liberal member of the National Assembly of Quebec for Chapleau, Benoît Pelletier, a gentleman who was beloved by all. Having had the opportunity to sit with him at the National Assembly of Quebec, I can confirm that. More importantly, no matter how intense his political jousting might have been, Benoît Pelletier never crossed the line of intellectual integrity. That is why he has our utmost respect.

He was one of the most prominent constitutional law experts of his generation. Within the Liberal family he embodied nothing less than the national consciousness of Quebec. He was a true federalist who believed both in the importance of Ottawa respecting Quebec's jurisdictions and in the pride of Quebecers. Today we are losing one of the last Quebecers who vigorously defended that perspective, intelligently and in good faith. Our thoughts are with his family and his loved ones, who will miss him very much.

Thank you, Benoît Pelletier.

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• (1405)

INCOME TAX RETURNS

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is tax season. Across the country, thousands of volunteers are hard at work helping other citizens fill out their tax returns.

In Châteauguay—Lacolle, soon to be Les Jardins-de-Napierville, people at the Centre d'action bénévole du grand Châteauguay and a volunteer organization known as "au cœur du jardin" are rolling up their sleeves and giving citizens some much-needed help so they can qualify for all our excellent programs, such as the Canada child benefit, the Canadian dental care plan, the GST credit, the disability tax credit, the Canada caregiver credit and many others.

* * *

*[English]***TARTAN DAY**

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on April 6, I hope many Canadians had a wee dram to celebrate our Canadian Scottish heritage. It was happy Tartan Day.

It is a day to commemorate the Declaration of Arbroath, the Scottish declaration of Independence signed on April 6, 1320, signifying the independence of Scotland. It is a day to honour the strong bonds between Canada and Scotland, and the immense influence this relationship has had on our culture.

Like millions of Canadians, and as chair of the Canada-Scotland Friendship Group, I am immensely proud of my Scottish connections. My wife was born there and my kids were raised to honour their Scottish heritage.

It started in Nova Scotia more than 40 years ago, but now Tartan Day is recognized across Canada to celebrate our deep Scottish roots. Last weekend, many Canadians proudly donned their kilts,

with their families' colourful tartans, listened to bagpipes, maybe did a Highland fling or tossed a caber at a Highland games.

I encourage all Canadians next year to join with friends and family to celebrate Tartan Day.

Sláinte.

* * *

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): *[Member spoke in Punjabi]*

[English]

Mr. Speaker, this month marks the fifth anniversary of Sikh Heritage Month. This act, which I introduced as a private members' bill, received royal assent on April 30, 2019.

Sikh Heritage Month allows us to celebrate and educate future generations about the inspirational role that Sikh Canadians have played and continue to play in communities across Canada.

On April 20, Khalsa Day and Vaisakhi will be celebrated in Surrey—Newton. The annual Nagar Kirtan will attract over half a million people of all faiths and backgrounds. The celebration signifies commitment to equality, while upholding the spirit of selfless service and unity.

I thank Sikh Canadians across our nation, who, over the past 125 years, have helped build Canada into the country it is today.

*[Member spoke in Punjabi]**[English]*

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SACRED HEART SCHOOL OF HALIFAX

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is widely acknowledged that schools play a fundamental role in assisting our youth in their intellectual and personal development.

Today, I rise to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the Sacred Heart School of Halifax. Throughout its history, Sacred Heart has remained committed to the mission of its founder St. Madeleine Sophie Barat and her conviction that education has the power to bring about societal change.

Over the years, Sacred Heart has provided generations of students with an exceptional experience, one focused on educational excellence, community and, of course, heart. It has demonstrated that their students can be the best in the world, all while still being the best for the world.

Sacred Heart alumni are making significant contributions to our country, notably in medicine, research and culture.

I congratulate Sacred Heart on its 175th anniversary. We thank it for the many contributions it makes to Halifax and to the world.

* * *

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister used to say that no relationship was more important to him than Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples, and yet the NDP-Liberal government has been using indigenous contracting to funnel money to well-connected government insiders in ways that produce no actual benefit for indigenous communities. This is a gross betrayal of taxpayers and indigenous peoples.

David Yeo is the arrive scam contractor whose company made \$8 million while, according to his own LinkedIn page, he was simultaneously a government employee. We still do not know what he actually did for the money. Yeo's two-person company benefited from an indigenous contracting set aside, even though no indigenous communities saw any of the money.

Indigenous leaders have warned that the Liberal approach to contracting is encouraging shell companies and other modes of obfuscation to gain an advantage in procurement processes, all to the detriment of legitimate indigenous peoples of Canada, communities and businesses.

It is time to end the corruption, to respect taxpayers and to insist that indigenous contracting policies actually benefit indigenous peoples, not well-connected NDP-Liberal insiders.

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• (1410)

SIKH HERITAGE MONTH

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): [*Member spoke in Punjabi*]

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, this week, Sikhs in Canada and around the world are celebrating Vaisakhi and Khalsa Diwas. That is why today Sikh Canadians from coast to coast to coast came together to celebrate this auspicious celebration on the Hill, where they attended a three-day long religious prayer, followed by a Kirtan and langar.

I want to welcome and thank everyone who took the time to celebrate with us today.

Vaisakhi is a time for Sikhs to reflect on their faith, history and values as they come together as a community to celebrate equality and the spirit of selfless service.

This April, we also celebrate the fifth anniversary of Sikh Heritage Month, a time to acknowledge the achievements of Sikhs, as they have been an integral part of Canada's history, and reflect on the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, who established Khalsa Panth in 1699.

On behalf of the residents of Brampton South, I wish everyone in Brampton and across the world a happy Sikh Heritage Month and a happy Vaisakhi.

Statements by Members

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Scot Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can you hear that? It is the sound of stomachs rumbling from coast to coast to coast. It is no wonder, with millions of Canadians lining up outside of food banks every month, but the hunger does not stop there.

Every time Canadians see the skyrocketing price of meat, butter and vegetables they are hungry. Every time they see the numbers on the gas pump keep ticking up and up they are hungry. Every time they hear about another Liberal ethics scandal they are hungry. Every time they look to buy a home, pay rent or renew their mortgage they are hungry. Every time their car is stolen in broad view and crime rises in their community they are hungry. Every time they see the out-of-touch Prime Minister hike their taxes again they are hungry.

Canadians are hungry for new leadership from a Conservative government that will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget, stop the crime and bring home a Canada where Canadians are not going hungry anymore.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Financial Post headline says it all. Scotiabank reports that the Bank of Canada rate cuts could be delayed due to high government spending.

Under the Prime Minister, our national debt has more than doubled, more than all other prime ministers combined. The consequences are spiralling inflation and skyrocketing interest rates hitting every single Canadian family. Rents and mortgages have doubled. Food banks see record visits in the millions. Where is the Liberal government? It is MIA, missing in action.

This year alone, Canada will spend \$46.5 billion just to service the growing debt. That is more than we spend on health care annually in the entire country.

After eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, common-sense Conservatives demand a dollar-for-dollar rule, for every new dollar spent, a dollar has to be found and saved. It is common sense. We need to stop the reckless overspending, stop inflation and stop punishing Canadian families. After all, this is how Canadian families balance their own budgets every single month,

Enough is enough. My constituents know that the Prime Minister is just not worth the cost, and after the next carbon tax election, we will finally have a Conservative government.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CHEMIKA MAMODE AND PATRICK RAHIMALY

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are people whose light we hope will never be dimmed. Two of those people are Chemika Mamode and Patrick Rahimaly, a Sherbrooke couple I would like to pay tribute to today.

Originally from Madagascar, they worked hard to become pharmacy owners in Sherbrooke's east end, where they served our community for 28 years. They also made it their mission to give back to the community that welcomed them.

They've been involved with the Festival des traditions du monde, Sercovie, the Vitae Foundation, Maison Oxygène and several community kitchens. They provide financial support to a number of community initiatives and organizations. Passionate about the arts, they have also been active in the cultural sector, including with the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke. Together with their children Keven and Sarah, they founded Immeubles Kesar to help develop urban projects that promote residential, commercial and cultural diversity.

Sherbrooke is proud of this inspiring couple. I am deeply grateful to Patrick and Chemika for everything they do for our community. I wish them a happy retirement.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

PROGRESSIVE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY SERVICES SOCIETY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring to Parliament's attention the outstanding contributions of Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society of British Columbia and Canada. This superb social services society has been helping individuals in our communities for decades. I wish to congratulate it on the resounding success of its mega jobs fair, which was held recently in Vancouver Kingsway. This event matches the talents and energy of workers with the aspirations and needs of employers.

I want to recognize Satbir Singh Cheema, the CEO of PICS, whose extraordinary leadership steers this great organization. His vision, skills and compassion are key to its success. I also wish to recognize long-time Vancouver Kingsway resident Inderjeet Hundal, PICS' director of senior housing. Mr. Hundal's respect and care for our elders is a model for us all. Finally, we remember Charan Gill, the founder of PICS. His commitment to social justice inspires us to this day.

Let us celebrate all who work for PICS, which is committed to building an inclusive Canada where everybody's potential can flourish.

[Translation]

JACOB FLICKINGER

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I want to offer our condolences to the family and friends of Jacob Flickinger, who died on April 1 in Gaza.

An aid worker for the World Central Kitchen, Mr. Flickinger grew up in Saint-Georges, in Beauce, before moving to Stoneham and heading to the United States, where he lived with his wife and their one-year old baby.

He went to Gaza to help. Like thousands of aid workers, he risked his own life to go to Gaza to spread a bit of hope in a territory that has been devastated since the beginning of the conflict with Israel. In war time, often when the worst atrocities are committed, we must remember those who are ready to sacrifice their lives in the name of humanity and fraternity.

I thank Mr. Flickinger for his self-sacrifice and his generosity. May world leaders learn from his courage and his conviction and finally find a solution to this unending and intolerable conflict.

* * *

[English]

CARBON TAX

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the costly and punishing carbon tax is hurting Canadians. Families are being forced to choose between filling up their tanks, heating their homes or feeding their families. Not only have Conservatives given this NDP-Liberal government several different opportunities to spike the hike and axe the carbon tax, but seven out of 10 provincial premiers, municipalities across the country and millions of Canadians have also come out in opposition to the April 1 hike. However, what was the Prime Minister's response? It was to let them eat cake.

Last week's 23% hike on gas, heat and groceries is another hit to Canadians who cannot afford it. Today, in Lloydminster and provincial border communities across the country, Canadians are protesting this devastating carbon tax. The Prime Minister cannot keep ignoring the pain and the suffering that this ineffective and costly carbon tax is causing them because, in the next election, Canadians will not let him.

* * *

CHEBUCTO LINKS

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, seniors in my riding can count on Chebucto Links for help putting healthy food on their kitchen tables. Every two weeks, its team delivers 10-pound produce bundles directly to seniors' doors for just \$5. With new support from the United Way, those bundles are now completely free, and double the number of seniors will receive them. This is great news for residents of Fairview and Clayton Park, and it has been made possible by the vision of the United Way and the selfless efforts of the volunteers at Chebucto Links.

Fighting food insecurity and supporting seniors are critical priorities. That is why our dental care plan is being rolled out to older Canadians now and why we are launching a national school food program. When we tackle issues alongside community organizations, big things get done. I thank Rachel and her entire team.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1420)

[English]

NEW MEMBER

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that the Clerk of the House has received from the Chief Electoral Officer a certificate of the election and return of Mr. Jivani, member for the electoral district of Durham.

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NEW MEMBER INTRODUCED

Jamil Jivani, member for the electoral district of Durham, introduced by the Hon. Pierre Poilievre and Mr. Colin Carrie.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the common-sense Conservatives want to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

When it comes to inflation, after eight years, the Prime Minister is like a pyromaniac firefighter who is spraying gas instead of water on the inflationary fire. Does the Prime Minister realize that his billions of dollars in spending are putting the heat and the costs on taxpayers?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives want to talk about the economy, I am more than happy to do so.

I can say that 1.2 million more Canadians have a roof over their head today than before the pandemic, and 2.3 million Canadians have been lifted out of poverty since we took office. We will continue to invest in Canadians, rather than cut programs like the Conservatives would do.

* * *

HOUSING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the common-sense Conservatives want to fix the budget to bring down inflation and interest rates, the Prime Minister is not worth the cost of mortgages.

According to Scotiabank's chief economist, this Prime Minister's inflationary deficits are increasing interest rates by 2% and preventing the Bank of Canada from lowering them. Canadians could lose

Oral Questions

their homes because of big multi-billion dollar announcements of inflationary spending. Will the Prime Minister acknowledge that this spending and these mortgages are not worth the cost?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are going to invest in Canadians. That is why we are going to help every generation move forward, especially young Canadians, by building more homes faster and by making life more affordable.

This Conservative leader does not understand affordability, does not understand housing, does not understand the economy and does not understand the environment. Everyone deserves a fair chance to succeed. We are putting fairness front and centre.

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do have a common-sense Conservative plan to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime while the Prime Minister is not worth the cost after eight years.

On inflation, with all of his multi-billion dollar announcements, he is like the pyromaniac pretending to be a fireman, except the hose is spraying gas on the inflationary fire, rather than water. According to Scotiabank's chief economist, the inflationary deficits are driving up mortgage payments.

Does the Prime Minister not realize that all of his spending is putting the heat and the costs on our homeowners?

• (1425)

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has a plan for an affordable and prosperous future. We have a plan that is focused on ensuring that we are building more homes faster, making life more affordable and growing an economy that works for all Canadians. The Conservative leader has no plan for affordability other than a bunch of tag lines. He has no plan for addressing the environment. He has no plan for the economy.

We believe in ensuring that Canadians have a fair chance to succeed, and we are acting on that.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our plan is to axe the tax and cap the spending to bring down inflation and interest rates. We will have a carbon tax election, and people will choose whether they want to quadruple the tax to 61¢ with the NDP and the Prime Minister, or axe the tax under my common-sense leadership. In the meantime, people cannot afford to eat.

Will the Prime Minister show a little bit of compassion and accept my common-sense demand to axe the tax on farmers and food?

Oral Questions

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is laughable when I hear the Conservative leader talk about affordability. He mentioned in a previous question some concerns he has around our housing policy. His plan to build more homes is to cut investments in homebuilding and to raise taxes on those who are building homes. When it comes to actually changing the ways cities build homes, his deputy leader held a press conference to explicitly declare that the Conservatives were siding with the NIMBYs when it comes to zoning reform.

We are going to do what is necessary to put money on the table to build more affordable housing, create market conditions to get more homes built and change the way that cities build homes so we can solve the housing crisis.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister caused the housing crisis. Under his role as housing minister, the amount of a paycheque necessary to make payments on an average mortgage has gone up to a record-smashing 64% from 38%. He is the only one, along with the Prime Minister, who wants to raise taxes on homebuilding with a massive carbon tax on the building materials that go into assembling homes.

Will the Prime Minister, instead of hiking the tax, accept my common-sense demand to axe the tax on farmers, food and houses at the same time?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting because he has actually put his plan on the record. His plan includes putting the GST back on apartment construction for hundreds of thousands of middle-class homes in this country.

He has one of the worst records of anyone in the past decade when it comes to getting homes built, from when he had the position responsible for housing in Parliament. While he was minister, they built exactly zero new apartments, zero co-operative units and only six affordable housing units across the entire country.

We are helping get hundreds of thousands of homes built in this country, and we will do what it takes to solve the crisis once and for all.

* * *

[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after pharmacare, dental care and medical assistance in dying, we thought that the federal government was done interfering in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction, but that is not the case. The Liberals have announced that, now, they also want to tell Quebeckers how to build housing.

We are talking about the same government that lost control of immigration, that caused the ArriveCAN scandal, that cannot pay its own employees through Phoenix, that caused an unforgettable passport crisis and that cannot manage its own borders. Imagine. This same government wants to tell the provinces and Quebec how to do things.

Seriously, are the Liberals not even a little bit embarrassed about this?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is the Bloc Québécois against investing in housing in Quebec, against investing in our child care centres and against making sure that young children in Quebec are going to school with full bellies instead of empty ones? If so, then they can do like the Conservatives and vote against our proposals.

In any case, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservatives have become one and the same today. They have become the "Conservative Bloc".

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had the nerve to add that, if the provinces do not want to accept his conditions, "they don't have to take our [federal] money". That is called blackmail.

It is not federal money; there is no such thing as federal money. It is Quebeckers' money.

This government is incapable of doing its own job, and it has no right to deny Quebeckers their share of the money they pay in taxes.

The Prime Minister does not have the right to hold Quebeckers' tax money hostage. Will he smarten up or will he pay the political price?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is not the Government of Quebec. We talk to the Government of Quebec.

Quebec's minister responsible for Canadian relations said this week that he believes we can work out win-win agreements. That is what he thinks, that is what the Government of Quebec thinks, and that is what we think. It is a win for Quebec and a win for Quebeckers. It is just not a win for the Bloc Québécois.

Again, let them do as their Conservative friends, cousins and brothers are doing. They are now one and the same. They are the Conservative Bloc.

● (1430)

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, do we know how much money the Conservatives gave away to big corporations when they were in power? They gave away \$60 billion in free money. Imagine what we could have done with \$60 billion. Instead of giving it as corporate handouts, we could have built a million affordable homes.

The Liberals love to criticize the Conservatives, but they have maintained those same corporate handouts.

Will they stop the free ride for CEOs? Will they stop the \$60 billion in Conservative corporate handouts, start investing to build homes that people can afford and start building a life that people can afford?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fairness is extremely important for Canadians. It is important that we are building a society that is socially just, that is prosperous and that is environmentally sustainable. Our budget is going to focus on building more homes faster, making life more affordable for Canadians and growing an economy for the future. We are very proud of the work we are doing. We are certainly ensuring that fairness informs everything that we do.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the Liberals had nothing to say about the Conservative corporate handouts that they maintain.

[Translation]

The last time the Conservatives were in power, big corporations got a big fat gift: a \$60-billion blank cheque. It is a gift that the Liberals keep on giving.

That money could have built millions of affordable homes. That is the price of voting Conservative.

Will the Prime Minister commit today to reversing this \$60-billion gift, yes or no?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very important to invest in building a greater number of more affordable housing units more quickly.

[English]

We have been making the investments necessary to ensure that we can solve the housing crisis. We are working at the same time to help grow the economy as we put money on the table, as we announced this week, to create an acquisition fund for non-profits that are going to maintain affordability permanently. That is on top of the affordable housing fund, which is investing billions of dollars to put a roof over the heads of the most vulnerable.

We will do what it takes to make sure everyone in this country has a safe and affordable place to call home.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the woke Prime Minister hiked his carbon tax scam 23% despite a majority of Canadians wanting him to spike the hike. As we see record-smashing food bank usage across the country, farmers will pay another billion dollars into this scam, making groceries even more expensive. After eight years, the Liberal-NDP government is not worth the cost or corruption.

Will the Prime Minister finally axe the tax for farmers and food and pass Bill C-234 in its original form in next week's budget, or is his agenda to push even more families into food banks?

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether members of the Conservative Party who come from Alberta have paid particular attention to what Premier Danielle Smith said about the Canada carbon rebate. She said that she manages the finances of her own house, and it turns out that the Canada carbon rebate gives her family more money than

she puts into the price on pollution. Guess what? She lives in rural Alberta, so she gets even more.

That is the plan. I do not know what the heck they are talking about.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we would like to know is what his next job is, because after the next election, he and his carbon tax scam will be gone.

Now there are six premiers who are demanding a carbon tax meeting because they all know that, after eight years, the NDP-Liberal government is like the carbon tax scam and not worth the cost.

Why is the Prime Minister hiding? Why does he not show some guts and call the meeting so the premiers can tell him to shove his carbon tax where his poll numbers are: in the gutter?

The Deputy Speaker: I know we have been away for a couple of weeks and we were looking forward to seeing each other, but let us try to keep our comments as reasonable as possible.

Hon. Randy Boissonnault (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to see how focused that particular MP is on me and my career. Guess what? My colleagues on this side of the aisle and I are focused on the people of Edmonton Centre. We are focused on Albertans and on Canadians, making sure that they can pay their bills, making sure they have good jobs, making sure they are fighting climate change and have a national school program.

What the Conservatives are doing is just bluff, bluster and lots of hot air. We are going to be here fighting for Canadians each and every day.

● (1435)

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, the cost of living is out of control. Farmers are suffering and food has become unaffordable because of the carbon tax. Almost two million Canadians are going to the food bank every single month, yet on April 1, the Liberal-NDP government increased the carbon tax by 23%.

Will the Prime Minister stop punishing Canadians and farmers and pass Bill C-234 in its original form?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do think it is time that the Conservative Party stopped trying to mislead Canadians. The price on pollution is an effective mechanism for reducing carbon emissions, and eight out of 10 Canadian families get more money back, a fact that was underlined by 200 economists across this country who said it is the most efficient and most effective way to reduce emissions that ensures we address affordability. In fact, Saskatchewan premier Scott Moe last week said that he explored alternatives to the carbon price but he found they were too expensive. My goodness, we have been saying that for years.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot afford to live because of the carbon tax. Common-sense Conservatives will axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

After eight years of the Liberal-NDP government, rent and mortgages have doubled. The Liberal-NDP government is just not worth the cost or the corruption.

Will the Prime Minister commit to immediately passing Bill C-234 in its original form, cancel the carbon tax and once again make life affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the fundamental problem with the remade Conservative Party, where policy is based on ideology and ignores all of the facts. Two hundred economists from across this country underline that the price on pollution enhances affordability for those on modest incomes and addresses climate change in an effective manner. Even Scott Moe and Danielle Smith have said that.

These folks, these climate-denying Conservatives, sit on their hands. It is time they listened to people who actually know what they are talking about, and they should abandon their plan to simply let the planet burn.

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[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week I was in Trois-Rivières, a city with a vacancy rate of 0.4%. A new report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC, shows that construction is going to plummet over the coming year. CMHC therefore expects that demand will drive up the cost of housing. That is outrageous.

Does the Prime Minister realize that people are going to end up on the street because of his senseless policies?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is quite right to call attention to the cost and affordability of housing, including in the Quebec City area. That is why it is so surprising that the Conservatives oppose our investments in affordable housing, including social housing in the Quebec City area.

First, they may have noticed that we announced just a few weeks ago that we are going to meet affordable housing construction objectives in the Quebec City area for the first time since 2011. Sec-

ond, as far as I know, they have yet to apologize for the accusations of incompetence and the insults they hurled at Quebec municipalities, including the City of Quebec.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past week, we have seen nothing but photo ops.

It is worth reminding the minister that the current programs are being announced as if they are brand new, but they have been around since 2017. Since 2017, practically nothing has been done with these programs. Once again, the Liberals are resorting to photo ops in an effort to raise their profile, but it is not working. All we have seen for eight years is out-of-control spending.

Will the Prime Minister finally listen to the Governor of the Bank of Canada and stop his out-of-control spending, which is only driving up inflation and interest rates?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my colleague is looking for photo ops, I invite him to come with me to visit the housing project in his riding called Le Monterosso. He has not been seen in the last few weeks, since the project was announced. That was mentioned during the press conference with mayor Bruno Marchand.

The member seems to be forgetting that hundreds of housing units have been built in his own riding, versus the six affordable housing units that his Conservative leader built across the entire country during his time as housing minister.

• (1440)

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if Ottawa wanted to speed up housing construction in Quebec, it would give Quebec the money for housing.

We are ready. We have our own permanent programs. We are actually the only ones in Canada who do. The Liberals could easily announce an unconditional transfer, but no, they are threatening to withhold that money from Quebec if it refuses to accept their conditions and fights with the federal government until 2025. We are in the midst of a housing crisis. People want housing, they do not want a fight with the federal government.

Why not just give Quebec its share, with no strings attached, so we can get to work now, not in 2025?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is looking for a fight, but I am looking for a solution. He was asking that same question before the housing accelerator fund. We talked and negotiated, and now we have a \$1.8-billion agreement to build affordable housing in all the provinces.

We will keep making the necessary investments to fix the housing crisis in Quebec and across the country.

Oral Questions

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is not just a question of jurisdiction; it is more serious than that.

When the feds get involved, the delays pile up. What the Prime Minister is saying is true: Quebecers who are struggling to find housing want governments to work together. That said, the federal government is not working with anyone. Even before we heard the details of their measures, the Liberals announced that they are willing to pick a fight over this until January 2025 in order to impose their conditions.

Who exactly is that helping right now? How does it help anyone to know that there will not be any housing starts before 2025 because the federal government refuses to work as part of a team?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague spoke about picking a fight. Bloc Québécois members are the all-time champions of picking fights. They live and breathe to bicker and fight. That is their *raison d'être*, trying to drag Ottawa into a fight when we are working with Quebec.

I have said it before: We invest in housing, they vote with the Conservatives. We invest in day care, they vote with the Conservatives. We are investing to ensure our kids do not go to school hungry, they vote with the Conservatives.

This is the latest alliance: the “Conservative Bloc”.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, 5.8 million housing units are needed by 2030, and the Liberals still find time to pick a fight, instead of taking action.

If their priority was to speed up housing construction, they would give the money to Quebec City. That is why many people are wondering whether the Liberal priority is to speed up the construction of housing or whether it is really to slow down how fast they are plummeting in the polls. A new Liberal housing announcement means taking Quebecers hostage, people who are struggling to find housing with their own money, for electioneering purposes.

In the midst of a housing crisis, is this what it means for the Liberals to have their priorities straight?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are discussing and negotiating with the Quebec government.

The Bloc Québécois does not speak on behalf of Quebecers. It campaigns against the current government on behalf of its little cousin, the Parti Québécois.

Meanwhile, what we are doing is signing agreements with Quebec. We have signed agreements on housing, on child care, on regional Internet access, on a whole range of measures. Why are we doing this? Because it is good for all Quebecers.

What is good for Quebecers is bad for the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is shocking that the average Canadian family must now spend 63.5% of their total pre-tax household income in order to afford a mortgage for the typical home in Canada.

It is even worse in British Columbia, where that is 106%. One hundred per cent is someone's entire income. No wonder families are in a financial crisis, where they can barely afford to live or feed themselves. This is after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government.

Will the Prime Minister actually build the homes, not bureaucracy and photo ops, in his budget?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take the question with a heavy dose of irony, considering that we have invested \$31.5 million in that member's constituency through the housing accelerator fund.

Moreover, this is a fund that not only she, but every Conservative member of Parliament, vows to take apart should the Conservatives form government. Where they will cut funds for housing, we will make the investment. Where we cut taxes, they will put them back on.

We are doing what it takes to make it easier to build homes faster, and we are going to put Canadians to work in the process.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a heavy dose of reality is that, after eight years of the Liberal-NDP government and all its spending and photo ops, things are worse.

Just today, RBC confirmed that Canada's housing crisis is only going to get worse under Liberal policies. They said that only 26% of Canadian households can afford a single detached home today. A couple of decades ago, it was 49%. The CMHC forecasts that, in 2025-26, housing starts will be even lower than they were in 2020-21.

The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost or the corruption. Will the Prime Minister actually build the homes, not bureaucracy and photo ops, in his budget?

• (1445)

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are putting forward policies that are going to help solve the national housing crisis.

We know that higher interest rate environments have made it difficult to build homes. That is why we are cutting taxes on new home construction, which the Conservatives oppose. It is why we are putting more money on the table to build new apartments, which they oppose. It is why we are putting money towards incentivizing changes for cities, which they oppose. Just this past week, the Conservative deputy leader held a press conference to proudly declare that they were siding with the NIMBYs when it came to municipal zoning reforms.

We need to do everything we can to make it easier to build homes more quickly and more cost effectively. It is a shame the Conservatives oppose it at every stage.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of deficits, people are no longer able to put a roof over their heads. There is still more red tape than common-sense solutions, like giving bonuses to cities that build more housing.

As we have said before, this Prime Minister is not worth the cost. The demand for housing is skyrocketing. A landlord in Saguenay received over 200 applications for his rental unit in just 24 hours. Apartments are increasingly scarce and increasingly expensive.

In the upcoming budget, will the Prime Minister finally build housing and stop adding red tape?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the next budget is coming and the member already knows that it will contain additional housing measures.

What he should also know is that, just a few months ago, we signed a \$1.8-billion agreement with the Government of Quebec that will provide, all at once, the largest number of new housing units in the history of Quebec. This is an extraordinary event resulting from an extraordinary collaboration.

Unlike the Conservatives, who keep spewing insults, picking fights and calling people, particularly municipal and provincial representatives, incompetent, we are working for Quebecers to get hundreds and even thousands of housing units built in the coming months and years.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Shahzeb is a young dad in Toronto.

He feels stuck. He cannot afford to leave his parents' home. Like many Canadians, he is feeling hopeless. In Toronto alone, 85,000 people are waiting for social housing. It is because of 30 years of Liberals ignoring the problem while the gut-and-cut Conservatives lost over 800,000 affordable homes.

Are the Liberals going to keep throwing money at rich developers for luxury condos, or will they start to build the social and affordable housing Canadians desperately need?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating my friend and colleague on his recent appointment; I look forward to working with him to defend the most vulnerable in the months ahead.

With respect, over the last number of years, we have put investments on the table that are building affordable housing for low-income families, and we are accelerating that work. The upcoming federal budget is going to include \$1.5 billion to help non-profits acquire social housing so that it can be kept affordable forever. We have made, in the fall economic statement, an additional billion-dollar investment to build more affordable housing stock, and we are working with provinces and territories by putting federal money on the table and using federal leadership to help solve the housing crisis, including for the most vulnerable. I am looking forward to continuing this work alongside my colleague.

NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *Uqaqtittiji*, grocery prices in the north are still sky high. In the latest flyer from NorthMart in Iqaluit, a jar of pasta sauce is over \$10. When I asked the Minister of Northern Affairs about the broken nutrition north program, he pointed to internal reviews and studies. Indigenous peoples and northerners do not need more studies. They need to put food on the table.

When will the Liberals stop the delays and fix the nutrition north program so people can put groceries on the table?

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Northern Affairs and to the Minister of National Defence (Northern Defence), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question. We know that affordability is an issue for all Canadian families; it is an even larger issue across the north. That is why, in our time in government, we have doubled our investment in programs such as nutrition north and added to programs such as the harvesters investment program, to allow people to have affordable foods that come from the land. We will continue to work with the territories and all communities to support them in achieving affordable and nutritious food for their communities.

* * *

● (1450)

FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no child should go to school hungry, but we know that, for many families, that is the reality. For parents of young children, a national school food program would help them feed their children and reduce their food costs. By providing consistent access to nutritious meals, we can set kids up for success.

Can the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development update the House on the progress of building a national food program?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know my colleagues, fellow moms and dads, on this side of the House agree that no child should go to school hungry. That is why we announced, just last week, a \$1-billion investment through budget 2024 for a national school food program. The program would ensure that children who arrive at school hungry have access to food, ensuring an additional 400,000 kids will be able to access this food. We will work with the provinces, territories and indigenous partners to roll this out. We know the Conservatives have voted against this, but we are doing the hard—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

* * *

HOUSING

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, Canadians cannot achieve the goal of owning a home and continue to struggle amidst this crisis.

According to a recent report in *The Globe and Mail*, Canada needs to complete 320,000 housing units annually from now until 2030 to meet the demand. Canadians have had enough and must see this crisis managed properly. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost or the corruption.

Will the Prime Minister stop basing the budget on bureaucracy and photo ops and actually build the homes?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. I have had the opportunity to speak with many moms and dads across this country about the programs that we have been putting in place to support them.

I recently spoke to Chris, who lives in Peterborough. She is a Trent University student. She shared the impact of our waiving of the interest on student loans. She shared the impact of being able to access \$10-a-day child care, as well as the Canada child benefit.

These programs have saved her tremendously and helped her and her daughter get ahead.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need homes and Canada has built fewer homes than it did back in the 1970s, when the population was half of what it is today. We need 320,000 units built annually before 2030. This requires a record pace of construction, which will exhaust an already burnt-out workforce. Canadians need solutions. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

Will the Prime Minister stop making announcements and just get the houses built?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, do members know what helps moms and dads across this country afford a home? It is being able to have access to \$10-a-day child care and get back into the workforce. We are seeing record numbers of women, of moms, getting back into the workforce, giving them the opportunity to contribute to their family finances and afford a safe place to live.

In contrast to the Conservatives' continued fearmongering, on this side of the House we are doing the hard work to support families.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of this Liberal government, finding housing in Canada is a nightmare. It was actually kind of funny and a bit ironic to see the ministers and the Prime Minister strutting around the country last week talking about how incompetent they have been when it comes to housing. The proof is that the CMHC confirmed last week that average home prices doubled between 2019 and 2022. That was all under the Liberals.

Is next week's budget going to build housing, not just create even more red tape?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, next week's budget is going to build even more housing. Consider these two numbers: six and 8,000. They are clear. During his reign as minister responsible for housing, the Conservative Leader created six affordable housing units in the entire country. In recent months, we signed an agreement with the Quebec government for a total of \$1.8 billion that will build 8,000 affordable housing units, in Quebec alone, over the next few years.

Unfortunately, my Conservative colleagues from Quebec do not seem to be aware of the projects being carried out in their own ridings. If they would like more information, they can easily contact us.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister must know that when the member for Carleton was minister, all housing was affordable in Canada. Now, the Liberals have doubled the cost of housing for all Canadians. Young families are losing hope of becoming homeowners, and seniors can no longer afford to pay their rent and are forced to stay in substandard housing. Some 80% of people who are due to renew their mortgage fear that they will not be able to make their payments.

Again, will the Liberals show some common sense next week and announce that they are going to build housing, not just create more red tape?

● (1455)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our colleague is right. The six affordable housing units built by the opposition leader were indeed affordable. Over the past few years, we have built hundreds of thousands of affordable housing units. The construction of another 750,000 units will be accelerated over the coming years. In Quebec alone, 8,000 affordable housing units will be built in the coming months under an historic agreement, the biggest investment in housing in the history of Quebec, that we signed with the Government of Quebec.

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

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the federal government spends its time interfering in Quebec's jurisdictions, the situation in its own jurisdictions is getting serious. The Prime Minister is in shock after finally discovering that immigration levels have exceeded our integration capacity.

Who was oblivious enough to have increased permanent and temporary immigration without thinking about housing, schools or health? Who was irresponsible enough to have branded everyone who talked about integration capacity a xenophobe? If only we knew. Who knows, it could well be the same person causing the debt to skyrocket. Does the Prime Minister know who this reckless person might be?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite refuses to acknowledge is that we have a good relationship with the Government of Quebec. I even visited Minister Fréchette two weeks ago to discuss our shared issues and find common ground. We have agreed to work together on reducing the number of people who are here temporarily, but we need to do it the right way.

I look forward to doing so, not only with Quebec, but with all the other provinces and territories across the country.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the Prime Minister is responsible for the largest population increase since 1957, many are likening him to a pyromaniac firefighter in the housing crisis. It is true that he is setting fires, but is he really trying to put them out? Is he lowering permanent immigration targets? No, he is not.

Is he spreading out the intake of asylum seekers among the provinces, to give Quebec some relief? No, he is not.

Is he reducing temporary immigration? No, he wants to increase it to two million, the highest level in history other than in 2023-24.

Now that he recognizes the problem with integration capacity, will he fix it?

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois should pay attention to the news. We made it very clear that we are going to reduce the number of people who are here on a temporary basis from 7% to 5%.

I have a question for the Bloc Québécois members. Where would they make cuts? I want them to be very specific, because I know there are many temporary workers in their ridings who work with farmers. Are they going to tell the farmers to reduce their numbers?

I would ask them to give a clear, definitive and precise answer.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are clear on the two most important economic issues we face, inflation and high interest rates.

They understand that government deficits cause inflation. Runaway deficits cause runaway inflation. This year's deficit is expected to be \$47 billion, \$7 billion higher than forecast. To say this is a runaway is an understatement. The Bank of Canada's governor has been clear that deficits are the main factor keeping interest rates high.

Will the Prime Minister cap his runaway spending with a dollar-for-dollar rule to bring down interest rates and inflation?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important for a responsible government to address issues around affordability, address issues around environmental sustainability, invest in growing a clean economy and have a sound fiscal management strategy. We are doing all of those things.

On the other side of the House, we have a Conservative Party of Canada that simply wants to cut and cut. It will cut affordable child care. It will cut dental care. It will cut the national school food program. It will cut the entire climate program. It will actually cut investments in growing a clean economy for the future.

My goodness, it is such an irresponsible position that these folks are taking—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Centre.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is just throwing taxpayer money at a wall without any thought about execution, and it is making matters worse for Canadians.

It is a whack-a-mole approach to economic policy. Obviously, after eight years of the NDP-Liberal government, Canadians cannot afford the Prime Minister, his excess spending or his corruption.

Scotiabank says that rate cuts could be delayed by high government spending.

Next week, the Minister of Finance will table her budget. It is time for the deficits to stop. Will the minister commit to a dollar-for-dollar reduction in order to bring inflation and interest rates under control?

● (1500)

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we will always be there to support Canadians, especially vulnerable Canadians, while maintaining a prudent fiscal position, including a AAA credit rating and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7.

We have been there for seniors with increases in the GIS and the OAS. We are there for school children with a national school food program. We are there for millennials and Gen Z with affordable housing and rental accommodation.

On this side of the House, we know how to do prudence as well as providing for the most vulnerable in this country.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is keeping interest rates so high is Liberal deficit spending. That is what. Now we can add Scotiabank to the long list of economists saying that after eight years, the NDP-Liberal government is not worth the cost. Record-high deficits are keeping housing, food and fuel at record-high prices.

Will the Prime Minister fix the budget and adopt our common-sense Conservative policy by bringing in a dollar-for-dollar rule to bring down inflation and interest rates?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unlike the party opposite, we actually know the role of the independent Bank of Canada, which is to set monetary policy.

While we are prudently managing taxpayer dollars, we will continue to invest in Canadians. Because of our policies, 86% of women between the ages of 25 and 45 are in the workforce. That is the Canada child benefit and that is \$10-a-day child care.

Every single time the party opposite has an opportunity to support Canadians, it votes against it. That is not common sense at all.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, young Canadians in my community of Richmond and across Canada are struggling to find housing that fits their budget.

We are scaling up our efforts to build more homes and to build them faster at prices Canadians can afford. Through the housing accelerator fund, the federal government is investing over \$35 million in the city of Richmond to fast-track the construction of 1,000 homes over the next three years and 3,100 homes over the next decade.

Can the minister share, with my community of Richmond and communities across British Columbia, how the government is supporting housing in budget 2024?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me thank my hon. colleague for his advocacy for his community, which is going to help get thousands of homes built in Richmond over the course of the next number of years.

In the upcoming federal budget, we are going to continue to put measures on the table that help accelerate the pace of home building. This includes low-cost financing to add tens of thousands of new rental units. This includes additional support to help non-profits acquire housing that they will keep affordable forever. It includes new investments in affordable housing and new strategies to build homes more quickly by incentivizing home building in factories.

With members like this advocating for their community, we can put a plan on the table that will solve the national housing crisis.

Mr. Jamil Jivani (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Durham Region is home to many millennials who dream of owning a house one day. For eight years, the Prime Minister has been promising af-

fordable housing, yet things are only getting worse. Millennials know he is not worth the cost.

The Liberal-NDP government continues to announce expensive photo ops in the lead-up to the federal budget, but we know, as millennials, that we deserve better. How can we ever believe any of these broken promises from the Liberal-NDP government again?

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by offering my sincere congratulations to our newest colleague in the House of Commons. It is wonderful to have him here.

What the member may not realize, being new to the House, is that his leader is actively campaigning on commitments to build fewer homes than we have already projected to build. He may not realize that the Conservative leader has promised to raise taxes on homebuilding. He may not realize the Conservative leader has pledged to cut funding for homebuilding. He may not realize that his party held a press conference last week to say that it does not want to do anything on municipal reforms and has decided to side with the NIMBYs.

Over the member's time here, I hope he comes to see the light and gets with a plan that will build more homes.

* * *

● (1505)

HEALTH

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after eight years of the Liberal Prime Minister's radical safe supply agenda, we see lives being put at risk. After the NDP-Liberal government decriminalized hard drugs, nurses in northern British Columbia are now being told to allow patients to use hard drugs and have weapons in their hospital rooms. This is unfair and unsafe for workers and patients.

When will the Prime Minister wake up and realize that his radical drug policy just is not worth the cost?

Hon. Ya'ara Saks (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every health care worker in this country deserves to be safe in their place of work. That is why this government passed legislation exactly for that reason.

Oral Questions

I, too, am concerned about the reports and expect the B.C. government to take the necessary actions to address the concerns raised by health care providers.

On this side of the House, we are saving lives. On that side of the House, they are busy with slogans and stigma.

Mr. Stephen Ellis (Cumberland—Colchester, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 300% more government-issued opioids are being seized by police in British Columbia. More drugs on the street mean the street prices of opioids are falling across this country, and that is what we are seeing.

The delusional NDP-Liberal government wants us to think that giving out free drugs to our most vulnerable is a cure, but Canadians know this is nonsense. When will the narcissistic Prime Minister, who is not worth the cost, crime or corruption, end this cruel and disastrous—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: I will let the hon. member maybe rephrase that.

Mr. Stephen Ellis: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say is this. Given the fact that I practised as a physician for a long time, that is the diagnosis.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Maybe we will have a quick chat after question period.

The hon. Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

Hon. Ya'ara Saks (Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservatives want to sow fear and stigma, on this side of the House we know that we have to stick to the facts. The RCMP says that there is no evidence to suggest that widespread diversion of drugs from prescribed alternatives is happening.

However, prescribed alternatives are not the issue. Any diversion is illegal in this country, whether it is medication for ADHD, for pain management or anything else. Those are the facts. Of the overdose deaths, 70% are from an illegal, toxic, poisoned supply. I challenge the member to actually read the data.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fishery is the backbone of Canada's coastal communities, and Liberal members of Parliament will always be there to stand up for fishers, their families and our fishing communities.

On February 8, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans adopted a motion proposed by Liberal members of Parliament to instill an official five-year review of the Fisheries Act.

Can the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans explain to the House the significance of the Fisheries Act review for coastal communities?

Hon. Diane LeBouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans for moving forward with this important review. Coastal communities know that the Fisheries Act does more than just regulate fishing. It is also a key law that impacts local economies, ecological protections and reconciliation. This review is just the first step toward a Fisheries Act that works better for communities on all coasts. I look forward to seeing the committee's recommendations at the end of this study.

* * *

FIREARMS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government promised to ban the AR-15. That is the weapon that was used to murder 20 six-year-old children at Sandy Hook. On Thursday, the Conservative leader was tweeting that the government was going after not the AR-15 but hunting rifles. It is little wonder he gets endorsed by Alex Jones, who is notorious for taunting families of children murdered by the AR-15.

Will the minister confirm whether the government is going after hunting rifles or the AR-15, or is this the Conservative leader being "the real deal" of disinformation for the likes of Alex Jones?

● (1510)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to salute my colleague's long service in the House on behalf of the people of northern Ontario.

I share—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I have never had that much applause in the House before.

I share our colleague's concern about the Conservative policy with respect to gun control. We have said from the beginning that law-abiding hunters and sportspersons are not the subject of these regulations. What we are doing is taking away guns that were designed to kill people on the battlefield, and we are also prepared to compensate the people who bought those guns lawfully. It is something the Conservative Party would undo, and we are committed to keeping Canadians safe.

* * *

[Translation]

SENIORS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, ever since I have been an MP, we have received the list of proposals that have been granted or denied New Horizons funding every February. New Horizons is a program that helps improve the lives of our seniors.

Unfortunately, for some reason, we did not get that information this year, which makes it impossible for us to help organizations in our ridings. My office has sent three emails, made five phone calls and even sent a fax to the office of the Minister of Labour and Seniors. We have received no response, not even an acknowledgement.

This is discouraging for members of Parliament trying to do our job. Can the minister explain why we are not getting this information? What is he going to do to fix this?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Labour and Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question and even the facts. I have no excuse there. I will dig in deeper and get the answers that the member is looking for.

* * *

JACOB FLICKINGER

The Deputy Speaker: Following discussions among representatives of all parties of the House, I understand there is an agreement to observe a moment of silence in honour of the Canadian aid worker, Jacob Flickinger, and of all aid workers who have lost their lives in Gaza.

I now invite hon. members to rise.

[A moment of silence observed]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 15(3) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to lay upon the table the list of all sponsored travel by members for the year 2023, as provided by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and in accordance with the policy on the tabling of treaties in Parliament, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the treaties entitled “Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of the Republic of Finland”, done at Brussels on July 5, 2022, and “Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of the Kingdom of Sweden”, also done at Brussels on July 5, 2022.

This is good news for Canada and for NATO.

Routine Proceedings

• (1515)

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to 27 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the good people of Waterloo. With Vaisakhi approaching, I am hoping that all celebrating Vaisakhi will have a good one.

Pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 62nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House.

[Translation]

If the House gives its consent, I move that the 62nd report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

I hear none. The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present three petitions from my constituents.

The first petition is on medical assistance in dying or the assisted suicide system. These constituents are drawing the attention of the House to the fact that, on March 17, MAID was supposed to become available to those with a mental illness. Parliament has since then extended it. They are still calling on the Government of Canada to introduce new legislation to stop the expansion of medical assistance in dying to those with a mental illness.

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my second petition goes back to the issue of the lost confidence that many Canadians in my riding have about the government here. They are calling on the House for a vote of non-confidence again. They are asking for an election to be held within 45 days after the vote is won.

Routine Proceedings

Once again, as the current government is not acting in the best interests of citizens, they are asking the House of Commons to hold a vote of non-confidence and to hold elections 45 days after such a vote.

SINGLE-USE PLASTICS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the third and final petition that I am tabling is on behalf of constituents in my riding who are also members of the Calgary Co-op. This is with regard to Environment Canada's decision to continue to ban compostable shopping bags that are 100% non-plastic bags.

These constituents are drawing the government's attention to the fact that the Calgary Co-op has successfully kept over 100 million plastic bags out of landfills with the use of its green compostable shopping bags. The City of Calgary supports the use of the Calgary Co-op's compostable bags, stating that the bags do fully break down in composting facilities and there is no impact on the environment. They are also reminding the federal government that the federal ban, as it stands now, allows for the Calgary Co-op to sell its compostable bags on store shelves, but it prevents it from selling these same bags a few feet away at the checkout, which makes little sense since it does very little to limit their use. Petitioners say that this unnecessary ban could send signals that stifle the adoption and development of environmentally responsible products. Finally, they are calling on the Government of Canada to recognize that the green compostable bags made by the Calgary Co-op do not constitute single-use plastics and are, therefore, worthy of an exemption from the upcoming ban.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are aware and these individuals are aware of the crisis of domestic violence and violent crimes associated across Canada specifically with women. The risk of violence and coercion of women is greater when they are pregnant.

The injury or death of a child in the womb when a woman is pregnant is not considered as aggravating circumstances when an individual is charged with a crime and facing sentencing within the Criminal Code. As a matter of fact, they make the comment that Canada is the only democratic country in the world with absolutely no regulations or laws in regard to abortion. The only other country is North Korea.

Justice requires, they say, that an attacker who abuses a pregnant woman and her child in the womb be sentenced accordingly and that the sentence should match the crime. They call on us in the House to legislate the abuse of a pregnant woman and/or the infliction of harm on the child that she is carrying as aggravating circumstances for sentencing purposes in the Criminal Code.

● (1520)

PORNOGRAPHY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have one more petition that I will bring forward briefly.

These individuals are very concerned about sexually explicit material that is so demeaning and sexually violent and can easily be accessed by young people online. A significant portion of this sexually explicit material is made available for commercial purposes

and is not protected by any effective age verification method. However, it is very clear that everyone believes that we have a responsibility to make sure that these young people do not have access.

Online verification was the primary recommendation made by stakeholders during a 2017 study by the Standing Committee on Health. These petitioners call upon the House to adopt Bill S-210, the protecting young persons from exposure to pornography act.

NATURAL HEALTH PRODUCTS

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last spring, the Government of Canada made legislative changes to allow Health Canada to regulate natural health supplements the same as therapeutic synthetic drugs, which will mean substantial new fees on the import, manufacturing and sale of things like vitamins, protein powders and other health supplements.

Constituents in my riding who rely on natural health products daily are concerned that these changes will result in the products they use being removed from Canadian store shelves or increasing in price substantially. They are calling upon the government to stop these changes and to work with the industries on issues such as labelling and fees. They ask us to save their supplements.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of constituents in Saanich—Gulf Islands, standing on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

The petitioners are pointing to the long-standing problem of the contribution, unfortunately, of Canadian companies, particularly those in the mining sector, in attacking human rights and being associated with environmental damage around the world.

Petitioners ask the House to consider that the people who are involved in such protests in other countries around the world, to defend their rights, are often harassed, attacked or killed. They are calling on the House of Commons to require companies to prevent adverse human rights effects and environmental damage and to require companies to do their due diligence, including by carefully assessing how their actions are contributing to such egregious human rights abuses and environmental damage. They ask for the Government of Canada and the House to work for the legal right for people who have been harmed by Canadian companies to seek justice in Canadian courts.

AIR SERVICE TO INDIA

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to table a petition regarding international flights. As we know, our Indo-Canadian community has grown considerably over the last number of years. A part of that has driven a demand to build that relationship, which ultimately sees more people going back and forth between India and Canada. Along with that comes the demand for increased direct flights. That is what the petition is asking for. It is a pleasure that I table it today.

[Translation]

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to rise to table a petition signed by 212 people.

Do members know that volunteer firefighters account for 71% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders? Firefighters and the petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support Bill C-310 to increase the amount of tax credits available for volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per year.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize all of the volunteer firefighters who serve the community of Mégantic-L'Érable and the entire country.

[English]

GAZA

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present a petition from nearly 10,000 folks from across the country.

The petitioners note that it was back in 1949 that the UN Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, was established to carry out direct relief and works programs for Palestinian refugees. They note that UNRWA is the primary provider of humanitarian aid in Gaza, providing food, social services, health care, schools and refugee camps, sustaining the lives of millions of civilians, more than half of whom are kids, in the Palestinian territory of Gaza, which has been blockaded by Israel since 2007.

The petitioners go on to note that South Africa submitted an application to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip and the case of South Africa v. Israel to the International Court of Justice, or the ICJ. After considering both applications and oral arguments, the court concluded that genocide was plausible. In its January 26 order, the ICJ cited UNRWA statements documenting dire conditions in the Gaza Strip before introducing its fourth provisional measure, which is, as the petitioners quote, "Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip." Finally, they note that Israel levelled allegations against a dozen UNRWA employees, after which Canada paused humanitarian funding committed to UNRWA without an investigation.

The petitioners, citizens and residents of Canada call upon the Government of Canada to live up to its obligations under the genocide convention to prevent the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip from deteriorating further before the court renders

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its final decision. The petitioners call on two specific actions. The first is for Canada to reinstate UNRWA funding, which, in the time since this petition was out in the public, has already been done. Second, the petitioners advocate for other countries to do the same and for Canada to call on other countries to do the same.

● (1525)

UKRAINE

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition brought forward by Canadians who see the unjust war Vladimir Putin is waging on Ukraine and want the Government of Canada to act, including by way of providing direct military assistance and further lethal weapons and supplies to the defence of Ukraine.

That is why Conservatives have called on the Liberal government to donate all discontinued surplus CRV7 rockets to Ukraine. These rockets were specifically requested by the Government of Ukraine, and Canada has 83,000 of them to set for disposal. The cost of disposal is estimated at \$30 million, but the cost for shipment to Ukraine is approximately \$5 million. This donation would not only be the right thing to do, but also the most cost-effective thing to do.

The Conservatives have and always will support Ukraine. We stand with it in its efforts to rebuild its economy and defend itself from Russia's illegal invasion.

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition I rise to present is signed by residents facing rising prices of gas, groceries and home heating.

The Liberal carbon tax has made it much harder to make ends meet. On April 1, the Prime Minister's carbon tax went up again, this time by 23%. This inflationary carbon tax means that a family of four will have to pay \$700 more for groceries in 2024. Conservatives know that people are hurting. People are being forced to choose between filling up their car, heating their home and feeding their family. I join with these petitioners in calling on the Prime Minister to immediately eliminate the carbon tax from home heating, and better yet, axe the tax altogether.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition signed by Canadians calling upon the Government of Canada to support Bill C-310, which would increase the tax credit for volunteer firefighters and search and rescue volunteers from \$3,000 a year to \$10,000 a year.

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Seventy-one per cent of firefighting first responders in this country are volunteers. Those volunteers were our first line of defence in my home province of Nova Scotia last year as we faced the worst wildfire season in our recorded history. Indeed, all across Canada, volunteer firefighters put their lives on the line to protect our communities. Boosting this tax credit would not only ensure that they are properly compensated for their essential roles, but also improve recruitment and retention at a time when our fire departments are struggling to maintain the number of volunteer firefighters.

Importantly, the petitioners also note that, in a moment when affordability is a top concern for many Canadians, this tax credit would allow these volunteer firefighters to keep more of their hard-earned income, which often goes back into their communities.

• (1530)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present a petition on behalf of constituents.

I rise for the 34th time on behalf of the people of Swan River, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. The community of Swan River is struggling with extreme levels of crime because of the Liberal government's soft-on-crime laws, such as Bill C-75.

The people of Swan River are upset that jail is a revolving door for repeat offenders as Bill C-75 allows violent offenders to be in jail in the morning and back on the street the same day. Manitoba West district RCMP has reported that just 15 individuals were responsible for 1,184 calls for service. The people of Swan River are calling for jail, not bail, for violent repeat offenders.

The people of Swan River demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which directly threaten their livelihoods and their community. I support the good people of Swan River.

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to stand up today to present a petition.

The petition I am presenting today comes from Canadians from across the country who are concerned about the consent and age verification of those depicted in pornographic material. The petitioners are asking the government to follow recommendation 2 of the 2021 Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics report on MindGeek, which would require all content hosting platforms to verify age prior to uploading content.

Bill C-270, the stopping Internet sexual exploitation act, would add two offences to the Criminal Code. The first requires age verification and consent prior to distribution. The second requires removal of that material if the consent withdrawn.

The petitioners are calling on the House of Commons to pass Bill C-270.

FREEDOM OF POLITICAL EXPRESSION

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present one petition to the

House in support of Bill C-257, an excellent private member's bill that would protect Canadians from political discrimination.

It is a bill that I put forward in the House. The petitioners want to see the House pass it as quickly as possible.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 2280, 2282, 2283, 2289, 2291, 2293, 2294, 2297, 2300, 2304, 2306 to 2308, 2310, 2311, 2313, 2317, 2318, 2322, 2323, 2325, 2326, 2328 to 2330, 2332, 2336, 2337, 2339, 2340, 2344 and 2354.

[Text]

Question No. 2280—**Mr. Alistair MacGregor:**

With regard to the mandate and responsibilities of the Grocery Task Force, broken down by month since its inception: (a) what is the total number of investigations initiated by the Grocery Task Force into practices that hurt consumers; (b) of the investigations in (a), how many investigations concluded that consumers were being harmed; and (c) what are the details of all investigations into practices that hurt consumers that have been initiated by the Task Force in (a), including, the (i) name of the grocer being investigated, (ii) conduct being investigated, (iii) date that the investigation began, (iv) date that the investigation concluded?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Grocery Task Force was established within the office of Consumer Affairs of the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, with the main mandate to provide the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry with advice tied to his efforts to stabilize food prices in Canada. As the Task Force has no mandate to take enforcement actions, it has not conducted any investigations.

Question No. 2282—**Mr. Kevin Waugh:**

With regard to the March 31, 2023 announcement by the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry that the government secured legally binding commitments from Rogers and Vidéotron: (a) what is the current status of each commitment; (b) for each commitment that has been completed, on what date was the government notified of its completion; (c) for each commitment that has not yet been completed, by what date does the government expect it to be completed; and (d) for each of the job creation commitments included in the announcement, how many jobs have been created to date?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to part (a) of the question, the status of each commitment is to be determined by Innovation, Science and Economic Development, or ISED, when it receives the first annual reports from Rogers, due on April 3, 2024, and Videotron, due by July 3, 2024. The parties have also committed to publish their annual reports online. The deadline for fulfillment of each commitment is set out in the following two agreements: Rogers – Undertakings of Rogers Communications Inc. related to its public commitments and agreement with His Majesty the King in right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of Industry Videotron – Undertakings of Quebecor Media Inc. and Videotron Ltd. with respect to Freedom Mobile

With respect to part (b), the status of each commitment is to be determined by ISED when it receives the first annual reports from Rogers, due on April 3, 2024, and Videotron, due by July 3, 2024.

With respect to part (c), the deadline for fulfillment of each commitment is set out in the two above-mentioned agreements. The Rogers commitments are generally to be completed in 5 or 10 years from the acquisition closing date, while the Videotron commitments are generally to be completed in 2, 3, 5 or 10 years from the acquisition closing date.

With respect to part (d), the status of the job commitment will be assessed by ISED following receipt of the first annual reports from Rogers and Videotron.

Question No. 2283—**Mr. Peter Julian:**

With regard to evictions data collected by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, since January 1, 2006: how many evictions occurred in Canada, broken down by province or territory and by year?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to evictions data collected by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, since January 1, 2006, Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation, or CMHC, does not have a database containing this type of data.

There is no authoritative source of this data across Canada. Evictions are the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, and legislation differs by jurisdiction.

CMHC is currently working with Statistics Canada to establish getting eviction records (applications, decisions, appeals, enforcements) from selected provinces. CMHC will obtain a limited amount of information from a small number of provinces which means it will only pertain to data regarding evictions that had applications to the Landlord/Tenant board in that province. It would not include the data for people who received an eviction notice from their landlord and immediately vacated the unit.

Statistics Canada will be integrating evictions data with other data sources to produce aggregated statistics on socioeconomic outcomes of people who have been formally evicted. CMHC will be analyzing this data in an attempt to learn about the characteristics of these households both before and after the eviction.

Question No. 2289—**Mr. Dean Allison:**

With regard to the government's COVID-19 vaccine mandates: since August 13, 2021, how many people were denied Employment Insurance benefits for the sole reason of their COVID-19 vaccine status?

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the department is not in a position to accurately represent the number of individuals who were denied Employment Insurance benefits for the sole reason of their COVID-19 vaccine status.

While we have data representing the number of EI claims submitted and denied with the Record of Employment, or ROE, code of M, or terminated, and a comment specifying “non-compliance to employer's mandatory vaccine policy”, the “comment” section is not a mandatory field on the ROE; as a result, it is not possible to provide an accurate count of all EI claims denied for the sole reason of the COVID-19 vaccine status.

For these reasons, producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question would require a manual collection of information would lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

Question No. 2291—**Mr. Brian Masse:**

With regard to the Housing Accelerator Fund and the decision to not fund the city of Windsor, Ontario (Ontario's application), due to the decision to not change their zoning bylaws to include four units on any residential property as-of-right: (a) did the Government of Canada refuse all applications from municipalities that presented alternative plans which included allowing a minimum of four units on other properties not currently listed as-of-right; (b) how many, and which municipalities were denied funding due to not changing their current zoning requirements to permit four units on any residential property as-of-right; (c) what consultations, and with whom, took place to create a different density planning formula than the one established in Ontario which permits threeplexes; (d) what studies or evaluations were done to determine that the city of Windsor required a density increase to fourplexes to use these funds; (e) without the change to fourplexes, would the city of Windsor have been able to use the funds if approved in terms of places available to build; and (f) was consideration given to municipalities based on statistics of poverty, gender-led households, race, ethnicity, first nations and children per household?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Housing Accelerator Fund, or HAF, and the decision to not fund the city of Windsor, Ontario, Ontario's application, Budget 2022 announced \$4 billion in funding until 2026-27 to launch the HAF. The target is to permit an additional 100,000 net new housing units over the course of the three-year initiative.

The HAF provides funding to local governments to incentivize local initiatives that remove barriers to housing supply, accelerate the growth of supply, and support the development of complete, low-carbon and climate-resilient communities, which are affordable, inclusive, equitable, and diverse.

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On October 23, 2023, the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities issued a public statement on the HAF progress which confirmed that “we will be prioritizing consideration of the communities based on their relative level of ambition and policy choices and we will work to finalize agreements with the cities, towns, and rural communities who are willing to do the most to provide homes for their residents.”

With regards to part a) and b), more than 500 local governments across the country submitted applications for the HAF. Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application in the coming weeks. As this review process is being finalized, no other municipalities have been declined under the HAF. Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation, or CMHC, is not permitted to make any specific Action Plan public without the applicant's consent or discuss applications that have been denied. For cities with successful applications, their Action Plans will be made public. As of right now, summaries of local action plans and initiatives funded through the Housing Accelerator Fund can be found on the CMHC website: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/project-funding-and-mortgage-financing/funding-programs/all-funding-programs/housing-accelerator-fund/housing-accelerator-fund-progress>.

With regards to part c) and f), CMHC consulted stakeholders throughout 2022 when designing the HAF. These stakeholders include the Canadian Urban Institute, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, provinces and territories, Indigenous groups and various organizations involved in the delivery of housing, alongside a public call for ideas. The Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities tabled a report in the House of Commons with a list of recommendations on the design of the HAF, to which the Government of Canada tabled a detailed response. CMHC considered these recommendations in the development of the program and those that aligned with the program objectives were incorporated in the design. As with all Government of Canada budget submissions, a Gender-based Analysis Plus was provided, noting that this is a broad-based housing supply program intended to accelerate the planning, permitting and construction of all types of housing, including non-profit and below market rental.

With regards to part d), CMHC has nothing to report.

With regards to part e), approved applicants have the flexibility to use their incentive funding to support housing in their communities, which include investments in affordable housing, investments in housing-related infrastructure, and investments in community-related infrastructure that supports housing.

Question No. 2293—Ms. Leah Gazan:

With regard to access to abortion care funded under the Canada Health Act, broken down by province or territory from 2015 to present: (a) how many hospitals provide safe abortion care services funded by the federal government; (b) how many clinics provide safe abortion care services funded by the federal government; (c) which municipalities with a population of 50,000 or more (i) did not have access to a hospital or clinic offering safe abortion care services funded by the federal government within 100 kilometers driving distance, (ii) did not have a hospital or clinic offering safe abortion care services funded by the federal government accessible by public transportation; and (d) which municipalities with a population under 50,000 (i) did not have access to a hospital or clinic offering safe abortion care services funded by the federal government within 100 kilometers driving distance, (ii) did not have a hospital or clinic offering safe abortion care services funded by the federal government accessible by public transportation?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the federal government does not directly fund hospitals or clinics to provide medically necessary health care services, including abortion care services. Rather the provincial and territorial governments fund and administer the provision of these services within the framework of the Canada Health Act and with federal assistance through the Canada Health Transfer, or CHT.

The Canada Health Act sets out the criteria and conditions that must be satisfied by provincial and territorial health care insurance plans for provinces and territories to qualify for their full share of the federal cash contribution available to them under the CHT. The CHT provides provinces and territories with federal funding to assist them in exercising their primary jurisdiction in the administration of their public health care insurance plans and the delivery of health care service.

The Canada Health Act requires that all medically necessary hospital and physician services be covered by provincial and territorial public health care insurance plans, whether they are provided in a hospital or in a facility providing hospital care, such as a private clinic. Surgical abortion services are deemed medically necessary by all provinces and territories, or PTs, and as such, are insured under their PT health insurance plans. Medical necessity is determined by provincial and territorial health insurance plans, in consultation with the medical profession.

The most recently available data from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, or CIHI, states there were an estimated 87,485 reported induced abortions in Canada in 2021. The number of reported induced abortions occurring in a hospital setting was 20,217, or 23.1%, while 67,286, or 76.9%, occurred in a non-hospital setting.

In the period after mifepristone restrictions were removed, most abortion providers in Ontario were general practitioners, at 66.5%, with obstetrician-gynaecologists, at 23.2%, and nurse practitioners, at 9.1%, taking up a smaller proportion of the workforce. By 2019 nearly 90% of practitioners offering abortion care provided 10 or fewer per year, and among all abortion providers the annual median number provided dropped to 1, or IQR 1-5. These findings indicate a strong integration of abortion care into more general services. Meanwhile existing services were preserved; the number of practitioners providing more than 50 abortions per year, that is, those with an abortion-focused practice, was unchanged after the policy implementation.

Routine Proceedings

CIHI reports that almost 2/3 of all reported abortions in 2021 were procedural, or surgical, while 1/3 were medical, or through medication. CIHI acknowledges that there is likely continued undercounting of medication abortions, with the use of Mifegymiso. Access to abortion services has improved for Canadians with the advent of medication abortion, through Mifegymiso, particularly since prescribing guidelines were updated by Health Canada in 2017, and coverage for the drug has been established in all provinces and territories

To further improve nation-wide access to sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion, Health Canada's Sexual and Reproductive Health Fund was created. Through Budget 2021 and 2023, \$81 million has been committed to the fund over six years. The fund supports community-based organizations that help make access to abortion, gender affirming, and other sexual and reproductive health care information and services more accessible for underserved populations, such as members of 2SLGBTQI+ communities, Indigenous and racialized people, and women and youth from underserved communities.

To date, \$8 million has been invested in four projects focused on access to abortion. Through these projects, new resources and supports are being developed for health care professionals, access to accurate information about abortion is being improved, and financial and logistical support for travel for abortion care is being provided. Specifically, the funding has made possible a 225 percent increase in the number of people receiving travel and logistical support to access abortion services, that is, 107 people assisted in 2021-22 vs. 348 people assisted in 2022-23.

Question No. 2294—Ms. Leah Gazan:

With regard to funding included in the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, broken down by province or territory since the program was initiated: (a) how much of the allocated \$539.3 million in funding has been committed to date; (b) how much of the allocated \$539.3 million in funding has been spent to date; (c) which organizations have received funding from this program; (d) how much funding has each program recipient received; and (e) how many women or girls have been recipients of programs, services or actions associated with this National Action Plan, broken down by those (i) who identify as Indigenous, (ii) who identify as Black or racialized, (iii) who are immigrants or refugees, (iv) who are Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, plus people (2SLGBTQI+), (v) with disabilities, (vi) living in northern, rural, and remote communities?

Ms. Lisa Hepfner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to parts a) and b), the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, or NAP to End GBV, is supported by a Budget 2022 investment of \$593.3 million over five years, which includes \$525 million over four years to support provinces and territories in their implementation of the NAP to End GBV, through bilateral funding agreements. The bilateral agreement for each province and territory, which includes their funding allocation and actions, updated annually, can be found on Women and Gender Equality Canada's webpage *Bilateral Agreements on the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence* at <https://femmes-egalite-genres.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/bilateral-agreements.html>.

With respect to parts c), d), and e), the bilateral funding agreements with the provinces and territories are designed to allow jurisdictions the flexibility to implement opportunities for action within

the framework of the five pillars and Foundation of the NAP to End GBV in accordance with their regional realities and priorities, with the exception of Quebec. Gender based violence is a priority for the Government of Quebec, which has invested significant funds to end violence against women. However, although it supports the overall objectives of the National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence, the Government of Quebec cannot adhere to it because it intends to retain its full responsibility in this area on its territory. Through an agreement that respects its autonomy, the Government of Quebec receives federal funding to support the programs, initiatives, and services to end gender-based violence that it puts in place based on the needs of its territory. Each province and territory is responsible for directing investments according to their areas of need and priorities. As part of the implementation of the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are working together to monitor the results and impacts of actions through the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence's expected results framework. The efforts of the NAP to End GBV is built upon years of consultation with thousands of stakeholders, the Federal Government will continue engaging with stakeholders as we implement an evergreen, and flexible NAP to End GBV. These ongoing engagements will identify changing needs and priorities faced in different regions. In addition to the bilateral agreements being posted online, a national report will be published on an annual basis demonstrating the progress of the NAP to end GBV in each province as well as the need for changing adaptation for each bilateral agreement. These public reports and agreements published on the website is part of the government's strategy to include accountability and transparency within the NAP to End GBV. As funding is gradually distributed throughout the 10 years, these public reports will be imperative in ensuring that all gaps are addressed when implementing the NAP to End GBV.

Question No. 2297—Mr. Frank Caputo:

With regard to inmates in facilities operated by the Correctional Service of Canada: (a) how many inmates are currently on an opiates reduction program such as suboxone or methadone; and (b) of the inmates in (a), how many are also concurrently accessing the needle exchange program?

Routine Proceedings

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Inter-governmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Correctional Service Canada, or CSC, offers a comprehensive suite of substance use treatment, support, and harm reduction services consistent with those offered in the community. Opioid Agonist Treatment, or OAT, is available to individuals with an opioid use disorder, or OUD, and is an effective treatment for OUD with literature demonstrating its success in reducing the use of illicit opioids and improving retention in addiction treatment. OAT is also effective in reducing the risk of HIV and hepatitis C infections among people who inject drugs and decreasing the harm associated with opioid use in prison and the likelihood of substance use upon return to the community. Effective OAT incorporates physical and mental health care and harm reduction delivered in an integrated fashion. For example, care includes provider-led counselling, substance use monitoring, provision of comprehensive primary care, harm reduction, education by health care professionals, the assessment and monitoring of emotional and mental health, and offering of psychosocial treatment interventions and supports.

Reducing the spread of infectious diseases makes institutions safer for employees and inmates, and it makes communities safer when inmates are released. One of the main ways that infectious diseases are transmitted in correctional institutions is through the sharing of illicit needles. The Prison Needle Exchange Program, or PNEP, gives federal inmates access to sterile needles in an effort to limit the transmission of infectious diseases.

Of the 13,619 offenders in custody on February 4, 2024, there were 3,129 offenders on OAT. Of those who were on OAT, 45 offenders were participating in the PNEP.

Question No. 2300—**Mr. Ted Falk:**

With regard to the government's approval of COVID-19 vaccines: what are the details of all research, studies, and data that the government used as a basis for its claim that the vaccines were safe and effective?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada has authorized several COVID-19 vaccines for use in Canada. Each of these underwent a careful scientific review, and met our standards for safety, efficacy and quality. Information about all of the authorized vaccines, including the Regulatory Decision Summary, can be found on the COVID-19 vaccines and treatments portal at <https://bit.ly/3EH07IB>. Click on the individual vaccine names and then the "all resources" tab.

The portal provides detailed information for each of the vaccines that have been authorized, such as the product monograph, which is the prescribing information for both consumers and healthcare professionals in the manufacturer insert; the summary basis of decision, which provides a detailed overview of the data considered by Health Canada; and the terms and conditions placed on the authorizations, which are the requirements for further data submission that manufacturers are required to meet.

Bear in mind that information in the portal is being updated regularly. Specific details related to various aspects of the submission review, including the summaries of the clinical efficacy and safety, can be found in the portal. The portal also includes the supporting data related to the approval of COVID-19 vaccines on Health

Canada's Public Release of Clinical Information website at <https://bit.ly/3GFvDHE>.

As the federal regulator, Health Canada requires that clinical trial results be generated from properly designed protocols so that safety and efficacy of vaccines can be well demonstrated. Health Canada also requires manufacturing data demonstrating consistency and quality in the production of the vaccine. These requirements are informed by science and are aligned with international standards, including the World Health Organization guidelines.

Question No. 2304—**Ms. Michelle Ferreri:**

With regard to statistics held by the government: what was the number of persons employed as child care workers in (i) 2022, (ii) 2023?

Ms. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while provinces and territories are not required to report on the number of persons employed as child care workers under the Canada-wide early learning and child care, or ELCC, Agreements, Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey on the employment estimates for the Early childhood educators and assistants occupational grouping estimated that the number of persons employed as child care workers in 2022 was 236,100 and 246,700 in 2023. It should be noted this occupation category captures workers who provide care for children between the ages of infancy and 12 years old employed in child care centres, agencies for exceptional children, and other settings where early childhood education services are provided.

As with any survey, the Labour Force Survey is subject to biases and errors and is best for monitoring longer term trends, rather than for comparing two single points in time. Further, please note that not all Labour Force Survey data is available for all provinces and territories. Due to sampling constraints, some data is not available for the North, including data regarding the number of early childhood educators and assistants. As such, the figures referenced above do not include the estimated number of early childhood educators working in the Territories.

As the provinces and territories are the owners of the administrative data related to the delivery of their ELCC programs and services, they may have the detailed information being sought. The Government of Canada will continue to work together with the provinces and territories through the implementation of the Canada-wide ELCC system to improve the collection and dissemination of data.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 2306—Mr. Michael D. Chong:**

With regard to government information about the two Canadian Hells Angels named in an indictment in the United States: did the U.S. government notify the Canadian government of these two Canadians before the indictment was unsealed?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP, was aware of the individuals in question and worked closely with the American authorities throughout their investigation.

This indictment demonstrates the importance of our close work with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, or FBI, in protecting both sides of our border and we look forward to continued collaborations. The RCMP is committed to combatting foreign actor interference. As foreign actor interference transcends borders, our strong relationships with Canada's security and intelligence community and law enforcement agencies around the world are essential to combatting it.

The RCMP will not be commenting further on ongoing investigations, domestic or international.

Question No. 2307—Mr. Michael D. Chong:

With regard to Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) reaction to two Canadian Hells Angels named in an indictment in the United States related to a plot to kill an Iranian defector: (a) did GAC request of Italy, which is Canada's protecting power in Iran, to make representations to Iran regarding this matter; (b) if the answer to (a) is affirmative, what specific message was delivered and on what date; and (c) if the answer to (a) is negative, why was no request made of Italy?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

Global Affairs Canada is unable to provide additional information regarding this case as it is a matter of on-going legal proceedings.

Question No. 2308—Mr. Fraser Tolmie:

With regard to the Department of National Defence issuing a posting for two journalists to engage in "role playing services" to prepare its spokespeople for challenging media questions: (a) what is the pay associated with such postings; (b) who authorized the decision to spend money on role playing services; and (c) why was the money in (a) not spent on investments in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Defence Public Affairs Learning Centre, or DPALC, provides Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces, or CAF, personnel with specialized military public affairs and communications training. This directly contributes to the objectives of the Defence Team, including the CAF, to uphold transparency and to effectively communicate the complex work undertaken by our members in support of the Government of Canada.

Contractors are used by the DPALC for certain ad-hoc components of media training, including for Spokesperson training. On January 15, 2024, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Affairs, issued a Tender Notice for the professional services of two role-playing journalists.

The contracting rates will be based on the per diem rates proposed by the successful bidder. The successful bidder is the bidder

that has the highest combined rating of technical merit and price. Given that the Tender Notice closed on February 23, 2024, pay rates are not yet available. Bidders must comply with the appropriate Treasury Board Security and Integrity provisions. The chosen contractor for these positions would be paid fixed time rates on the specific dates that services are rendered.

Question No. 2310—Mr. Michael Kram:

With regard to Parks Canada and the eradication of deer on Sidney Island: (a) were other lower-cost options to hunt and kill the invasive deer studied or considered prior to the implementation of phase one, including, but not limited to, allowing local hunters to hunt the deer for free; (b) for each option in (a), what is the reason that it was rejected; (c) what options did Parks Canada study or consider for the implementation of phase two of the deer eradication; (d) for each option in (c), what was the estimated cost and why was each option accepted or rejected; and (e) once all phases of the eradication are fully implemented, what does Parks Canada estimate to be the cost per invasive deer killed?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to parts a), b), c) and d), various options to manage fallow deer on Sidney Island have been considered and adopted by Parks Canada.

Recreational hunters have been hunting fallow deer on the private lands on Sidney Island since 1981, including paid and professional culls. Despite removing almost 15,000 deer, the population has continually rebounded. These culls have not been successful at keeping the deer population at a healthy level for the ecosystem.

The Sidney Island Ecological Restoration Project is a multi-jurisdictional restoration project that aims to facilitate recovery of forest ecosystems that have been significantly damaged due to over-browsing by introduced invasive European fallow deer. The project has been collaboratively built from the ground up, with project partners co-developing the project's vision and goals, thorough expert analysis by specialists and animal welfare organizations to implement the project safely, and then co-designing restoration actions. Project partners—including the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council, Tsawout First Nation, Pauquachin First Nation, the Province of British Columbia, Islands Trust Conservancy, and Sidney Island residents—made the decision to proceed with eradication after more than 40 years of population control efforts, including culls, have not successfully facilitated ecosystem recovery.

Project partners formed a project steering committee in 2019, and developed a three-part strategy for long-term ecosystem recovery, focusing on vegetation restoration, the eradication of European fallow deer, and the long-term management of black-tailed deer. Each project partner underwent an internal process to determine whether their community or organization supported the proposed strategy for ecosystem recovery. In spring 2023, all project partners formally approved the implementation of the strategy.

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Other methods of population management were also considered, including the following. Capturing and relocating animals to other areas. Relocation transfers negative impacts as European fallow deer are invasive to the whole region and relocation would result in ecological degradation elsewhere. Sterilization of the fallow deer on Sidney Islands. Sterilization does not allow for a complete removal of the population. Unless completely removed, the population of fallow deer will eventually rebound, as it has been seen previously after culls on Sidney Island. Surgical sterilization would require the successful capture of every individual male or female in the population, which would be incredibly resource-intensive and also poses significant feasibility challenges.

Parks Canada did not conduct a cost analysis on these methods of deer population management because the options did not meet the needs of the project for the reasons listed earlier.

The intention of the Sidney Island Ecological Restoration Project is to eradicate the invasive fallow deer on Sidney Island. This operation is not a cull, it is an eradication. An eradication requires different skillsets than a cull, particularly as the project area includes private residential lots, many with residential built environment and some with full-time residents. Marksmen with extensive experience in deer eradications and a well-established safety record of marksmanship in semi-urban environments are necessary for the operation to be completed safely and effectively. Specific statutory and regulatory authorities are required for this operation, including permits granted by Parks Canada, Transport Canada, the Province of British Columbia and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. With eradication, the goal is zero animals remaining from the target population. Access to private property is required for this operation which was provided by the Sidney Island Strata Corporation and the Islands Trust Conservancy.

Animal welfare and visitor safety are priorities for Parks Canada. The proposed eradication methods were selected to ensure the humane treatment of wildlife and to minimize the safety risk to local community members and visitors. Public Services and Procurement Canada, on behalf of Parks Canada, posted a solicitation process requiring bidders to have experience conducting eradication operations in populated landscapes.

A primary contractor was tasked with the development and implementation of an operational plan for eradication of invasive European fallow deer from Sidney Island, including Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project. Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC), on behalf of Parks Canada, awarded this contract to the successful bidder, Coastal Conservation Inc., a Canadian company, on March 29, 2022. The Request for Proposals was posted publicly and available to domestic and international firms.

With respect to part (e), the fallow deer eradication project cost is not determined on the basis of a cost per deer. The project cost is based on the selection of a humane and effective method for complete removal of the population of deer. The scope of the overall restoration project reaches far beyond the short-term component of addressing the issue of fallow deer and includes propagation and planting of native plants and trees. The project goal is the restoration of the Coastal Douglas-Fir Forest ecosystem on Sidney Island. The estimated budget for the ecosystem restoration project is \$5.9 million, \$796,340 of which was incurred for Phase 1. These ex-

penses are for more than deer eradication, they include expenses such as meat processing, Indigenous harvesters, equipment purchases and rentals, outreach activities, and amounts paid to contractors.

Question No. 2311—Mr. Philip Lawrence:

With regard to the government's Medical Expense Tax Credit, broken down by year since 2016: (a) how many individuals filed medical expenses for gluten-free products; (b) what was the total value of tax credits claimed for gluten-free food products; (c) what is the breakdown of the individuals who claimed medical expenses for gluten-free products by income level; (d) how many audits were conducted on individuals claiming gluten-free products as a medical expense; (e) what is the administrative cost to administer this tax credit; and (f) how many employees or full-time equivalents are assigned to administer this tax credit?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the noted question, what follows is the response from the Canada Revenue Agency, or CRA, as of February 9, 2024, that is, the date of the question.

The Medical Expense Tax Credit is a non-refundable tax credit that can be used to reduce tax that is paid or may have to be paid. Expenses include a wide range of products, procedures and services. Persons with celiac disease can claim the incremental costs associated with buying gluten-free food products as a medical expense.

With respect to parts (a), (b) and (c), on the T1 General Income Tax and Benefit Return, the medical expense claims recorded on lines 33099 and 33199 encompass lump sums for various eligible expenses, some of which may not be related to celiac disease. Further information can be found on "https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/tax/individuals/topics/about-your-tax-return/tax-return/completing-a-tax-return/deductions-credits-expenses/lines-33099-33199-eligible-medical-expenses-you-claim-on-your-tax-return.html#hw_clm."

Although medical expenses are reviewed as part of the CRA's compliance workload, the CRA does not track the various types of expenses which taxpayers are claiming on their tax return for medical expenses, nor are they broken down by income levels. As such, the CRA cannot respond in the manner requested.

With respect to parts (d), (e) and (f), through a variety of verification activities the CRA ensures taxpayers and benefit recipients comply with tax legislation administered by the CRA. The CRA cannot isolate the costs to administer this tax credit individually. This credit is one of numerous credits on the holistic T1 individual income tax and benefit return and is integrated into the blended activities of the CRA. As such, the CRA cannot respond in the manner requested.

Question No. 2313—Mr. Dane Lloyd:

With regard to the \$256 million committed over five years in budget 2022 to the Fighting and Managing Wildfires in a Changing Climate program: how much of this commitment has been spent to date, in total, and broken down by specific investment?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Natural Resources and Energy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Budget 2022 announced \$256 million for the Fighting and Managing Wildfires in a Changing Climate, or FMWCC, program to support the efforts of provinces and territories to strengthen capacities and capabilities in fire management across Canada by procuring specialized wildland firefighting equipment.

The Equipment Fund under the FMWCC currently has agreements in place with Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and Yukon.

The program spent \$6.75M in fiscal year 2022-2023 and has committed to spend another \$30.9M for the 2023-2024 fiscal year to procure specialized equipment. To date, \$188.8M has been committed over 5 years, with the remaining to be invested in the near future.

Of the \$6.75M that has been spent to date, \$6.62M was invested in specialized wildland firefighting equipment including, the repair of aging equipment, vehicles, mobile units, avionics upgrades, wildfire tools, first aid equipment, hoses, pumps, trailers, storage containers, chainsaws and accessories, fire camp water systems, weather stations and enhanced communications equipment. The remaining \$0.13M was invested in personnel and training.

Question No. 2317—**Mr. Alex Ruff:**

With regard to the processing of requests made under the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act (ATIP) by Parks Canada since January 2015: (a) how many requests have been received each year; (b) what is the average response time each year; (c) what was the shortest processing time each year; (d) what is the longest processing time each year; (e) how many hours of work were allocated to process ATIP requests broken down by year; (f) how many contracts for services have been issued to process ATIP requests, broken down by year; (g) what are the details of each contract in (f), including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) vendor, (iii) value, (iv) number of ATIP requests processed related to the contract; (h) how many complaints has Parks Canada received via the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and the Office of the Information Commissioner of Canada regarding ATIP requests each year; (i) what tool does Parks Canada currently use for records management; (j) what is the amount of records held by Parks Canada that remain undigitized, including the quantity of records in total, broken down by year of record; and (k) what are the details of any specific investments, if any, that Parks Canada has undertaken to increase compliance with the Access to Information Act and Privacy Act regarding requests, including, the date, financial value, and description of each investment?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the responses to parts (a) to (d) and (h) of the question, please refer to the statistical report on the Access to Information and Privacy Acts, published on the following website: <https://parks.canada.ca/agence-agency/dp-pd/baiprp-atipo/rap-rep>

With respect to part (e) of the question, the information requested is not systematically tracked in a centralized database. However, the length of time taken to process ATIP requests is calculated in calendar days and captured in the statistical report on the Access to Information and Privacy Acts, published on the following website: <https://parks.canada.ca/agence-agency/dp-pd/baiprp-atipo/rap-rep>

In response to parts (f) and (g), Parks Canada undertook a preliminary and broadly scoped search in order to determine the amount of information that would fall within the scope of the question and the amount of time that would be required to prepare a

comprehensive response. The information requested is not systematically tracked in a centralized database. Parks Canada concluded that producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question would require a manual collection of information that is not possible in the time allotted and could lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

In response to part (i), records management at Parks Canada is managed through shared folders hosted on file servers, GCDocs and SharePoint. Parks Canada records are also held in the specialized applications PeopleSoft, or Oracle; Maximo, IBM; STAR, SAP; ArcGIS, ESRI; NIRS, or the national integrated realty system; PC411, or Parks Canada 411; IEM, or incident event management; ParksNet, Intranet; CCM, and other Government of Canada applications hosted by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

With respect to part (j), Parks Canada does not have an inventory of undigitized paper records.

With respect to part (k), Parks Canada has not undertaken any specific investments to increase compliance with the Access to Information and Privacy Act.

Question No. 2318—**Mr. Gérard Deltell:**

With regard to information on project applications subject to Inefficient Fossil Fuels Subsidies Guidelines held by the government: (a) how many applications have been submitted; (b) how many applications are being reviewed; (c) how many applications have been (i) approved, (ii) rejected, (iii) delayed; and (d) for each application in (a), (i) when was the application received, (ii) what are the details of each project, (iii) what is the estimated completion date?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as part of its effort to fulfill Canada's G20 commitment to phase out or rationalize inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, on July 24, 2023, the Government of Canada released the "Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies Government of Canada Self-Review Assessment Framework" and the "Inefficient Fossil Fuel Subsidies Government of Canada Guidelines". The framework defines a fossil fuel subsidy and the methodology for assessing efficiency, while the guidelines are meant to avoid the creation of any new inefficient subsidies. The framework and guidelines were jointly developed by Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Department of Finance Canada and apply to all federal departments and agencies.

Proponents do not apply to the IFFS framework and guidelines, but rather, government departments and agencies are responsible for applying the guidelines when considering applications for project funding that could be deemed an inefficient subsidy to the fossil fuel sector.

Routine Proceedings

Subsidies to the fossil fuel sector are considered “inefficient” unless they meet one or more of the following criteria: subsidies that enable significant net greenhouse gas emissions reductions in Canada or internationally in alignment with article 6 of the Paris Agreement; subsidies that support clean energy, clean technology or renewable energy; subsidies that provide an essential energy service to a remote community; subsidies that provide short-term support for emergency response; subsidies that support indigenous economic participation in fossil fuel activities; subsidies that support abated production processes, or projects that have a credible plan to achieve net-zero emissions by 2030.

No centralized database exists to track government-wide decision-making; however, departments and agencies are required to document how an approved project meets one of the six criteria, in cases where the guidelines apply.

Question No. 2322—**Mr. Ted Falk:**

With regard to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC): (a) has IRCC outsourced the processing or review of any case files to the private industry in the past five years; (b) if the answer to (a) is affirmative, (i) what is the total amount spent on such outsourcing, broken down by year, (ii) how many case files were outsourced, broken down by year; (c) what are the details of all contracts related to such outsourcing since 2019, including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) vendor, (iii) value or amount, (iv) number of files outsourced to the vendor, (v) manner in which the contract was awarded (i.e. sole-sourced or competitive bid); (d) what is the rationale for outsourcing such files; and (e) what specific security measures, if any, are in place to ensure that applicants whose files are outsourced have their information protected?

Mr. Paul Chiang (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, IRCC does not contract out or outsource processing to the private industry. Therefore, IRCC does not have any information to provide for this question.

Question No. 2323—**Mr. Peter Julian:**

With regard to the Canada Housing Benefit, broken down by federal electoral district since the program's inception: (a) what is the total number of applications (i) received, (ii) approved; (b) what is the total dollar value of payments delivered to eligible applicants; (c) how many children, in total, have been helped by the program; and (d) how many seniors, in total, have been helped by the program?

Mr. Chris Bittle (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Canada housing benefit, broken down by federal electoral district since the program's inception, CMHC and the Canada Revenue Agency undertook an extensive preliminary search in order to determine the amount of information that would fall within the scope of the question and the amount of time that would be required to prepare a comprehensive response.

The information requested is not systematically tracked in a centralized database and relies on a provincial component for all Canada housing benefit applications. It was concluded that producing and validating a comprehensive response to this question would require a manual collection of information that is not possible in the time allotted and could lead to the disclosure of incomplete and misleading information.

Any information regarding application statistics can be found on www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/child-and-family-benefits/top-up-canada-housing-benefit/statistics.html

Question No. 2325—**Mr. Michael D. Chong:**

With regard to the data security breach at Global Affairs Canada (GAC) which was reported around the end of January 2024: (a) how many users' information was impacted, in total and broken down by (i) GAC employees, (ii) government employees outside of GAC, (iii) the general public, (iv) diplomats from other countries; (b) on what date did GAC become aware of the data breach; (c) on what date were the impacted users informed of the breach; (d) if impacted users were not informed, why were they not informed; (e) for impacted users, what types of information were breached; (f) did the data breach only impact users who accessed the GAC-operated Secure Integrated Global Network (SIGNET) between December 30, 2023, and January 24, 2024, and, if not, what other users, time periods or networks were impacted; (g) what action, if any, did GAC take to prevent data security breaches in response to the December 2022 announcement by the United States Secret Service that entities working on behalf of the government of the People's Republic of China, including APT41, were hacking and conducting espionage; (h) is the actor(s) responsible for the data breach a state or non-state actor(s); and (i) what is the name of the actor(s) responsible for the data breach?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following reflects a consolidated response approved on behalf of Global Affairs Canada ministers.

In response to parts (a) to (i) of the question, given its profile, Global Affairs Canada, or GAC, takes a proactive approach and employs a variety of security monitoring measures to detect and address potential risks. In collaboration with federal cybersecurity partners, GAC has a robust cybersecurity infrastructure and works closely with partners, including the United States and other close allies, to share information to address potential threats. The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and the federal cybersecurity community address issues as quickly as possible.

In January 2024, Global Affairs Canada discovered malicious cyber-activity on its network, as well as indications of a data breach. While investigations are still ongoing, early results suggest that many Global Affairs Canada users, including employees, may have been affected. A first message to all Global Affairs Canada employees was sent on January 24, 2024. Potentially affected individual users were advised from January 27 to 28, 2024, following forensics work by GAC and cybersecurity partners. GAC employees have been contacted directly by the department's privacy team to share initial results and mitigation measures.

No further details can be provided at this time with respect to specific cybersecurity incidents, due to operational security considerations.

Question No. 2326—**Ms. Louise Chabot:**

With regard to Employment and Social Development Canada's Skills for Success Program: Training and Tools stream for 2023: (a) with regard to the unallocated funds, how have they been used or how will they be used; (b) why have no Quebec organizations received any funds; (c) do the grants awarded allow for translation of the tools into French to ensure their accessibility; (d) why was the treatment of submitted proposals repeatedly postponed in the fall-winter 2022-2023 and spring-summer 2023 before being rejected last July; and (e) why is the CREMA proposal on a "waiting list" while \$209 million have not yet been spent?

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Irek Kusmierczyk (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to part (a) of the question, throughout the skills for success, or SFS, program investment streams, there are now a total of 69 agreements in place, valued at approximately \$233.1 million. All SFS program funds are currently notionally allocated.

In response to part (b) of the question, there are currently three Quebec-based organizations receiving funding as part of the budget 2021 investment in the SFS program.

The SFS program is primarily a national program, and the geographic locations of applicants were not used to assess proposals or to prioritize investments. Eligible applications were assessed based on the advertised parameters and priorities of the intake process, as outlined on the program's funding page.

In response to part (c) of the question, to comply with the official language requirements, the SFS terms and conditions permit the translations of project materials into French or English when it has been determined during the project assessment and negotiations that the target clientele who are eligible to participate in a project to be carried out by the recipient is composed of members of both official language communities, and the anticipated demand for project assistance by the target clientele in both official languages determines the use of both official languages.

In response to part (d) of the question, the funding page for the SFS program's training and tools stream stated that funding decisions for this call for proposals would be made by late fall 2022. However, due to the high volume of funding applications received, it took longer than expected for applications to be reviewed. Applicants were notified of the delays.

In response to part (e) of the question, all SFS program funds are notionally allocated. While the program cannot speak to specific applications, in cases where programs are oversubscribed, some applicants may receive notification that their proposal may receive further consideration should additional funding become available.

During the negotiation of contribution agreements, it is normal for the value of some projects to fluctuate as project activities and expenditures are finalized. It is therefore possible for funds to be released and made available to finance other eligible projects. However, the message to organizations regarding this possibility does not guarantee that sufficient funds will be released from this exercise to allow the funding of additional organizations.

Question No. 2328—Mr. Colin Carrie:

With regard to Health Canada's approval of mRNA vaccine products: (a) can Health Canada definitively exclude the possibility that undesirable effects to human cells and tissues (e.g. cell proliferation, toxicity) may be caused by conceivable mechanisms of action, such as (i) the creation of aberrant proteins by means of ribosomal frameshifting, (ii) the concomitant injection of residual DNA plasmid fragments, which, according to Speicher et al., are known to exceed by 188 to 509 fold the guideline limits for residual DNA that the United States Food and Drug Administration and the World Health Organization set at 10 ng/dose when measured by fluorometry, and the subsequent transfection of these fragments into the cell's nucleus with the help of the lipid nanoparticles (LNPs), (iii) the concomitant injection of other contaminants such as double-stranded RNA or fragmented RNA, (iv) the presence of abnormally high levels of IgG4 antibodies due to repeated vaccination, (v) the concomitant injection of bacterial endotoxins previously detected in Pfizer and Moderna vials, which may also be transfected via LNPs, (vi) the potential for

reverse transcriptase of mRNA into DNA, (vii) the presence of SV40 promoter/enhancer DNA as an additional contaminant that could transfect the cell and integrate into the genome, (viii) the LNP-facilitated entry of mRNA and spike protein across the blood-brain barrier, across the placenta, into breast milk, and into organs and tissues, particularly of the heart, bone marrow and brain; (b) when considering the mechanisms of action in (a), can Health Canada definitively exclude the possibility that any combination of two or more of these mechanisms may cause undesirable effects of cell proliferation or toxicity; (c) has Health Canada completed a risk-benefit assessment in relation to (i) each of these singular mechanisms of action, (ii) the combination of any of the mechanisms listed in (a); (d) if the answer to (c) is affirmative, what is the risk-benefit assessment; (e) if the answer to (c) is negative, why has Health Canada not completed a risk-benefit assessment; and (f) did Health Canada set new safety limits for levels of residual DNA in the presence of a lipid nanoparticle delivery system in an mRNA vaccine product?

Mr. Yasir Naqvi (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada initially authorized the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 mRNA vaccine in December 2020 and subsequently has authorized updated versions, including the most recent vaccine targeting the XBB Omicron subvariant in late 2023: <https://covid-vaccine.canada.ca>. Each assessment included a determination that the vaccine met the department's stringent regulatory, safety, efficacy and quality requirements for use in Canada.

In response to part (a)(i) of the question, as a regulator, Health Canada sets quality standards and requirements for manufacturers to follow, including providing comprehensive and detailed information about the vaccine itself and about the manufacturing process. There are strict limits and controls to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. The department authorizes a product only once the data has been reviewed and demonstrates that the product's benefits outweigh its risks.

Prior to Health Canada authorization, the mRNA vaccines were tested in preclinical safety studies for general and reproductive toxicity, and no safety signals related to frame shifting were reported.

After authorization, Health Canada continues to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines through surveillance and risk minimization measures, including requiring manufacturers to regularly submit safety reports and reports of adverse events following immunization, or AEFIs, and regularly assessing whether there is any new safety information that may affect the benefit-risk profile of the product. Should a safety issue be confirmed, Health Canada will take appropriate action, which may include communicating the risk to Canadians or changing the recommended use of the vaccine.

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In response to part (a)(ii) of the question, as a regulator, Health Canada sets quality standards and requirements for manufacturers to follow, including providing comprehensive and detailed information about the vaccine itself and about the manufacturing process. There are strict limits and controls to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. The department authorizes a product only once the data has been reviewed and demonstrates that the product's benefits outweigh its risks.

The limit for residual DNA in biological drugs required by Health Canada for approval is not more than 10 ng/human dose. This is in line with the World Health Organization's recommendation concerning residual DNA in biological drugs and is consistent with the quality limits of other international regulators.

After authorization, Health Canada continues to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines through surveillance and risk minimization measures, including requiring manufacturers to regularly submit safety reports and reports of AEFIs, and regularly assessing whether there is any new safety information that may affect the benefit-risk profile of the product. Should a safety issue be confirmed, Health Canada will take appropriate action, which may include communicating the risk to Canadians or changing the recommended use of the vaccine.

In response to part (a)(iii), please see the responses to parts (a)(i) and (a)(ii).

In response to parts (a)(iv) and (v), please see the response to part (a)(i).

In response to part (a)(vi), please see the responses to parts (a)(i) and (a)(ii).

In response to part (a)(vii) of the question, as a regulator, Health Canada sets quality standards and requirements for manufacturers to follow, including providing comprehensive and detailed information about the vaccine itself and about the manufacturing process. There are strict limits and controls to ensure the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine. The department authorizes a product only once the data has been reviewed and demonstrates that the product's benefits outweigh its risks.

The SV40 promoter/enhancer sequence was found to be a residual DNA fragment in the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID 19 vaccine. The fragment is inactive, has no functional role and was measured to be consistently below the limit required by Health Canada and other international regulators. Health Canada continues to monitor the COVID 19 vaccines to ensure that they continue to meet the highest standards for safety, effectiveness and quality, and that their benefits continue to outweigh any potential risks.

After authorization, Health Canada continues to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines through surveillance and risk minimization measures, including requiring manufacturers to regularly submit safety reports and reports of AEFIs and regularly assessing whether there is any new safety information that may affect the benefit-risk profile of the product. Should a safety issue be confirmed, Health Canada will take appropriate action, which may include communicating the risk to Canadians or changing the recommended use of the vaccine.

For the response to part (a)(viii), please see the responses to parts (a)(i) and (a)(ii).

For the response to parts (b) to (e) of the question, please see the response to part (a)(i).

In response to part (f) of the question, the limit for residual DNA in biological drugs required by Health Canada for approval is consistent with the WHO recommended limit of not more than 10 ng/human dose. There are no proposed changes to this limit for the mRNA vaccines.

Question No. 2329—Ms. Michelle Ferreri:

With regard to the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care program: (a) how much does it cost the government to administer the program annually, in total and broken down by province or territory; and (b) how many employees or full-time equivalents are assigned to work related to the administration of the program, in total and broken down by province or territory whose program's administration the employee is assigned to?

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is investing over \$27 billion over five years to build a Canada-wide early learning and child care, or ELCC, system, ensuring all families have access to inclusive and affordable regulated child care, no matter where they live. Canada-wide ELCC agreements have been signed with all provinces and territories, or PTs, including an asymmetrical agreement with Quebec, to reduce fees to an average of \$10 a day and support the creation of over 250,000 spaces nationwide by March 2026.

In response to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care supports the Government of Canada's vision of a Canada-wide ELCC system that ensures all families have access to high-quality, affordable, flexible and inclusive early learning and child care, no matter where they live.

Employees of the federal secretariat support the implementation of a Canada-wide ELCC system by carrying out a range of activities; single employees are not "assigned" to support work for a single jurisdiction. Functions include managing federal-provincial/territorial agreements, developing policy, acting as liaison with domestic and international ELCC stakeholders, and supporting research and innovation projects across ELCC's foundational pillars: access, affordability, quality, flexibility and inclusion.

As of February 15, 2024, salaries for the secretariat totalled \$9,015,781 for a total of 76 full-time equivalents. In support of program delivery, the secretariat's operating funding totalled \$8,798,615, also as of February 15, 2024. This operating funding includes but is not limited to supporting the following activities: data and research activities, including surveys and research undertaken by Statistics Canada; the operations of the national advisory council on ELCC and the FPT forum of ministers most responsible for ELCC; bilateral, stakeholder and international relations; and administrative support for the Prime Minister's awards of excellence.

Under the Constitution Act, 1867, PTs have primary responsibility for matters pertaining to education, including the design and delivery of ELCC programs and services. Each PT has its own system, governed by legislative and regulatory frameworks that carry differing costs, to administer the Canada-wide system in their respective jurisdiction.

In this respect, questions regarding the costs and the number of full-time equivalents assigned to administer ELCC programs and services in each PT should be directed to the appropriate PT ministries most responsible for child care.

Question No. 2330—Mr. Marty Morantz:

With regard to what the Minister of Finance and officials in the Department of Finance knew about the allegations contained in a February 6, 2024, report from Sam Cooper that, since 2015, more than 10 Toronto-area branches of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) had issued at least \$500 million in home loans to diaspora buyers claiming exaggerated incomes or non-existent jobs outside of Canada: (a) were the minister and Department of Finance officials aware of these allegations prior to approving the acquisition of the HSBC by the Royal Bank of Canada in December 2023, and, if so, what impact did these allegations have on the approval decision; (b) was the government aware that these fraudulently obtained mortgages facilitated a large money laundering operation, and, if so, when did it become aware; and (c) what action, if any, is the government taking in response to these allegations?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on acquisition applications subject to ministerial approval, the department relies on a rigorous review process undertaken by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, or OSFI, to provide the Minister of Finance with advice on matters relevant to the application. The relevant matters for the minister's consideration are set out in section 396 of the Bank Act. Given its role as a regulator, the Department of Finance will not comment on any supervisory or regulatory process that may be underway.

Canadians must have confidence in the integrity and security of their financial institutions. In this regard, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada, FINTRAC, and OSFI, continue to engage with financial institutions to promote, monitor and enforce compliance with anti money laundering and anti-terrorist financing and prudential lending requirements respectively. FINTRAC and OSFI engage closely and regularly to share supervisory insights and coordinate supervision of federally regulated financial institutions in Canada.

Question No. 2332—Mr. Doug Shipley:

With regard to Correctional Service Canada (CSC), in total and broken down by year since 2016: (a) how many federally incarcerated inmates have sought a medically assisted death; (b) how many federally incarcerated inmates have been granted a medically assisted death; (c) what is the breakdown of inmates in (a) and (b) by (i) dangerous offenders, (ii) high-profile offenders, (iii) multiple murderers; (d) of the

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inmates in (b), for how many was a natural death (i) reasonably foreseeable, (ii) not reasonably foreseeable; (e) what is the breakdown of inmates in (b) by (i) those who received a medically assisted death inside a prison or CSC facility, (ii) those who died in a hospital or other similar location; and (f) of those who received a medically assisted death within a CSC facility, what is the breakdown by (i) location, (ii) name of facility?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Inter-governmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the CSC's top priorities is ensuring that those who are incarcerated in Canada's federal institutions have access to quality, safe, patient-centred and culturally responsive care. This is underscored by CSC's legislative mandate and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, or CCRA, which includes providing essential health care and reasonable access to non-essential health care to federal inmates, in keeping with professional standards. As part of this, CSC is responsive to the needs of offenders, including quality and compassionate palliative and end-of-life care.

Medical assistance in dying, or MAID, is a complex and deeply personal matter, and CSC ensures a robust and compassionate process for those who may wish to access these services. The eligibility requirements within CSC follow the legislative requirements that apply to all Canadians. Once an individual makes such a request, a physician or nurse practitioner will meet with them to discuss relevant information, offer referrals to support services such as mental health professionals, chaplains, elders, etc., and schedule the individual for an eligibility assessment. It should be noted that CSC's guidelines require that an external physician or nurse practitioner perform the second eligibility assessment and that the procedure be completed externally to CSC, namely in a community hospital or health care facility, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The process related to the provision of MAID is comprehensive and contains numerous safeguards to ensure that federally incarcerated individuals are afforded the same rights as all other Canadians.

As of February 13, 2024, the total number of requests that CSC has received since the implementation of the legislation was 37, of which 10 eligible individuals received MAID. Furthermore, of the individuals who received MAID, nine received it in external facilities and one received it within a correctional facility at the individual's request. All procedures were carried out by health professionals outside the service.

In processing parliamentary returns, the government applies the principles set out in the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act. Information with regard to specific cases has been withheld on the grounds that it constitutes personal information.

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 2336—Mr. Corey Tochor:**

With regard to the increase to the government's tax on alcohol scheduled for April 1, 2024: (a) how much revenue is the government projected to receive from the tax on alcohol in the 2024-25 fiscal year; and (b) how much additional revenue is the government projected to receive in the 2024-25 fiscal year as a result of the April 1, 2024, tax increase on alcohol?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to part (a) of the question, revenues from the federal excise duty on alcohol products are projected to be \$2.2 billion in 2024-25.

In response to part (b), in real terms, the government does not anticipate an increase in revenues as a result of the inflation adjustment mechanism. Excise duty rates on alcohol are indexed to the consumer price index to ensure that they maintain their effectiveness, including in meeting their health objectives, and that excise duty revenues generated do not decline over time. On March 9, 2024, the government proposed to cap the inflation adjustment at 2% for beer, spirit and wine excise duties, effective for two years starting on April 1, 2024. This cap on excise duties represents a decline in revenues and is presented in the fiscal framework as a reduction of \$63 million in 2024-25 and \$353 million over five years.

Question No. 2337—Mr. Jake Stewart:

With regard to patrols on land by Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) employees in the area of southwest Nova Scotia: (a) how many DFO employees are conducting regular patrols on land in (i) Queens County, (ii) Lunenburg County, (iii) Kings County, (iv) Annapolis County, (v) Digby County, (vi) Yarmouth County, (vii) Halifax County, (viii) Hants County; (b) what are the hours, including standby hours, worked by the employees in (a), from 00:00 to 23:59; and (c) what is the Conservation and Protection Detachment responsible for each of the counties in (a)?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to patrols on land by Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or DFO, employees in the area of southwest Nova Scotia and in response to parts (a) and (c) of the question, there are 48 DFO employees regularly in the area of southwest Nova Scotia, conducting regular patrols on land. DFO's conservation and protection, or C and P, detachments in southwest Nova Scotia do not plan and execute operations based on county lines.

DFO's C and P directorate is unable to report this data at either the detachment or county level, so as to preserve the integrity of its law enforcement planning and operational activities.

In response to part (b), employees work 7.5-hour shifts at various times during a 24-hour period and are available to respond to urgencies as necessary.

Question No. 2339—Mr. Gerald Soroka:

With regard to the finding of the Auditor General that the government's Arrive-CAN application mistakenly told 10,000 people that they needed to quarantine in June 2022: (a) what compensation or recourse has the government made available to these 10,000 people; and (b) which minister has taken responsibility for this mistake?

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Inter-governmental Affairs (Cybersecurity), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as this matter is the subject of ongoing litigation, the CBSA will refrain from commenting on it.

Question No. 2340—Mr. Alistair MacGregor:

With regard to federal investments in Canada's grocery sector since January 1, 2006: how much federal funding has been provided to (i) Loblaws, (ii) Metro, (iii) Walmart, (iv) Sobeys, (v) Costco, broken down by company, year, and type of funding?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to federal investments in Canada's grocery sector since January 1, 2006, no federal funding has been provided to Loblaws, Metro, Walmart, Sobeys or Costco.

Question No. 2344—Mr. Blake Richards:

With regard to properties owned and operated by government departments or agencies: what is the inventory of government buildings and properties (i) within the municipality of Crossfield, Alberta, (ii) within the municipality of Airdrie, Alberta, (iii) within the municipality of Cochrane, Alberta, (iv) within the municipality of Canmore, Alberta, (v) within the municipality of Banff, Alberta, (vi) within the electoral district of Banff-Airdrie that are not included in the aforementioned municipalities?

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the directory of federal real property, or DFRP, found at <https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/dfrp-rbif/introduction-eng.aspx>, is the central repository for basic information on the Government of Canada's real property holdings, both land and buildings. The inventory can be searched by various attributes found in the left-hand menu of the website, e.g., by municipality or by electoral district. All search results can be downloaded directly from the website.

Please note that federal custodian organizations are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of the information reported in the DFRP. They may also choose to restrict the publication of information about a property or building based on their internal security criteria.

Question No. 2354—Ms. Leslyn Lewis:

With regard to the government's funding of the \$34 million Sault Smart Grid: (a) what was the process by which the government made the decision to invest in this project; (b) what internal policy analyses were done on the project, and what were the results of those analyses; (c) were any privacy and security risks identified for this project; (d) if the answer to (c) is affirmative, what are those risks; (e) were any consultations done by the government before approving the project, and, if so, who was consulted and what feedback was received; (f) if the answer to (e) is negative, why not; (g) what conditions are attached to this funding; (h) how will the funding be disbursed; (i) are there reporting requirements as part of the funding agreement, and, if so, what are the details of those requirements; (j) is the government aware of any public consultations that Sault Ste. Marie has undertaken with the community on this project; (k) if the answer to (j) is affirmative, what concerns, if any, is the government aware of that were raised by community members, including (i) data privacy concerns, (ii) security concerns, (iii) cost concerns; (l) has the government done an internal analysis of the costs and benefits of automated meter information technology, and, if so, what are the results of that analysis; and (m) what efforts has the government made to ensure Sault Ste. Marie will (i) protect the system's security, (ii) ensure redundancy, (iii) protect privacy?

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Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada provided \$7.658 million in funding to the Sault smart grid project through the green infrastructure smart grid program. The program selected projects through a competitive request for proposals process. Applications were assessed by a committee of evaluators according to established evaluation criteria and recommended for funding consideration.

Responsibility for matters such as project regulatory approval, public consultation and assessment of privacy and security risks rests with the provincial electricity regulator, which in the case of this project is the Ontario Energy Board, or OEB. Any specific questions pertaining to consultation, privacy or security should be addressed to the OEB.

In response to parts (a) and (b) of the question, the evaluation of the project was completed by a technical review committee according to defined evaluation criteria such as alignment with program objectives, project risk and project impact. As one of the top-ranked projects resulting from the evaluation of proposals, the project was considered as part of an overall recommended portfolio for the technology types and regional balance aspects provided. The result of this portfolio analysis was that the project was recommended for funding by the program.

In response to parts (c) and (d) of the question, the legislative responsibility to assess privacy and security risks belongs to the provincial electricity regulator, in this case the OEB. The project application to the program referenced existing cybersecurity requirements and their considerations within the project, with no issues identified by reviewers.

With respect to part (e) of the question, project evaluations by the technical review committees, composed of subject matter experts internal to the federal government and external, and within the program were completed to determine a recommended portfolio of projects for approval. The feedback from the evaluation committee focused on the merits of the proposals measured against the established evaluation framework.

In response to part (f) of the question, utility projects require approval from provincial electricity regulators to move forward, in this case the OEB. These regulatory review processes are intensive, involve extensive consultation processes and require that sufficient engagement be demonstrated where applicable. NRCan approved funding up to 25% of total project costs, and disbursement of funds was contingent on the ability of the proponent to obtain the regulatory approval necessary to proceed. The program did not add additional consultation requirements.

Regarding part (g) of the question, funding conditions are specified in a standard contribution agreement between Canada and the proponent, in this case PUC Distribution Inc. Project CAs use general terms that are non-negotiable unless those standard provisions are a legal impediment to entering into the agreement. The CA outlines a variety of conditions, including but not limited to intellectual property, indemnity, default, reporting requirements, disposition of assets, conflict of interest, confidentiality, eligible expenditure period, total project costs and contribution percentages.

In response to part (h) of the question, funding was disbursed quarterly following review and approval of quarterly expense reports submitted by the proponent within the eligible expenditure period from September 5, 2018, to March 31, 2023. NRCan reimbursed funding only based on eligible expenses incurred within a given quarter. NRCan contributed a total combined amount of \$7.658 million towards the project.

In response to part (i) of the question, the contribution agreement specifies reporting requirements, including documentation for submitted claims, ongoing progress and technical reports, final financial and technical reports, post-completion revenue reporting, and a technical performance report for hold-back release.

With respect to parts (j) and (k) of the question, the project received approval from the OEB in April 2021 via a decision and order whereby the OEB determines sufficiency of engagement and the associated regulatory approval process provides opportunities for public intervention.

In response to part (l) of the question, the program did not complete its own internal analysis of the costs and benefits of advanced metering infrastructure. The costs and benefits of utility projects are specific to each utility system. Analysis of the costs and benefits is the responsibility of the regulator, in this case the OEB, which found that the project is in the public interest, delivering direct benefits to customers.

As for part (m) of the question, the legislative responsibility to ensure that a utility will protect system security, ensure redundancy and protect privacy belongs to the provincial electricity regulator, in this case the OEB. This performance is considered during provincial regulatory approval filings and requires regular demonstration of compliance. NRCan funding is contingent on receiving regulatory approval to proceed.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, furthermore, if a revised response to Questions No. 1589, originally tabled on September 18, 2023, Question No. 2002, originally tabled on January 29, 2024, Question No. 2261, originally tabled on March 20, 2024, and the government's responses to Questions Nos. 2279, 2281, 2284 to 2288, 2290, 2292, 2295, 2296, 2298, 2299, 2301 to 2303, 2305, 2309, 2312, 2314 to 2316, 2319 to 2321, 2324, 2327, 2331, 2333 to 2335, 2338, 2341 to 2343, 2345, 2346, 2351 to 2353, and 2355 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled in an electronic format immediately.

Routine Proceedings

[Text]

Question No. 1589—Ms. Andréanne Larouche:

With regard to the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP): (a) how many project applications were submitted in each province for the last three calls for community project proposals, broken down by constituency; (b) how many of the projects in (a) received a grant or contribution, broken down by constituency; (c) what calculation formulas are used to allocate grants and contributions by province when calls for project proposals are made; (d) according to the memorandum of understanding, what are the details of the collaboration between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec for the implementation of the NHSP; and (e) who sits on the selection committee established by the memorandum of understanding in (d)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2002—Mr. Michael Barrett:

With regard to government contracts signed with GCstrategies since November 4, 2015, and broken down by department, agency, Crown corporation, or other government entity: (a) what are the details of all such contracts, including, for each, the (i) date signed, (ii) value, (iii) start and end date of the work, (iv) detailed description of the goods or services, (v) details on how the contract was awarded (sole-sourced, competitive bid), (vi) titles of officials who approved or signed off on the contract; and (b) for each contract in (a), what is the current status, including if any aspects of the contract remain open, or if the contract has been completed and settled?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2261—Mr. Frank Caputo:

With regard to bonuses for executives at the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC), broken down by year since 2020: how many and what percentage of executives got bonuses (i) in total, (ii) broken down by province, (iii) broken down by correctional institution or other place of employment (i.e. CSC head offices)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2279—Mr. Alistair MacGregor:

With regard to the mandate and responsibilities of the Grocery Task Force, broken down by month since its inception: (a) what are the details of all engagements with governments and consumer advocacy stakeholders, including the (i) date of the engagement, (ii) purpose of the engagement, (iii) name of the organization or government being engaged, (iv) activities being coordinated; (b) what are the details of all engagements with external partners, experts, and industry representatives to undertake analysis, including the (i) date of the engagement, (ii) purpose of the engagement, (iii) partner, expert, or representative being engaged; (c) what work has been done with consumer groups to report findings to Canadians, including the (i) date that work was initiated, (ii) consumer group with which work was done, (iii) details of the findings that resulted in work, (iv) date on which those findings were reported to Canadians; and (d) what grocery-related information has the task force shared with Canadians to help them make informed marketplace choices?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2281—Mrs. Laila Goodridge:

With regard to vehicles owned by Parks Canada: (a) how many vehicles does Parks Canada own, in total and broken down by National Park, Historic Site or other location where the vehicle is based out of; and (b) of the vehicles in (a), how many are electric vehicles, in total and broken down by National Park, Historic Site or other location where the vehicle is based out of?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2284—Mr. Peter Julian:

With regard to federal childcare investments, since October 1, 2021: (a) how many new childcare spaces have been built as a result of federal funding, broken down by province or territory, and by year; and (b) how many early childhood educators have been trained or hired as a result of federal funding, broken down by province or territory, and by year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2285—Mr. Peter Julian:

With regard to federal investments to private sector pharmaceutical companies, since January 1, 2006: how much federal funding has been provided, broken down by company and by year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2286—Mr. Luc Berthold:

With regard to the Port of Montreal, broken down by year, since 2019: (a) how many stolen vehicles does the government estimate have arrived at or passed through the port; and (b) of the stolen vehicles in (a), how many did the (i) Port of Montreal, (ii) RCMP, (iii) Canada Border Services Agency, seize before they were transported aboard?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2287—Mr. Dean Allison:

With regard to the government's purchase of COVID-19 vaccines, beginning January 1, 2020: (a) which companies did the government purchase the vaccines from; (b) for each company in (a), (i) how many vaccines were purchased, in total and broken down by type of vaccine, (ii) how much was each company paid by the government for each order placed, (iii) where is each company headquartered, (iv) in what city and country did each company manufacture the vaccines; and (c) what is the breakdown of each vaccine purchased and how many were (i) distributed domestically, (ii) distributed internationally, broken down by country, (iii) not used or destroyed due to expiration or other factors?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2288—Mr. Dean Allison:

With regard to the government's purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, beginning January 1, 2020: (a) which companies did the government purchase PPE from; and (b) for each company in (a), (i) how much equipment was purchased, in total and broken down by type of PPE, (ii) how much was each company paid by the government for the equipment, (iii) where is each company headquartered, (iv) in what city and country did each company manufacture the PPE?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2290—Mr. Dean Allison:

With regard to the government's purchase of COVID-19 rapid tests, since January 1, 2020: (a) which specific companies did the government purchase these tests from; (b) how many tests did the government purchase from each company; (c) how much was each company paid by the government for the tests; (d) where is each of the companies in (a) headquartered; and (e) in what city and country did each company manufacture the COVID-19 rapid tests?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 2292—Mr. Brian Masse:**

With regard to the sales and transfers of military equipment and weapons from Canada to Israel and in light of the International Court of Justice determination that Israel is carrying out a plausible genocide in Gaza and has issued several orders to Israel: (a) what military equipment and weapons has the government of Canada sent or approved to be sent to Israel since October 7, 2023; (b) what military equipment and weapons has the government of Canada sent or approved to be sent to Israel since January 26, 2024; (c) what military equipment and weapons has the government of Canada rejected sending to Israel since October 7, 2023; (d) what military equipment and weapons has the government of Canada rejected sending to Israel since January 26, 2024; (e) what surveillance equipment has the government of Canada sent or approved to be sent to Israel since October 7, 2023; (f) what surveillance equipment has the government of Canada sent or approved to be sent to Israel since January 26, 2024; (g) what surveillance equipment has the government of Canada rejected sending to Israel since October 7, 2023; (h) what surveillance equipment has the government of Canada rejected sending to Israel since January 26, 2024; (i) what is the monetary value of the military equipment and weapons the government of Canada has sent to Israel since October 7, 2023; (j) what is the monetary value of the surveillance equipment the government of Canada has sent to Israel since October 7, 2023; (k) what is the monetary value of the surveillance equipment, military equipment and weapons the government of Canada sent to Israel in 2021, 2022, and 2023; (l) what surveillance equipment, military equipment and weapons the government of Canada sent to Israel in 2021, 2022, and 2023; (m) as a signatory to the Genocide Convention, has the government of Canada taken legal advice to comply with the orders that the International Court of Justice has issued to Israel and to ensure the government of Canada does not contravene them; and (n) what plan, if any, does the Government of Canada have to comply with the orders of the International Court of Justice?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2295—Ms. Leah Gazan:

With regard to Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, broken down by province and territory from its inception in 2019 to present: (a) how much of the funding allocated to the program has been committed to date, broken down by its four funding streams, the (i) Designated Communities stream, (ii) Rural and Remote Homelessness stream, (iii) Territorial Homelessness stream, (iv) Indigenous Homelessness stream; (b) how much of the allocated funding has been spent to date, broken down by its four funding streams, the (i) Designated Communities stream, (ii) Rural and Remote Homelessness stream, (iii) Territorial Homelessness stream, (iv) Indigenous Homelessness stream; (c) how many people have been recipients of programs or services associated with Reaching Home, broken down by (i) gender, (ii) status as Indigenous, (iii) those self-identified as Black or racialized, (iv) status as immigrant or refugee (v) those self-identified as Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, plus (2SLGBTQI+), (vi) those living with a disability, (vii) those living with a substance use disorder, (viii) those living with unmet mental health needs?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2296—Ms. Leah Gazan:

With regard to childcare workers spanning from 2017 to present, broken down by province and territory: (a) what was the total number of childcare workers, broken down by (i) self-identified gender, (ii) self-identified racial background, (iii) self-identified status as Indigenous, (iv) status as immigrant or refugee, (v) self-identified Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, plus (2SLGBTQI+), (vi) self-identified as living with a disability, (vii) resided in an urban region, (viii) resided in a Northern, rural, or remote region, (ix) income tax bracket, (x) education level; (b) what was the median income of childcare workers, broken down by (i) self-identified gender, (ii) self-identified racial background, (iii) self-identified status as Indigenous, (iv) status as immigrant or refugee, (v) self-identified 2SLGBTQI+, (vi) self-identified as living with a disability, (vii) resided in an urban region, (viii) resided in a Northern, rural, or remote region, (ix) education level; and (c) what job-related benefits were childcare workers entitled to, broken down by (i) self-identified gender, (ii) self-identified racial background, (iii) self-identified status as Indigenous, (iv) status as immigrant or refugee, (v) self-identified 2SLGBTQI+, (vi) self-identified as living with a disability, (vii) resided in an urban region, (viii) resided in a Northern, rural, or remote region, (ix) education level?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2298—Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:

With regard to the enactment of the Emergencies Act by the government in 2022: (a) what was the cost burden for the government, broken down by federal department and agency, including (i) actuarial costs, (ii) equipment costs, (iii) skilled labour costs (e.g. judges, police officers), (iv) other costs broken down by type; and (b) what is the total value of costs that were disbursed to other levels of government, broken down by (i) province, (ii) municipality?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2299—Mr. Ted Falk:

With regard to government advertising on social media to promote COVID-19 vaccines: (a) what was the amount spent on such social media advertising, in total, and broken down by year since 2020; and (b) what is the breakdown of (a) by type of spending (graphic design, celebrity endorsement fee, ad placement) and by social media platform?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2301—Mr. Ted Falk:

With regard to the government's requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic that federal public servants provide proof of vaccination: (a) what are the total expenditures on compensation, severance packages and settlements to employees who were impacted by the requirement, including, but not limited to, payments made to mediators, agents, lawyers, or for legal proceedings; (b) how many employees received payments mentioned in (a); and (c) what is the breakdown of (a) and (b) by reason for the payment and how the amount was arrived at (negotiated settlement, legal proceedings, etc.)?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2302—Mr. John Nater:

With regard to the government's rebranding of the carbon tax: (a) which consulting, polling or research firms is the government using services or data from, in relation to the rebranding; (b) what are the details of all contracts related to the rebranding, including, for each, the (i) date, (ii) value, (iii) vendor, (iv) description of goods or services, (v) manner in which the contract was awarded (sole-sourced or competitive bid); and (c) on what date did the government begin conducting research on the rebranding of its carbon tax?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2303—Mr. John Nater:

With regard to the government's claim that 97% of fuel used on farms is exempt from the carbon tax: (a) how did the government come up with that figure; and (b) what specific data was used, and what assumptions were made by the government in arriving at that figure?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2305—Ms. Laurel Collins:

With regard to the 2 Billion Trees Commitment, broken down by province or territory since its inception: (a) what is the total amount of funding allocated to the (i) cost-sharing agreements with provinces and territories, (ii) Private Lands stream, (iii) Urban Lands stream, (iv) Federal Lands stream, (v) distinctions based Indigenous stream; (b) for the funding identified in (a), what amount of funding has been delivered to provinces, territories, or organizations; and (c) what is the total amount of funding that is on hold or remains undelivered as part of this program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2309—Mr. Tom Kmiec:

With regard to the federal government's commitment to resettle 15,000 refugees in Canada following the renegotiation of the Safe Third Country Agreement: (a) what is the breakdown by country of origin; (b) what is the breakdown by country of citizenship; (c) what is the breakdown by demographics of the claimants by (i) age, (ii) sex or gender; and (d) how many claims were (i) accepted, (ii) refused, (iii) still awaiting a decision?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 2312—Mr. Dane Lloyd:**

With regard to the \$285 million committed over five years to the Wildfire Resilient Futures Initiative: how much of this commitment has been spent to date, in total, and broken down by specific investments?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2314—Mr. Scott Aitchison:

With regard to the Apartment Construction Loan Program and its precursor the Rental Construction Financing Initiative, broken down by year, by province or territory, and by type of end user (market housing developer, non-profit housing developer, municipality), between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2027-28: (a) how much funding has been allocated to the program; (b) how much funding has been committed; (c) how much funding has been transferred to the recipients; (d) how many units have been constructed or are expected to be constructed; and (e) how much has the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spent, or is it projected to spend, administering the program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2315—Mr. Scott Aitchison:

With regard to the Affordable Housing Fund, and its precursor, the National Housing Co-Investment Fund, broken down by year, by province or territory, and by type of end user (market housing developer, non-profit housing developer, municipality), between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2027-28: (a) how much funding has been allocated to the program; (b) how much funding has been committed; (c) how much funding has been transferred to the recipients; (d) how many units have been constructed or are expected to be constructed; and (e) how much has Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spent, or is it projected to spend, administering the program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2316—Mr. Scott Aitchison:

With regard to the Rapid Housing Initiative, including Rounds 1, 2, and 3, broken down by year, by province or territory, and by type of end user (market housing developer, non-profit housing developer, municipality), between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2027-28: (a) how much funding has been allocated to the program; (b) how much funding has been committed; (c) how much funding has been transferred to the recipients; (d) how many units have been constructed or are expected to be constructed; and (e) how much has the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spent, or is it projected to spend, administering the program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2319—Mr. Dan Albas:

With regard to the Housing Accelerator Fund, broken down by year, by province or territory, and by type of end user (market housing developer, non-profit housing developer, municipality), between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2027-28: (a) how much funding has been allocated to the program; (b) how much funding has been committed; (c) how much funding has been transferred to the recipients; (d) how many units have been constructed or are expected to be constructed; and (e) how much has the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spent, or is it projected to spend, administering the program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2320—Mr. Dan Albas:

With regard to the Federal Land Initiative, broken down by year, by province or territory, and by type of end user (market housing developer, non-profit housing developer, municipality), between fiscal years 2017-18 and 2027-28: (a) how much funding has been allocated to the program; (b) how much funding has been committed; (c) how much funding has been transferred to the recipients; (d) how many units have been constructed or are expected to be constructed; and (e) how much has the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation spent, or is it projected to spend, administering the program?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2321—Mr. Randy Hoback:

With regard to government funding for initiatives to alleviate homelessness, broken down by year for each of the last five years: (a) how much has been spent by the government, in total and broken down by province or territory and by major metropolitan area for each department or agency that provides such funding; (b) what are the details of all funding provided, including the (i) date, (ii) recipient, (iii)

location of the recipient, (iv) amount of funding, (v) type of funding, (vi) program under which the funding was provided, (vii) purpose of the funding or project description; (c) how much has the government spent to administer programs aimed at reducing homelessness; (d) how many homeless people, including all forms of homelessness, were there in Canada, broken down by province or territory and major metropolitan area; and (e) for each number in (d), (i) what is the yearly change in terms of both numbers and percentages, (ii) what is the total change over the past five years in terms of both numbers and percentages?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2324—Mr. Kelly McCauley:

With regard to the ArriveCAN application: (a) what was the cost of the update or release that resulted in the glitch in ArriveCAN that sent erroneous notifications instructing people arriving in Canada to quarantine, as reported by the CBC on July 22, 2022; and (b) what were the costs of any government-paid quarantines resulting from this glitch in ArriveCAN, in total and broken down by month, location, hotel, and type of cost?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2327—Mr. Gord Johns:

With regard to the electoral district of Courtenay—Alberni, broken down by fiscal year, since fiscal year 2005-06: what are all the federal infrastructure investments, including direct transfers to municipalities, regional district associations or First Nations, national parks, highways, etc.?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2331—Mr. Doug Shipley:

With regard to Correctional Service Canada (CSC), in total and broken down by year since 2016: (a) how many times has CSC overridden an inmate's security level in relation to the security level cut-off scores in the (i) Security Reclassification Scale, (ii) Security Reclassification Scale for Women, (iii) Security Reclassification Scale for Women - Version 2; (b) of the instances in (a), how many times was the level of custody overridden to be (i) lower than cut-off scores, (ii) higher than cut-off scores; (c) what is the breakdown of instances in (a) by original and new security level (e.g. minimum security to maximum security, maximum security to medium security, etc.); and (d) of the inmates who were classified as (i) dangerous offenders, (ii) high-profile offenders, (iii) multiple murderers, how many had their security level overridden to a lower classification?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2333—Mr. Terry Dowdall:

With regard to government funding allocated to initiatives to alleviate homelessness, broken down by year for the next five years: (a) how much has been allocated by the government, in total and broken down by province or territory, for each department or agency that will provide such funding; (b) what are the details of all funding allocated, including the (i) project name, (ii) amount, (iii) purpose of the funding, (iv) type of project to be funded, (v) locations where the funding will be spent; (c) how much is the government projected to spend to administer programs aimed at alleviating homelessness; (d) what are the government's projections on how many homeless people, including all forms of homelessness, will exist in Canada, broken down by province or territory and major metropolitan area; and (e) for each number in (d) that increases, what is the government's rationale for projecting an increase?

(Return tabled)

*Routine Proceedings***Question No. 2334—Mr. Damien C. Kurek:**

With regard to the government's use of data extraction tools capable of unlocking mobile phones, computers, or similar devices, since January 1, 2018, broken down by year and by department or agency: (a) how many times were such tools used with judicial authorization on individuals (i) employed by the department or agency, (ii) not employed by the department or agency; (b) how many times were such tools used without judicial authorization on individuals (i) employed by the department or agency, (ii) not employed by the department or agency; (c) for each time in (a), was the collected data kept or destroyed after it had been used; (d) for each time in (a) and (b), did the individual whose data was collected receive notification of the collection (i) before, (ii) after, their data was collected; and (e) were there any instances where, at any point, an individual whose data was collected was not informed, and if so, what is the description of each such incident and the rationale for not informing the individual?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2335—Mrs. Laila Goodridge:

With regard to travellers entering Canada, broken down by year since 2020: (a) how many travellers entered Canada, in total, and broken down by type of point of entry (air, road, marine); and (b) for each category in (a), how many and what percentage of travellers (i) submitted their declaration through the ArriveCAN application prior to arrival, (ii) arrived without using the ArriveCAN application?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2338—Mr. Jake Stewart:

With regard to Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) employees in the Human Resources and Corporate Services sectors, broken down by fiscal year from 2014-15 to 2023-24: (a) what was, or is, the total budget for each sector; (b) for Human Resources, what is the number of full time equivalents (FTE); (c) for each FTE in (b), what are their (i) roles, responsibilities, or job description, (ii) job title, including Treasury Board classification, (iii) associated salary range; (d) for Corporate Services, what is the number of FTEs; (e) for each FTE in (d), what are their (i) roles, responsibilities, or job description, (ii) job title, including Treasury Board classification, (iii) associated salary range; and (f) what is the average salary of all FTEs in each sector?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2341—Ms. Michelle Rempel Garner:

With regard to Polar Knowledge Canada and the Canadian High Arctic Research Station (CHARS), which Polar Knowledge Canada operates: (a) how many full time equivalent (FTE) positions have been vacated in each year since 2015, in total, and broken down by Treasury Board classification level (e.g. AS-04, EX-02, etc.); (b) how many FTEs have been hired in each year since 2015, broken down by Treasury Board classification level; (c) of the employees currently at Polar Knowledge Canada, how many and what percentage have been there longer than (i) one year, (ii) five years, (iii) 10 years; (d) how many complaints regarding workplace harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, reprisal for whistleblowing, assault or other matters have been made by former or current Polar Knowledge Canada staff or consultants, or others who interact with Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS, against Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS (i.e. their staff or the entities), in each year since 2015, broken down by (i) year, (ii) resolution status; (e) what are the total expenditures on payouts or settlements made to former or current staff or consultants, or others who interact with Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS, related to complaints made regarding workplace harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, reprisal for whistleblowing, assault or other matters against Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS (i.e. their staff or the entities); (f) how much in severance or other types of payouts has been paid to departing Polar Knowledge Canada and CHARS staff, broken down by year, since 2015; (g) what are the expenditures in legal fees spent by Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS in relation to complaints made regarding harassment, bullying, racism, sexism, reprisal for whistleblowing, assault or other matters, broken down by year, since 2015; (h) since 2015, have any requests been made to increase funding related to legal fees beyond the original annual budgeted amount by either Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS, and, if so, what are the details of any such requests, including, for each, (i) the date, (ii) who made the request, (iii) the outcome; (i) what is the total number of lawsuits regarding harassment, negligence, unfulfilled contracts or wrongful dismissal that were filed against Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS, broken down by year; (j) what are the details of all contracts issued since 2015, including, for each, the (i) vendor, (ii) vendor address, (iii) date, (iv) total dollar value of the contract, (v) scope and deliverables of the contract, (vi) manner in which the contract was awarded (i.e. sole-sourced, competitive bid); (k) how many FTE positions are or have been filled by persons that

are family members or close friends of existing employees at Polar Knowledge Canada or CHARS; (l) what are the details of Polar Knowledge Canada's or CHARS' nepotism policy in their hiring policies from 2015 to the present, including the details of any substantive changes that have been made and the year any such changes were made; (m) what are the details of Polar Knowledge Canada's and CHARS' contract procurement processes and policies from 2015 to the present, including the details of any substantive changes that have been made and the year any such changes were made; (n) what are the details of Polar Knowledge Canada's and CHARS' workplace harassment policies, including prevention policies, and the details of any substantive changes that have been made and the year any such changes were made; (o) what are the details of Polar Knowledge Canada's and CHARS' current organizational charts, including all permanent full- and part-time positions, and any contractors involved in day-to-day operations, as well as associated Treasury Board classification levels; (p) what were the results of the aggregated data from the 2022 Public Service Employee Survey for Polar Knowledge Canada, broken down by survey question posed to employees (e.g. My Job, My Work Unit, My Immediate Supervisor, Senior Management, My Organization (Department or Agency), Mobility and Retention, Harassment, Discrimination, Stress and Well-Being, Duty to Accommodate, Compensation, Hybrid Work, General Information, etc); and (q) how many grants, contributions or contracts were flagged by Polar Knowledge Canada staff or members of its Board of Directors for potential conflicts of interests, broken down by year and value?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2342—Mr. Eric Duncan:

With regard to the government's decision to rebrand the carbon tax incentive payment to Canada's carbon rebate: what are the projected costs associated with the rebranding, including the implementation costs and any costs incurred in the development process of the new name, broken down by type of expense?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2343—Ms. Jenny Kwan:

With regard to federal housing investments to build, repair, or renovate student housing since January 1, 2006: how many dollars of federal funding have been invested, broken down by (i) province or territory and city, (ii) funding type, (iii) year, (iv) number of units supported?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2345—Mr. Blake Richards:

With regard to records from Veterans Affairs Canada home care programs: (a) how many veterans accessed home care programs each year since 2016, in total, and broken down by province or territory; and (b) how many veterans living abroad accessed home care programs each year since 2016, in total, and broken down by country?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2346—Mr. Blake Richards:

With regard to Canada's 2021 census and information about veterans held by the RCMP and Canadian Armed Forces: (a) how many veterans live in each province and territory; (b) what is the breakdown of (a) by federal electoral district; (c) how many veterans currently reside outside of Canada, in total, and broken down by country; and (d) how many veterans have been released from the RCMP or Canadian Armed Forces in the last 10 years, broken down by year?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2351—Mr. Damien C. Kurek:

With regard to contracts signed by the government with GC Strategies since November 4, 2015, broken down by type of government entity (i.e. department, agency, Crown corporation, other government entity): (a) what is the total value of the contracts; (b) what are the details of each contract, including the (i) date, (ii) vendor, (iii) value, (iv) description of the good or services provided, (v) manner in which the contract was awarded (i.e. sole-sourced, competitive bid); and (c) for each contract, did the government do a value-for-money assessment, and, if so, what was the result?

(Return tabled)

*Privilege***Question No. 2352—Ms. Leslyn Lewis:**

With regard to the Canada Infrastructure Bank's expenditures since 2017, incurred on projects that were not completed, indefinitely delayed, or otherwise abandoned, including those that never reached the Financial Close stage: (a) for each project, what is the breakdown of expenditures by (i) project name and project partners, (ii) category and type of expenditure; (b) what are the details of all contracts associated with expenditures in (a), broken down by project, and including, for each, the (i) amount, (ii) vendor, (iii) date and duration, (iv) description of the goods or services provided, (v) manner in which the contract was awarded (sole-sourced, competitive bid); and (c) for each contract in (b) that involved consulting or providing advice, including legal, financial, technical, and other advice, (i) what were the topics or questions which required consultation, (ii) what specific goals or objectives were related to the contract, (iii) were the goals or objectives met?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2353—Ms. Leslyn Lewis:

With regard to bonuses paid out at the Canada Infrastructure Bank in the 2022-23 fiscal year: (a) what was the total amount paid out in bonuses; (b) how many and what percentage of officials (i) at or above the executive (EX) level, or equivalent, (ii) below the EX level, or equivalent, received bonuses; and (c) what is the breakdown of how much money was paid out in (a) to officials at or above the EX level versus officials below the EX level?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 2355—Ms. Leslyn Lewis:

With regard to the government's housing policies and Immigration Levels Plan for 2024-2026: (a) what analyses has the government done to estimate the housing infrastructure required to meet its immigration targets; (b) what are the results of those analyses; (c) what is the projected gap in housing supply vis-à-vis the number of immigrants the government will be welcoming at each phase of its 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan; (d) according to the government's own data and estimates, how many permanent and temporary immigrants are currently without affordable housing; and (e) what are the projected impacts of immigration levels on housing affordability going forward?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

• (1535)

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not note that we are experiencing the eclipse right now. We even saw a dimming of the light in the House of Commons. Unfortunately, that will not be the biggest cover-up we talk about today.

It will also my great honour and privilege to split my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable. We will be talking about the privilege motion, which is the subject of debate today.

I will start by going through some of the facts, specifically quoting some of the Auditor General's report, of the scurrilous accusations in here, which are really quite disturbing, and certainly there is more to come. It will give us the context. I will then discuss the importance of parliamentary supremacy and the need for this body to get the information it requires to fulfill its democratic duties.

I will start by reading from paragraph 1.18 in the AG's report on the ArriveCAN application. It says:

We found that financial records were not well maintained by the Canada Border Services Agency. We were unable to determine a precise cost for the ArriveCAN application because of poor documentation and weak controls at the Canada Border Services Agency. We estimated that the application cost approximately \$59.5 million.

For the rest of the speech, as a shorthand, I will refer to that amount as \$60 million. That \$60 million is a large amount of money. This was for a contract that was originally set to cost somewhere between \$80,000 to \$160,000, but it ballooned up to \$60 million.

Just as disturbing as a \$60-million price tag is the fact that the Auditor General, who has an incredible team with probably hundreds of years of service combined, when trying to investigate and fact-find, was unable to get through the poor record-keeping and terrible lack of detail at the Canada Border Services Agency. This was despite the AG's incredible abilities.

I believe that the Auditor General, in subsequent testimony, even said that she had never seen bookkeeping this bad in her entire career, and this is after many years of being a professional auditor. The AG could not even get to what the exact number was, but she estimated it as \$60 million. It could be more, but we do not know that at this point.

I will go further into the report, to paragraph 1.39, where it says:

The Canada Border Services Agency informed us that GC Strategies was awarded the contract on the basis of a proposal that it submitted. Agency officials told us that they had discussions with 3 potential contractors about submitting a proposal to develop the ArriveCAN application. We found that the agency received a proposal from 1 of the 3 potential contractors, but this proposal was not from GC Strategies. There was no evidence that the agency considered a proposal or any similar document from GC Strategies for this non-competitive contract.

The Canada Border Services Agency awarded a contract on a non-existent proposal. CBSA initially said there were three different proposals put out there, but the Auditor General only found one of those proposals, and it was not from the eventual winner of this non-competitive process. As far as I know, that proposal still has not been tracked down.

It is amazing that there would be a \$60-million contract awarded on a missing, or non-existent, proposal. Once again, this is incredibly troublesome. We have heard from all members in the House that we are shocked. We share that almost unanimously. How could it happen that a \$60-million proposal would simply disappear?

• (1540)

The public service may face criticism on a variety of issues, but one thing I rarely ever hear is that it has a lack of record-keeping or a lack of data. The Auditor General said that she has never seen bookkeeping that bad.

We move on to continue the discussion of GC Strategies. I believe it has been reported that it is actually called the Government of Canada Strategies, which says a lot on its own.

We will go to 1.58 of the report:

Some of the requirements or eligibility criteria were extremely narrow, which likely prevented competition. For example, bidders were required to have been awarded 3 informatic contracts with the Government of Canada [within] the last 18 months with a [greater] value...[of] \$10 million.

I don't think there would be too many of those. The report continues:

We also found that the reasonableness of per diem rates in the bid was insufficiently assessed. Per diem rates were assessed on the basis of the 3 non-competitive contracts, which the Canada Border Services Agency...issued during the pandemic. In our opinion, the agency should not have used these prior non-competitive contracts as a reference point.

It is just so odd. How does one define the request proposal process so narrowly that there is a handful, or even just one firm, that could possibly apply for this position? The amount of suspicion that comes from this is incredible.

I will just say that again: One of the conditions for the bid for the ArriveCAN app was that a company had “been awarded 3 informatic contracts with the Government of Canada [over] the last 18 months with a value greater than \$10 million.” It certainly appears to me, just a simple guy from Orono, Ontario, that in fact it was almost targeted directly at one particular firm. In this case, it was GC Strategies.

We heard the testimony of Mr. Firth. I imagine I was one of tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Canadians who tuned in to some of that committee coverage at the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, or OGGO. I could not believe this gentlemen's audacity in which he talked. To be candid, he acted as if this was some type of unfairness that had been done to him. The reality is that we have allegation after allegation and have \$60 million spent without, yet, a really solid explanation. We have firms being paid \$1,000 or more a day, an hour. This has caused incredible upset for Canadians struggling to get by and seeing record-high usage of food banks. They want answers.

That brings me back where I want to end, which is at the very heart of democracy. What separates this country from many others are our democratic principles and our commitment to the parliamentary Westminster system. It is this Parliament that guarantees the rights and freedoms of Canadians from coast to coast.

When we say “privilege,” I think it is miscast. It is not my privilege, and it is not any of the members of Parliament's privilege; it is

Privilege

Canadians' privilege. It is due to the years of sacrifice throughout our history, through wars and otherwise, when we stood up for freedom and democracy, which has given us the ability to voice our opinions. I, and I imagine all MPs, still hear that sometimes the people of this great land are concerned and frustrated with their lack of a voice and their lack of power. I certainly go to work every day to act for them and to give them a voice, and Canadians want to know what happened to their \$60 million for this app.

• (1545)

How did a two-person firm make \$20 million? How did they possibly justify this? Given the context of the AG saying that this is the worst record-keeping she has ever seen in her many-year history, Canadians deserve answers. That is what we are asking for.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, the government is very open. It wants to see, and looks forward to, Mr. Firth being at the bar. The issues are going to be how we have questions and answers, and how we heighten the sense of accountability.

However, I am interested in a comment. The member might not necessarily be aware of this, but when his leader was the Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, there was a \$400-million scandal with ETS. It was a procurement scandal. If the leader of the Conservative Party had done his job back then and had not been successful in the cover-up, we might have seen some rules changed that could have prevented this. Is that a fair comment, on my part?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I have two children, an eight-year-old and a 10-year-old. When, occasionally, they do something wrong, one of them will immediately point to the other one when they are guilty. It is amazing. It is called “whataboutism”. That is the base level of the Liberal politics. They will deflect, deny and do anything not to take responsibility. The arrive scam is the Liberal government's fault, and we are going to get answers.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, my friend down the way and I find common cause in this motion that is before us.

Part of this motion is about the testimony of GC Strategies at committee, which was unsatisfactory and not consistent with the rules of parliamentary privilege. However, I think there is a larger issue at play here, which is that unless Parliament asserts its specific privileges, we risk getting to a place where no witnesses would have to come to committee to provide responses to our answers.

Privilege

We see this in other cases as well. I came out of a committee meeting today where witnesses were less than forthcoming with information about government programs and the fate of Canada Post. Does the member share my concern that unless the supremacy of Parliament is re-established, the ability of committees to get answers for the Canadians we represent will continue to be undermined?

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I agree.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, to the members for Northumberland—Peterborough South and for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, we really are at one of those rare moments I love in this place, when we are in violent agreement. We should be seeing witnesses respect Parliament and answer questions clearly. This may veer from where the member for Northumberland—Peterborough South is coming, but it is pretty clear to me that something very wrong has happened within the functionality of the civil service that this could happen at all. I do not see any long figures of partisan engagement. What I see is base incompetence and a chance to make a quick buck, which should never, ever be allowed in the culture of our civil service. Bring it on, and let us get Mr. Firth in here.

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I know the vast majority of our civil servants are working their tails off to do what they can to make Canada a better country. This is a big challenge, though. As they say, the fish rots from the head down. We really need to get to the bottom of this to make sure we do not have any more issues such as this.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Madam speaker, we are in a situation where a witness refused to answer several questions put to him a number of times in committee. The main reason for this was the fear that what he said could be held against him, because some members of the committee and the media were leaking what was said in committee to the newspapers. This could be a flaw with respect to witnesses' privileges.

To make sure that this does not ever happen again, might it be important to change some of our operating rules to ensure that, even if the testimony is leaked to the traditional or social media, it remains protected?

• (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Philip Lawrence: Madam Speaker, I am open to any discussions that might make the process better, but the reality is that a lot of this should be public. Canadian taxpayers have the right to know where their millions of dollars are going. If it is not essential to the national security or to other related issues to keep their privacy, the Canadian public should know what is going on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, today we are discussing an important issue. The Speaker recognized that there might have been a breach of parliamentary privilege stemming from a situation that has been discussed at length in the media. Unfortunately, I find that Quebeckers are not talking about it enough. That will come, however, since, given the extent of the situation surrounding the Prime Minister's ArriveCAN

scandal, we are now resorting to taking historic action in the House: summoning a witness to the bar.

For the people watching, I would like to clarify that “the bar” is a golden bar located at the entrance to the House of Commons. Only members of Parliament and pages can be admitted to the House. Exceptionally, someone will be permitted to come to the bar to testify and answer for their actions. The actions for which the witness is criticized are not having answered questions put to him by a committee, lying when questioned by parliamentarians, and not having taken the study of the ArriveCAN scandal undertaken by the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates seriously.

The motion is clear. Kristian Firth, one of the two owners, managers and employees of GC Strategies, is being asked to appear to receive an admonishment from the Speaker. This is what is called getting a slap on the wrist from the Speaker. Mr. Firth is being asked to answer questions asked of him and appearing in the 17th report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates. He is also being asked to answer additional questions that might arise from the questions he is asked here in the House. This is important. The credibility of our parliamentary system depends on it.

The purpose of parliamentary committees is to fuel debates in the House. They are intended to allow members to delve further into an issue, to question people and situations so that we have all the information we need to make the right decisions and pass laws. That is why all of the bills introduced in the House must go through the committee process. The people who table bills must come answer questions in committee. Witnesses may be invited to help us make the right decisions. That helps both the government and the opposition parties.

It is also an opportunity to hold the government to account for its actions. Things happen sometimes, or reports get published like the one from the Auditor General, that reveal the chaos around management of the ArriveCAN application. To date, this application, which should have cost \$80,000, has cost \$60 million. The exact amount is not yet known. Not even the Auditor General could pinpoint it. Of these \$60 million, \$20 million went to a company that acted as a go-between. This company was contracted to develop a computer application, but has no IT knowledge. All it knows is how LinkedIn works, and how to connect people so the government can implement its contracts. It is entirely unreasonable to pay millions of taxpayer dollars to companies that serve as fronts or intermediaries and do no work.

Consequently, parliamentarians wanted to find out more. In committee, they questioned the firm GC Strategies. By the way, “GC Strategies” is the name of a private company. It is no surprise that the name starts with the letters “GC”, since the company wants to imply that it has special ties with the Government of Canada, as in “Government of Canada Strategies”. The company demonstrated its lack of rigour in the work it did. Furthermore, it truly sought to squeeze this government for as much as possible.

Witnesses who appeared before the committee did not want to answer questions. They took the summons to appear before the parliamentary committee with a grain of salt, thinking it was no big deal, that they could refuse to answer questions, and nothing would come of it, as has too often happened in the past. Unfortunately, the example comes from on high. We saw this in other parliamentary committees when, in the SNC-Lavalin affair, the Minister of Justice was subjected to political pressure to make a decision and could not get answers either from the public servants involved or from the Prime Minister and his team.

• (1555)

He hid behind cabinet confidence to avoid speaking the truth and avoid suffering the consequences. The result is that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner submitted a report. He found the Prime Minister guilty of a breach of ethics. What was the consequence for the Prime Minister? He said he took full responsibility for his actions and would ensure that it never happened again.

It is therefore not surprising that, subsequently, witnesses appear at a parliamentary committee believing it is not a big deal if they do not answer questions, for absolutely nothing will happen. This time, however, we said no. All the parties said no, enough is enough, people have to answer. We should proceed this way so witnesses give the whole truth when they testify and understand the importance of their testimony before a committee, not only for parliamentarians, but also for Canadians.

I myself have witnessed certain situations in the ArriveCAN file. I asked one of the officials to name the company that recommended GC Strategies, and had to ask three questions before the officials finally agreed to name the company GC Strategies. That is completely unacceptable. It is time that the House of Commons, and we all, as parliamentarians, put a stop to this to make sure these kind of things do not happen again.

I want to give a few examples so that people understand the situation clearly. Here is an example of a question Mr. Firth was asked that he did not want to answer. On GC Strategies' website, there is a statement that says, “GCstrategies listen and try to find solutions to my problems vs. selling me a solution to a problem I've never had.” This quote is attributed to a senior executive in the Government of Canada. A senior executive said that about GC Strategies. Mr. Firth was asked who this senior executive was who had so much respect for his company. Believe it or not, Mr. Firth refused to answer that simple question.

However the quote was on the homepage of their website, which, unfortunately, we can no longer find. A search for gcstrategies.ca now leads to a GoDaddy site. The site is no more. Fortunately we have screenshots, which I have in my hands right now, although I cannot show them.

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Here is another example. GC Strategies quoted an assistant deputy minister. That is something. That is in the higher echelons of government. Apparently, the assistant deputy minister said that the company took the time to understand their client's business and vision, and so on. It was a glowing comment praising GC Strategies. Mr. Firth was asked who was that voluble assistant deputy minister who was so full of praise and goodwill towards his company. Mr. Firth refused to answer the parliamentarians. Why do we need to know that? Because we need to update the entire procedure, solve the existing problem that allows companies like GC Strategies to develop an app that should cost \$80,000 but ends up costing taxpayers \$60 million. The owners of the company developed the app out of their basement with no IT knowledge whatsoever.

My colleague, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, who is the opposition critic on ethics, was very clear. He has a list of some of the lies told by Mr. Firth. In particular, Mr. Firth was asked whether he had ever lied to a parliamentary committee. He refused to answer. He did not want to lie twice. He was asked which public office holders he met with outside government offices. He refused to answer. That is important, because we need to know who this company's connections are to find out how it managed to obtain so many contracts when it has so few employees. We need answers to these questions.

Mr. Firth was asked a simple question. The member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan asked Mr. Firth how many hours he spent working on sending LinkedIn invitations. That is not a difficult question. He could have said one, two, three hours. He refused to answer the question.

This is an extraordinary situation that demands an extraordinary response. For too long now, witnesses appearing before parliamentary committees have ceased taking the work we do in the House seriously. With the multitude of Liberal scandals we are currently dealing with, witnesses need to know that there are consequences to not telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in a parliamentary committee. That is why I support this motion to call Mr. Firth to testify at the bar.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate a number of the comments that the member has made. What comes to my mind is the fact that we have an individual about which everyone is saying the same thing: We want this individual to come before the committee.

For me, it is about trying to take it to the next step. We have not really experienced this for over 100 years. We want to ensure that there is a very strong, credible aspect to it.

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Could the member give some indication, from his perspective, of how he sees the interaction taking place when we have someone called to the bar in a question and answer situation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, being myself a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, I can tell you that we all tried in good faith to hold a meeting last week to discuss the terms and conditions of the appearance. We wanted to organize a meeting without forcing anyone, based on good faith on both sides.

Unfortunately, the Liberal chair of the committee refused to call a meeting so we could analyze the process. If we now have to let the House leaders make the decision, it is because the Liberals did not want us to forge ahead and settle the matter in committee as we should have, with the consent of all parties in the House.

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member and I agree on much when it comes to this privilege motion.

Today I received a strange email sent directly to my parliamentary email from the individual in question, in which he apologized and then reiterated all the statements that he has made, laying out why he was not in the wrong.

Did my colleague receive such an email, and does he feel that the apology should somehow replace the actions in the motion we are debating today? Having provided this non-apology by email to some members of Parliament, should he somehow be off the hook in terms of appearing at the bar and explaining to the House why he was so willing to ignore the parliamentary privileges of this place?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, it is too little, too late. He gets caught. He apologizes. It is the second time he has done it.

No, he should appear at the bar of the House of Commons to answer for his lies and why he did not tell the whole truth and only the truth to parliamentarians.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, in terms of one of the contracts that was signed with GC Strategies, GC Strategies actually designed the parameters of the contract and then got the contract later on.

Was my hon. colleague aware of that, and could he explain it a little?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, this time, I will answer the question in French, because it is a little more technical in nature.

That is precisely where the problem lies. We need to understand how this could have happened. How is it that a company was asked to define the terms of a contract that it itself was awarded by the Liberal government? How could we have allowed this to happen in our system? I sincerely think that the reason is the laxness we have seen on the part of the Liberal government in the past eight years when it comes to the various scandals it has faced.

People think they do not have to be afraid and can say whatever they want in committee because there are no consequences. It is

time that we put an end to that. To ensure that we can shed light on these situations and on all the other scandals that come out day after day and week after week, we need to adopt the motion of privilege to send a clear message to witnesses that they should not play games with the House of Commons or with Canadians.

• (1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to stand on behalf of the good people of Skeena—Bulkley Valley and address the motion before us today. Before I begin, I would like to share that I will be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore, although I expect that both his remarks and mine will be eclipsed by certain events happening outside the chamber at this moment.

However, the motion in front of us that we are debating today, as everyone knows, is not a joking matter. This is a very serious matter indeed. When we come up against matters of parliamentary procedure, a lot of these subjects appear somewhat obscure to the people we represent. Goodness forbid if any of them are watching on CPAC right now, when larger celestial events are happening outside, but if they were, I think they would find this topic of parliamentary privilege to be a bit of an obscure one.

Therefore, instead of getting into the weeds and dealing with some of the precedent around this, I want to speak more directly to why this matters to people who are asking questions. They are watching the news and seeing reports of the ArriveCAN scandal and the troubling revelations around that, and they want answers. This motion today is about getting those answers. Those of us honoured to sit in this place have a sacred responsibility to get answers on behalf of Canadians; really, that is at the heart of what we are talking about today.

Of course, we cannot separate this from the larger issue, which is how we ended up with this app costing \$60 million. If members read the Auditor General's report and the report of the procurement ombudsman, they would see that the findings in those reports are extremely troubling. The Auditor General found that the people of Canada overpaid for this product. They paid too much, and they did not get the product that they might have had if the process had been better. People deserved value, but they did not get it.

The procurement ombudsman found serious irregularities in the procurement process that people should be concerned about. People deserve fairness. Canadians deserve fairness, but what we saw was a procurement process that was profoundly unfair. I know that my Conservative colleagues have been calling this the “arrive scam app”; it is clever, it rhymes and all that. However, it is really more of a racket; if we look at the company at the heart of these allegations, GC Strategies, we see this two-person IT recruiting company that has found a way to put itself at the centre of so much government procurement in Ottawa and to funnel these lucrative contracts through its little shop, charge an exorbitant commission of 15% to 30% and then have other people do the actual work and deliver the product. That is good work, if one can find it, I suppose, but the company has enriched itself to the tune of millions of dollars. What have the Canadian people gotten? The people got an app that, in some cases, did not work, that the Auditor General has said we paid too much for and that could have been done for a fraction of the cost.

Among the issues that were raised by the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman, there is one that is really the most egregious thing. I have been following this since I joined the government operations committee. One of the most egregious revelations was that the GC Strategies company and its principal, Kristian Firth, were involved in writing the criteria for the contract that the company then won. As the procurement ombudsman found, the company wrote those criteria in such a way that, really, only it could be the winner of the contract at the end. It is as if I, as a member of Parliament, helped write a contract for someone who was five feet, nine inches on a good day, if I stand up straight; had brown hair; wore blue suits; and lived in Smithers, British Columbia. Then, at the end of the day, surprise, surprise, Madam Speaker, guess who got the contract. It is the person who wrote the criteria, which were custom fit for their situation. I am making light of it, but that is essentially what is in these reports.

• (1610)

I think, to the people watching back home, that is a profoundly unfair process. What the people of Canada expect is a competitive procurement process where entrepreneurs who hang their shingle out there and do the hard work of putting together proposals, innovating and coming up with new products and services have a fighting chance to get government work. What we have seen here is that the deck is stacked against people like that. It is stacked because certain insiders have found a way to enrich themselves and to ensure that government contracts flow through them.

I think that is wrong, and while it is not the matter that is before us today, it is related to it because the individual whom this motion seeks to call to the bar, which would be an unprecedented and historic event if it takes place, is at the heart of the ArriveCAN issue. I was at the committee when Mr. Firth appeared, and I agree with what has been said in this place about his testimony: He was evasive and prevaricating. As has also been mentioned, he was not the first witness to act like that in front of a parliamentary committee, and I think that is something that should concern all of us.

The gravity of the allegations, the amount of money that is involved and the implications for the larger issue of government procurement make this situation particularly worrisome, and that is

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why my colleagues and certainly our party are so intent and serious about getting the answers that Canadians deserve.

With respect to Mr. Firth's prevarications and refusal to answer questions, one of the questions the committee had was about his conversations and communications around the writing of the criteria for the contracts that his firm eventually won. At the committee hearings, he essentially said he understood that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was now involved and so he would not answer the questions. I assume it was because he did not want to somehow jeopardize any future investigation by the RCMP that might involve himself, but of course that is not how the system works.

As everyone in this place knows, Parliament is supreme in its ability to seek answers on behalf of Canadians. Witnesses cannot come before a committee and say they are worried they are going to perjure themselves or place themselves in some type of legal jeopardy by answering the questions. That is not a valid excuse. If Parliament wants answers to questions, Parliament gets the answers to the questions. What we see in the motion before us is one of our only options of recourse in a case where a witness refuses to answer the questions of committee.

Mr. Firth said, “I've had a chance to speak with my lawyer, and I'm sticking to my line with regard to the fact this is under investigation by the RCMP; therefore, I cannot interfere with that.” There are several issues with that statement. First of all, the RCMP had not contacted Mr. Firth. He had heard in the media and from members of Parliament that the RCMP was somehow involved, but he had yet to become a subject of the investigation. Even if he had, none of that is an excuse for not answering the questions of Parliament, which remains supreme under the practices and traditions of parliamentary privilege. None of this really stacks up.

As I mentioned in a previous question, I did receive an odd email directly from the individual in question, in which he apologized and then went on to provide all of the same excuses for his behaviour at committee that we have already heard. I do think it is right and appropriate that he be called before the House to answer the questions of Parliament and to explain how this all came to be, how the Canadian people ended up paying for an app that cost \$60 million, when the Auditor General has found that it could have been done for a fraction of that. These are some really egregious situations around government procurement, irregularities and alleged misconduct. I mentioned the two investigations that have resulted in reports. CBSA is conducting its own internal report.

I will return to why Canadians should care about all of this. They should care because they deserve fairness, value and a Parliament that is able to get answers on their behalf. That is what the motion is about. I will be supporting it, as will my colleagues. I hope it passes.

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• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate many of the comments the member has put on the record. I, for one, not only expect that Canadians would get accountability; it should be a given they will get accountability. Whatever government happens to be in place, of whatever political stripe, has an obligation to look for that accountability.

Part of the concern I have is that we need to take a look at the bigger picture regarding the procurement process. One of the reasons it is important that we maintain the integrity of the system is so we ensure that we do not allow corruption to infiltrate it. That way, we can ensure that Canadians are all being given a fair opportunity and can have confidence in the system. That is the reason why I think that, in a situation like this, having the individual come to the bar is of great benefit.

I wonder whether the member can provide his thoughts on that aspect.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I agree that is why we should call the individual before the bar. I do not think that will get us all of the answers we need in order to get to the bottom of the irregularities, alleged misconduct, possible fraud and worse when it comes to the ArriveCAN app.

I would add that it is one thing to question the contractors who enrich themselves, but another thing to figure out how the problem was allowed to get this bad and how far this problem goes within government procurement. Of course, irregularities and problems with government procurement land at the feet of the minister responsible for the department that procures the contracts and the minister who is responsible for procurement more generally. It happened on the current government's watch. Therefore some, probably most, of the responsibility for what appears in the Auditor General's report should fall at its feet, and it should be accountable for it.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, on the question of the individual's appearing before the bar, maybe some people are watching committees, and maybe some of the media are paying attention, but what would the consequences be for a person appearing at the bar in the House of Commons, where the national media pays attention to what is said more than it might at committee, or from the larger audience who may be viewing this? What would the repercussions be for an appearance that may be different than at committee?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I think it is a fair question. For most Canadians who are not familiar with the fact that we have a brass bar in the chamber, and who do not understand this somewhat archaic and historical tradition of Parliament, it may not seem like an effective way to set things right, but it is the way we operate. It is within our procedures and practices as an institution, and I think it is our responsibility to use every resource we have available to get the answers.

I would hope the individual in question has some modicum of respect for this institution, because after all, this is the institution by which we govern this amazing country of ours. As a Canadian, I would hope that his respect for this institution would outweigh his

desire to protect his own financial interests or reputation when it comes to his particular business. That is why I hope we get straight answers from him.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech, which was fascinating, accurate and straight to the point.

The people in my riding of Trois-Rivières know that I used to work in ethics, so they often ask me questions about this, about what happened with ArriveCAN. People wonder how that could happen, how people can come to committee and give half answers, evasive answers and sometimes even false answers. We are debating a motion that would compel the person in question to come tell his story before Parliament.

In these times where people are losing faith in our institutions, are we also seeing the decline of decency in society?

[*English*]

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Madam Speaker, I think we are seeing an erosion of decency in society, and I think that erosion of decency also undermines our institutions. In calling the individual to the bar, I think we, as parliamentarians, should also reflect on how we uphold the integrity of this place. Certainly in the five years that I have been here, I have seen plenty of behaviour that does not uphold and strengthen Canadians' trust in Parliament, and that should be of grave concern to us all.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the members opposite who have deliberated over this very issue. The issue of integrity is at the crux of what we are talking about today. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the motion put before the House. I share the disappointment and frustrations expressed by parliamentarians and Canadians with respect to the allegations of wrongdoing in certain federal contracting processes.

Protecting the integrity of federal procurement processes, alongside strengthening the management of government operations, is indeed a top priority for us. We support the many studies and investigations under way, including the committee work that has led to the privilege motion we are debating today. Canadians deserve to know how the series of contracts fell into place and what is being done to prevent future wrongdoing. To fully understand what has happened, and thereby take effective steps not to repeat it, we must allow for all investigations to proceed free from political disruption.

The motion before us is serious indeed. It goes to the heart of our work as parliamentarians. We represent the people of Canada, and in our service to them we seek honest, expert answers to pressing questions, often at committee. We summon witnesses to committee to provide factual testimony to assist in our work. We accept that not all questions may be answered on the spot, and so we allow for responses in due course.

We do not accept the refusal of witnesses to respond. However, for the record, as already stated by my hon. colleague, Mr. Firth has refuted this in his recent correspondence on April 8, today, to the Chair and to members of Parliaments.

I have to say that the ArriveCAN issue has indeed raised many questions, most of which can be answered by only a few people. All parliamentarians are concerned about the issue, and certainly we all want to hear the facts. Truthful, timely testimony is needed. If we are to improve our procurement processes and safeguard them against wrongdoing, we must take proper steps.

What we are dealing with is a complex system in place. Hard-working public servants exist to ensure that government contracts move forward properly and bring clear benefits to Canadians. In fact, the contractors in question had been doing business with the previous Conservative government, and charges were laid for bid-rigging at the time when the Conservative government was in power, with some of these very procurement processes. We must seek to ensure that federal procurements are transparent and that they do, indeed, hold value for taxpayers.

Millions of Canadians are still using the app to this very day. In fact, I had the privilege of using it over the weekend, but in the case of the ArriveCAN contract awarded to GC Strategies, it is clear that the system did not function properly. The government has already taken swift and decisive action to improve the procurement process and hold bad actors accountable.

Allow me now to provide the House with a sense of what the government has done and is doing to address potential weaknesses in the federal procurement process, both from an enforcement perspective and from an internal improvement perspective. PSPC has a number of mechanisms in place to prevent, detect and respond to fraud and other potential integrity issues within the procurement and real property transactions. Last year, Public Services and Procurement Canada suspended all delegated authorities for professional services-based task authorizations. This was in order to implement additional controls to strengthen IT procurement and management of contracts.

Now, all other federal departments must formally agree to a new set of terms and conditions to obtain access to select professional services that provide supply. The department has also directed its procurement officers to ensure that all task authorizations include a focus on clear tasks and deliverables. All of this helps to improve the procurement process.

Last November, at the request of the Canada Border Services Agency, PSPC issued stop-work orders against Dalian, Coradix and GC Strategies, halting the work on all active contracts with the Canada Border Services Agency while the investigations proceed. In March of this year, the department went a step further, suspend-

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ing the security status of GC Strategies Inc. and Dalian Enterprise until further notice. This effectively prevents the companies from participating in all federal procurements with security requirements.

Public Services and Procurement Canada takes protecting the integrity of the procurement system very seriously, and it is a cornerstone of our responsibility for ensuring fair, open and transparent procurements.

● (1625)

At the same time as these enforcement actions are under way, the department is making changes internally. To guide our efforts to improve, we are fortunate to have recommendations from two independent studies. They include those of the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman, who made it clear in their recent reports that Canada's procurement system is vulnerable to manipulation by bad actors.

PSPC is acting on the recommendations of the Auditor General and the procurement ombud in line with its commitment to an open, fair and transparent procurement process while obtaining value for Canadian taxpayers. Over the past year, PSPC has taken concrete actions to strengthen the oversight of all the professional services contracts falling under its authority, several of which I've already mentioned. We have introduced measures and controls to strengthen the contract management processes with the client departments. Collectively, these measures will help continue to strengthen and enhance federal procurement processes to promote greater competition, particularly in the field of IT consulting services.

Government procurement already operates within a framework of laws, regulations, policies, programs and services. However, we know that we can and must always do more. That is why PSPC continues to modernize government procurement practices. One of our long-standing priorities is a sweeping modernization of the procurement system to make it easier, faster and more accessible for suppliers, particularly those from under-represented groups.

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I am proud to say that we are making progress. The goal is to simplify our processes and improve access. That includes the deployment of our electronic procurement solution, a new system that is shifting a very paper-based approach to procurement into an electronic repository. We are also improving our ability to hold companies accountable for their misconduct while protecting federal expenditures. Our government recently announced the creation of a new office of supplier integrity and compliance, which will take effect in May. The new office will allow the government to better respond to wrongdoing and further safeguard the integrity of federal procurement. It also includes new measures to improve our capacity to take swift action against suppliers of concern.

We are deeply concerned by allegations of fraud, which weaken the public's trust in the government. We are committed to taking action against improper, unethical and illegal business practices and to holding companies accountable. At the department level, PSPC fully supports all efforts to investigate allegations of wrongdoing and to take the appropriate steps to address them.

The decisions associated with the early development and implementation of ArriveCAN have been a sobering revelation for Canadians. We take our responsibility as the stewards of public funds seriously, and we will continue to review processes and look for ways to strengthen the integrity of our procurement function. Bad actors are and will continue to be held to account.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, the subject of these discussions is very important.

Of course, committees have certain responsibilities. That said, committees also have certain powers. In this case, it is clear that those powers have not been used properly, since individuals have appeared before committees but have not willingly answered questions from committee members. I think there is a very important aspect here that the government is ignoring. Specifically, there was a cost estimate of \$80,000, but the bill ended up somewhere near \$60 million. I hear government members react much like the rest of us in the House, but the responsibility here falls to the government.

My question is very simple. Were any individuals suspended from the Canada Border Services Agency as a result of this gigantic fraud?

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: Madam Speaker, in fact, the committee and Parliament do have powers and responsibilities to ensure that we ask the right questions, as the member rightly put. When it comes to cost, ArriveCAN enabled us to have a product that is still being used to this day. Some may argue about its ability, cost and value. We certainly are questioning that ourselves, but in regard to any allegations of wrongdoing that have been made, individuals from various departments have been put on notice and have been dismissed without pay until resolutions are made.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I just want to ask a question of my colleague and friend from the Liberals. I hope he did not spend a whole lot of time preparing that speech last night. I am sure he was up late writ-

ing it all out. We really need to address the fact that this motion is to call Kristian Firth from GC Strategies into the House.

This is a rare tool that has been used since Confederation and it is only used in the most egregious situations. We have an individual here who tried to make a mockery of one of our committees, who refused to answer questions and who refused to bring about accountability and justify the number of dollars he had personally stuffed in his pockets through the arrive scam app. We are studying this at committee right now: how an organization of two employees sitting in their basement was able to get tens of millions of dollars in government contracts and then subcontract that out to bigger and more professional organizations like KPMG.

Will the parliamentary secretary for the department of procurement agree that Mr. Firth needs to come before the bar and be held to account for the way he has undermined our parliamentary institutions and to ensure that this never happens again?

Mr. Charles Sousa: Madam Speaker, you have outlined a situation that has concerned all of us on committee—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I apologize for interrupting the hon. parliamentary secretary, but the hon. parliamentary secretary has to speak through me.

I did not say anything.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Madam Speaker, I would let my colleague know that we on this side of the House care deeply about the very issues that are presented before the committee. We care very deeply for the fact that certain questions were not revealed. Notwithstanding that Mr. Firth decided to do so in camera, which was denied to him, and he made reference to that, we do support that he appear before the House to answer those questions. We cannot and will not allow a repeat of those types of activities. We remind the House that these are the same actors who were involved with the Conservative government in the past. They have been at this for some time. We must take every effort to correct it.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am wondering how much faith the member for Mississauga—Lakeshore has that the House will get straight answers to their questions with this extraordinary step we are considering taking today.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Madam Speaker, the member from British Columbia is also a member of the standing committee. I believe that he shares the same concerns that I do. Mr. Firth has already issued a statement today outlining his responses. The extent to which we would hear anything more when he appears at the bar before the House, we would soon see. However, we must take that extra step and I support the motion as a result.

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[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have been examining the ArriveCAN file in committee since October 2022, if not earlier.

We have to continually analyze the documents, read mountains of documents and cross-check the information obtained from the documents themselves or from witnesses, so it is a long process. The work would be easier if the witnesses gave us all of the information that we asked for right away. That is the main aspect of parliamentary privilege that was violated in committee several times.

Parliamentary privilege involves the power to get answers to our questions. However, recently, there have been situations where we did not get any answers. For example, we were told that we would not be given the answer right away but that the information would be sent later. There were also situations where the witness said that he could not answer because it could interfere in a potential RCMP investigation. In that case, the witness, a partner of GC Strategies, had not yet been contacted by the RCMP, so his testimony, if it was not part of an investigation, should have been free and voluntary.

That being said, when witnesses appear before a committee, they are sworn in. They have to give the committee members all of the information. They also have to answer all of the questions that they are asked to the best of their knowledge.

When we compare the information we received from the Auditor General of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency and other witnesses with that of GC Strategies, some of that information is clearly contradictory, so much so that we are calling for an extraordinary measure: ordering a witness to attend at the bar of the House of Commons. This is a rarity in Canada's history. It happened one particularly memorable time, when John A. Macdonald was arrested and brought before the House. That was certainly a historic event.

We need to make sure this is done with proper consideration and due process. We do not want to humiliate anyone—I do not, anyway. We do not want to intimidate anyone. We want full answers about public money, the taxes that we and all citizens pay.

I would like to quote from the committee report:

On Monday, October 17, 2022, the committee agreed, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(c), to undertake a study of the ArriveCAN application.

In the course of this study, the committee chose to invite Kristian Firth to appear before it.

The committee reports the following facts to the House:

Following a refusal of the witness to appear, the committee reported this failure to the House on Monday, February 26, 2024, which resulted in the House of Commons adopting an order for both Mr. Kristian Firth and Mr. Darren Anthony to appear before the committee within 21 days.

I must point out that Mr. Firth, who refused to appear, ended up providing doctor's notes a few weeks ago to justify why he did not want to appear. It took a very long time.

It was only under threat that the men appeared before the committee, despite the committee's offer of accommodations to respect their capacities and needs by giving them breaks when they were tired or when testifying took more effort.

● (1635)

Mr. Firth agreed to comply with the House order and during his appearance before the committee on Wednesday, March 13, 2024, Mr. Firth provided a statement and was asked a series of questions by committee members concerning his role with the ArriveCAN application.

During this witness testimony, the committee was unable to ascertain certain facts from Mr. Firth, who repeatedly refused to answer questions, citing a potential investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a justification for his refusal to respond.

Witnesses in committee have rights, including the right not to have their testimony used against them in a potential lawsuit. Nevertheless, this is the argument that Mr. Firth has repeatedly put forward for not answering members' questions, even, for example, when they asked him the name of the person who had contacted him to request a backgrounder on a potential application. There is nothing criminal about naming the person who asked for information; that is not illegal.

The committee notes that *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, at pages 1078-79, states the following:

Witnesses must answer all questions which the committee puts to them.

That information was repeatedly given to the witnesses.

The report goes on to say, “some of the witness testimony provided by Mr. Firth was called into question as being misleading or false”. For example, the Auditor General tells us that GC Strategies probably received \$19.1 million in connection with ArriveCAN. However, she also says that it is difficult to track the money, because some of the codes on some of the invoices lack detail, so there is no way of knowing if the work listed on certain invoices was for ArriveCAN or something else. ArriveCAN was not GC Strategies' only contract during the pandemic. GC Strategies says it received \$11 million. Maybe so, but in the documents it submitted a few months earlier, the total added up to \$9.6 million. We asked GC Strategies to explain the difference between the amount in the documents that were provided and this more recent amount, but its only response was that the company had provided the documents. We were told that the company received \$4.5 million per year, but now we are being told that \$2.5 million was related to ArriveCAN. That is the kind of information that is not clear.

We are not lawyers, although some members were lawyers in another life. We are not here to act as lawyers. Our role on the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates is to determine whether procedures have been properly followed and whether taxpayer money has been well spent. It is impossible, however, to determine whether procedures were followed when we repeatedly fail to receive information, even just things like the names of the people who can answer our questions, who can tell us what the procedure was, how it was applied and how it can be improved. We have no answers to these questions.

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Some people might think that it is a little ridiculous for us to request this information. In a recent email, Mr. Firth said that it was utterly pointless. However, when it comes to looking after public funds, when it comes to looking after taxpayers' money, no request is silly, stupid or trivial. Our role is to ensure that every penny is spent well and in compliance with procedure. To do that, we need answers, and we have not received them all.

We met with Mr. Firth three times. Following our questions at his first appearance, he sent us a slew of documents, including a list of contracts he allegedly had with the Government of Canada related to ArriveCAN. However, some questions remain answered.

● (1640)

In another slew of documents that followed the second meeting we summoned him to, we still did not get any answers to the questions we had asked him at the first and second meetings. It was not until his third appearance that he partially answered questions. We should have been able to get answers from the start in order for the study process to be complete and transparent. We should not have been forced to request more resources so we could hold two more meetings with the same person, on the same topic, to get more information in order to understand the situation and analyze it more fully. We should have had that information from the get-go, not nearly two years later.

Let us talk about the questions he did and did not answer. At the third meeting, we asked him for the names of public servants he had met with during their business hours at breweries and other locations. He provided the names. We must give credit where credit is due. It is important to be fair and equitable, regardless of what one thinks of the situation. We asked for the names of the contacts for the contracts, and we got those names. We asked for the names of the people with whom he had discussed developing the criteria for the \$25-million contract. The answers to that were more vague. He told us that he had not been involved in developing the criteria. We have emails that prove otherwise. He said that he was not involved in developing the criteria, but that the criteria must not have been all that restrictive, since 40 companies qualified to bid on the contract. Curiously, his company was the only one that bid on the contract, and it won. What is going on? Who is telling the truth? Is the truth in the emails, in the documents, in Mr. Firth's impressions, or in his testimony?

Is it normal for consulting firms to sit at the table and help set out the criteria for a contract they are going to bid on? He said he did not do that, but he also said he cannot comment because the RCMP is investigating. However, he still has not been called as part of that investigation.

What was the purchase price of Coredal Systems Consulting? That is another question that he was asked because, before becoming GC Strategies, the company was called Coredal Systems Consulting. Mr. Firth and two other people bought Coredal Systems Consulting and changed its name to GC Strategies. Coredal Systems Consulting also had several contracts with the government. It is a bit complicated, but basically the company was purchased so that one person's security clearance could be transferred to someone else. Were the security clearances examined? Apparently they were, but we also need to take a closer look at the process in particular. Is

it relevant to know how much Coredal Systems Consulting was worth at the time of purchase? I do not think so. I do not take umbrage at the fact that no answer was given to that question, but on principle, when a member asks a question, the witness needs to answer. That is what parliamentary privilege is all about.

We also wanted to know the name of the person who asked GC Strategies to prepare a slide deck for an app in March 2020. We are waiting for the answer. We asked for the names of the company's contacts at the Canada Border Services Agency, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, and Employment and Social Development Canada. We are waiting for the answer. According to Mr. Firth, 40 companies qualified to bid on the contract, the one he said he was not involved in developing the criteria for. It is not clear how, but he is the one who got the contract, which ended up being untendered.

● (1645)

What did we get? We got a list of contracts GC Strategies has received since it was created and their nominal value. We got the amounts invoiced to the government and the amounts paid to subcontractors. We got doctors' notes and letters telling us that they hoped the utterly pointless process would now be over. We sensed exasperation. We also sensed a possibility of involving lawyers and the courts. I will talk about that later.

Is this some kind of warning that we should not be exercising our parliamentary privilege to get answers to our questions? I hope not.

However, there is one thing to remember in all this. Witnesses are called to appear and answer difficult questions. Ministers and deputy ministers can testify to that. Just about every organization in government goes before a committee at one time or another. The questions are not always easy.

Can we adopt a more respectful tone when asking questions? Absolutely, yes. Can we ask questions in ways that make people feel respected? Absolutely, yes. Have we always done so in all committees, including the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates? To be perfectly honest, not always. It is deplorable. Could that tone cause a person to feel their integrity is under attack? Possibly. Now, I am not trying to defend anyone in particular, but I am trying to keep things in perspective and find the voice of reason and balance in all this. We need to look inward as well as outward.

Earlier, I asked a colleague a question about the fact that one of the main concerns the head of GC Strategies expressed was that his statements would be used against him on social media and in traditional media, that his children would again be insulted and photographed without permission, that his home would be photographed, and that he and his wife would receive degrading and threatening calls and emails.

I have read some of those emails and they are far from pleasant. Some of them resemble the kind of thing we receive. It is just as unpleasant for us as it is for ordinary Canadians. We therefore need to carefully consider our tone and how we handle information, as well as the scope of our parliamentary privilege. Does posting certain information on social media damage the privilege of witnesses? It might. That is something we need to consider and think about. Informing the public is important. We can say anything, but it all depends on the tone we use and how we do it. We have to look at all sides of the coin—heads, tails and the edge. If we only look at one side of things, we miss a lot of information. That is what looking for balanced information is all about. That is what we must strive for above all in committees of this Parliament.

Was the witness right to withhold information? The answer is no. Was the witness right not to wholly or partly trust the entire committee or some of its members? Unfortunately, I am inclined to say yes, that is, he was right to be afraid that information might be distorted. Nevertheless, our privilege stands. We have to analyze our practices, but our witnesses also need to understand that they have to provide all the information, not just the information they are willing to give us.

• (1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member really trying to explain the context of a situation, whether it is the committee, the roles that committee members play or, ultimately, witnesses. I think that took a great deal of bravery to be able to say so, and I appreciate that. I understand the Bloc's position is also to see the witness brought to the bar, which is great.

Often what happens in a committee, especially when we bring in witnesses, is that things sometimes get a little bit too politically partisan. As a result, it can be a disservice to the committee and, ultimately, witnesses. Could she can provide some further thoughts on the potential of partisanship and the impact that has on the whole process going forward?

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, my opinion is just the same as it was when I was elected in 2019, despite the five years that have gone by and everything I have seen since then. In committee, our work should never, ever, ever be partisan. The committee is there to conduct studies for the common good, for the good of the public and for the good of public finances, as far as the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates is concerned. The common good has no colour. It is not light blue, dark

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blue, red, orange or green. It has no colour. That must not change and must not be forgotten.

Yes, it can fun to publish a few words in newspapers or on social media to generate some likes. However, are we in kindergarten, or the House of Commons?

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, we completely agree with the Bloc Québécois member on this issue. The integrity of parliamentary committees is paramount. We have seen witnesses appear in committee, including the ethics committee, and not answer questions.

When we call someone to the bar to testify before a committee, we want to send them the message that parliamentarians are entitled to full and truthful answers every time anyone appears before a committee. That is the message we are going to send to the next witnesses who appear in committee. Does she agree with that?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, indeed, the committees—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I must interrupt the member because some members are making a lot of noise.

The hon. member for Beauport—Limouilou.

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, thank you. I have a good voice, so when other voices drown me out, that is something.

Yes, the committees need to get answers to their questions. Yes, parliamentarians are supposed to get answers, and witnesses are expected to provide all the information they have. However, in our democracy and in our justice system, we cannot presume that anyone is guilty. We have to presume that they are innocent.

Is it possible that a person providing information is not hiding anything, but finds more information later? Yes, that is possible. Is that the case here? I could not say. The fact remains that when I look at the questions being asked and the answers being provided, I see that one of the main reasons why people refuse to provide information is the fear that the answer will be used against them.

Committee members also have to do some soul-searching about the way they ask their questions and how they speak in public. We are responsible adults. We need to set an example. If our tone is intimidating and accusatory, and if we make connections where there are none, then the person could be concerned that what they say in committee will be held against them, unfortunately. This should not happen.

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• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Lisa Marie Barron (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I want to acknowledge that it is essential that we are moving forward. We seem to be on the same page on ensuring that we get the answers we need about how we got into this mess in the first place with the ArriveCAN app. I think this speaks to some bigger issues around the process of how money is being allocated to consultants and being contracted out. One thing that came up and that the member mentioned in her speech was this process in which the criteria for this contract was developed by the exact people who would receive the funds and are in question today.

Why does the member feel it is a concern that the criteria was developed by the same people who received the funds to follow through on the contract? What does that mean for how Canadian taxpayers' money is being utilized?

[Translation]

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, when the government drafts a contract or a call for tenders, it should know what it wants.

If the government hires a company as a consultant to help it describe its needs more clearly, that is one thing. Normally, the government should know what it wants and how to describe it, but let us suppose that some artistic licence is taken.

The company that was hired as a consultant should not be allowed to bid on a call for tenders it helped draft. If that happens, it can give the impression that the company drafted the call for tenders in such a way as to make sure it would win the contract.

It is important to avoid the appearance of this kind of collusion at all costs.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her excellent work and tremendous diligence. There are things that may not be that clear from the outside, but those of us in here can see who is serious about working for the common good. I would like to take this opportunity to tip my hat to her.

We are faced with an extraordinarily appalling situation that unfortunately appears to be a repeat of past history. The previous discussion was about a contract being awarded to the company that wrote the criteria. Funnily enough, that reminds me of the WE Charity affair they managed to hush up. How odd. I am also reminded of other horror stories in our history, like the sponsorship scandal and others.

Of course, we will receive witnesses and make sure we get at the truth. We will get to the bottom of what is shaping up to be a huge scandal.

Once that is done, then what? What do we need to change to make sure we do not go through another scandal like this in two or three years?

Mrs. Julie Vignola: Madam Speaker, allow me to respond with a quote: The misfortune of the historian is to know what happened and to watch history keep repeating itself.

I do not claim to be a historian, but I was a history teacher. We keep ending up in the same situation over and over again.

How can we make sure that it never happens again, regardless of who forms the government? That is not important. Regardless of who forms the government, this must not happen again. Our processes need to be comprehensively reviewed on an ongoing basis, not just when problems surface. That is one possible solution.

We must make sure that the procedural rules are clear and that they are not 375,000 pages long. No one has the time to read and apply all that.

We need to streamline our procedures and make sure they are reviewed.

• (1705)

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Peace River—Westlock.

It seems that the Prime Minister all too often finds himself at the centre of scandal and corruption, and here we are again. Whether it is the WE Charity scandal, the green slush fund or the arrive scam app, when it comes to doing favours for friends, of course we know that the Liberal government just cannot help itself. It turns out that we are seeing this once again.

The government actually promised it would create the app for about \$80,000, but then it turned out that close to \$60 million was funnelled into that app. It is an app that Canadians did not want and did not need, and ultimately at the end of the day, it did not work. It malfunctioned a good portion of the time, which, of course, had a detrimental impact on 10,000 Canadians during its time of use.

What is insane about the contract is that not only did the government pump \$60 million, at least, into the app, but according to the Auditor General's report, 76% of those who were contracted to work on the app actually did no work. They collected a robust paycheque but actually did not do anything to earn that paycheque. That seems to be a classic Liberal way of operating.

It is important to bear in mind that \$80,000 was the promise, but over \$60 million was the actual spend, which is 750 times the amount that the Prime Minister told Canadians he would be using. That is a problem in and of itself that deserves accountability, but there is more to the story than just that. It turns out that was the tip of the iceberg. Here we are today, talking about the more.

The Auditor General discovered that the Canada Border Services Agency, CBSA, failed to adhere to policies, failed to adhere to controls and failed to be transparent in terms of its procurement processes and procedures. That then limited competition and, again, resulted in favours being done for friends. Notably, the agency failed to maintain adequate documentation. The Auditor General actually made note of this in her report, stating that she was led on a trail of what seemed to be deception and secrecy. She actually was not able to get to the bottom of it, but she did her best. Of course, we appreciate that because taxpayers deserve answers when it comes to how their money is being spent.

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One of the things the Auditor General found was that GC Strategies, one of the companies that was contracted to work on this app, actually did not do any work. Rather, GC Strategies found others through LinkedIn and other processes to do the work for it. It just wanted the cash. GC Strategies was permitted to draft its own contract. How is that for competition? It actually drafted its own contract and the government was like, “Sure, it looks great to me. We’ll sign off on that.”

What we see, though, is that this is not a one-off. We have watched the government over the last eight and a half years operate in this regard over and over again, with a lack of due process, a lack of transparency and a lack of accountability.

A few months ago, Conservative members moved a motion to bring the two leads of GC Strategies, Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, to committee in an effort to hold them accountable. That is really the point of this debate today: accountability. It is the accountability of the government and its illogical decisions, as well as the accountability of one of these individuals, Kristian Firth. This is where I will spend the remainder of my time.

It was highlighted in the report from the Standing Committee on Government Operations that Kristian Firth and Darren Anthony, the founders of GC Strategies, actually failed to appear not only once or twice but multiple times when summoned to committee. It was only when they were faced with the prospect of arrest that they eventually complied. That brings us to where we are today, because those two men from GC Strategies finally showed up but Mr. Firth refused to provide answers.

It is one thing to take a seat at the table but it is another to actually be productive, and he refused. While he was at committee, he declined to provide answers to the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. When he was asked whether he had previously misled committee, Mr. Firth went mum.

• (1710)

Similarly, when questioned about his interactions with public office holders outside of government premises, Mr. Firth again refused to answer. He then refused to answer again when asked questions by the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan and again when asked questions by the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek. Let us talk about defiance. Furthermore, on its website, GC Strategies showcases detailed endorsements and recommendations from senior government officials without giving names, and when asked to disclose those names during that testimony, Mr. Firth again refused to answer.

It is not just the refusal to answer that is the problem we are discussing today, but it is also the outright lies. During his initial appearance before the committee, Mr. Firth made false statements regarding his interactions with government officials outside of official settings, and he also lied with regard to money that was spent on hospitality initiatives and on trying to court government officials in order to win the contract.

Subsequently, when summoned by the committee to return and to provide further clarification, Mr. Firth chose to evade further questioning and went into hiding altogether. It is worth noting that during Mr. Firth’s initial appearance at the committee approximately a

year and a half ago, he pledged to provide the necessary answers promptly and agreed to return to committee. However, during his most recent appearance, once again compelled by the threat of arrest under a House order, he assured the committee that he would provide the names of the implicated government officials by the following morning at 9 a.m. However, when the committee started at 10 a.m., lo and behold, they were not provided, and in fact, the clerk had reported back to the committee that Mr. Firth had once again deceived them and would not be providing what he had sworn to.

Subsequently, the committee had to resort to threatening Mr. Firth with arrest by the Sergeant-at-Arms to compel his co-operation. Only under this ultimatum did Mr. Firth emerge from hiding. However, even then, he refused to provide straightforward answers to questions that any individual would not normally have a problem answering.

It is important to note that Mr. Firth was chosen by the Liberal Prime Minister and given tens of millions of dollars. In fact, he has been given hundreds of millions of dollars since the beginning of the current government in 2015. GC Strategies has benefited from this friendship; there is no doubt about that. However, what is most important today is the fact that Mr. Firth came to committee, was asked questions and refused to answer or just lied altogether. It is important to note that he did this after taking a solemn oath that holds him accountable to this place. He swore that oath the morning of his appearance, and it is meant to uphold the integrity of this institution. His failure to respect that oath and function accordingly then calls into question his respect not only for the elected members of this place but also for the entire Canadian population because it is here that 338 elected members represent those Canadians, and it is those Canadians whose tax money was taken and was used potentially inappropriately.

Therefore, we have to get to the bottom of these important questions. When Mr. Firth arrives at committee and altogether refuses to answer those important questions on behalf of Canadians or outright lies, we have a problem. It is then incumbent upon those in this place to hold him to account.

With that said, I believe we must work together as the House of Commons to reinstate the confidence Canadians rightfully deserve in this place. Therefore, the motion being discussed today presents a fitting response to the breaches of rules that have occurred. That, of course, is an admonishment. Holding the individual accountable and ensuring transparency would provide the necessary answers to the questions that were rightfully posed. If this motion is approved, the individual in question will be brought before the bar of the House, ensuring accountability and rectifying the transgressions that have occurred. Therefore, today, we are calling on the members of this place, especially the governing party, to vote for accountability and transparency.

Privilege

• (1715)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member who just spoke amplifies the true motivation as to why the Conservatives have taken this approach. It has very little to do with improving the system and accountability. It has a whole lot more to do with the personal attacks on the Prime Minister. She even said that it was the Prime Minister who chose Mr. Firth to win the contract. The Conservative Party needs to realize a number of things. One of those things is that the types of things we are witnessing today have taken place, and it is not the first time.

I was about to say Pierre Poilievre, but I cannot say that. The leader of the Conservative Party of Canada was part of a \$400 million scandal. He was the parliamentary secretary to the Treasury Board at that time. He had a very successful cover-up. Had Canadians benefited by not seeing a cover-up by the leader of the Conservative Party—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I have to interrupt the hon. member for a point of order.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, the member acknowledged that he is not to use names, but there was no apology, and he simply carried on. It had the same effect. By naming a member's full name and not their title, he essentially got to do indirectly what he could not do directly.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): I would like to ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to apologize.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I apologize for hurting feelings. I should not have said that.

At the end of the day, the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member apologized and said he should not have said that. That is exactly what he said.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, he apologized for offending the member. He did not apologize and withdraw his words.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I apologize, and I withdraw the words. Hansard has my approval to take them off the record, if it would like.

The issue here is that the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada was the parliamentary secretary for Treasury Board when we had the largest significant scandal. It was the ETS scandal. It was \$400 million. Had the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada done his job back then, maybe we would have other protocols that would have prevented what took place during a pandemic, when the government was literally spending billions of dollars to have the backs of Canadians.

Would the member not agree that the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada made a big mistake in covering up one of the largest scandals in Canadian history, the ETS scandal?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, I would highlight that the hon. member seems a little scared. He seems quite passionate to protect something that we should all be wanting to expose.

I am not sure why the hon. member is so defensive of this individual, Kristian Firth, who came and refused to answer questions in this place and who outright lied during other questions being asked. I am not sure why the hon. member across the way feels the need to defend Mr. Kristian Firth.

I am not sure why the hon. member across the way feels the need to defend that in this operation, GC Strategies was allowed to write its own contract. I am not sure why the hon. member across the way feels the need to defend the Prime Minister, the leader of his party, who promised he would spend only \$80,000 on this app, yet he spent over \$60 million.

I am not sure why the hon. member across the way feels the need to defend that there was no transparency, no accountability and that due process was not followed when the app went out for tender, then the contract was secured and the app was built.

I am not sure why the hon. member across the way feels that this place can continuously be disrespected and disgraced by a lack of accountability and transparency. I am not sure why the hon. member stands for those things.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is rather ironic to see certain elected members, who spoke a few minutes ago about dealing with issues in a non-partisan manner in order to get to the bottom of things, now replying to people from other political parties that this also happened in their government.

We need to move beyond that, and I will give the member the opportunity to do so by asking her a fundamental question, which I asked my colleague from Beauport—Limoilou earlier. We are going to bring these people in, and that is good. We will get to the bottom of this and find out the truth about this scandal, which I think is quite serious. However, as I noted earlier, it will probably not be the last.

I do not want any more scandals. This is sadly reminiscent of WE Charity and other previous incidents. My question to the member is this. Once we get to the bottom of this scandal, what does she think needs to be done to ensure that it never happens again? When friends give each other contracts and millions of dollars are thrown around, it is ordinary people's money that is being squandered. It makes no sense, and we have a duty to do something to ensure that this never happens again.

• (1720)

[English]

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate that question. I think that should ultimately be the goal of this place, that we would get to the bottom of this and that we would understand why these types of scandals are allowed to take place. We at least somewhat know the answer to that: It is a lack of transparency and a lack of accountability. We have seen where the current government, over and over again, has failed to adhere to those principles.

Therefore, it has put Canadian taxpayers at risk and has disgraced this place known as the House of Commons, which is our democratic institution. It is meant to protect justice and the rule of law. It is supposed to protect the Canadian people and to make sure their voices and their dollars count. When we do not insist on that transparency and accountability, then more corruption is allowed to take place.

I appreciate the support of the Bloc Québécois in pursuing this endeavour.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, as I begin my speech, I want to talk a bit about how Canadians cannot afford the higher taxes and inflation that the government has brought on, and they cannot afford the Prime Minister. That is why we have been calling for judicial use of taxpayer dollars. We have been calling for the government to axe the tax on farmers and food by immediately passing Bill C-234. We have demanded that the government build homes, not bureaucracy, by requiring cities to permit 15% more homebuilding each year as a condition of receiving federal funding. We have also asked the government to cap the spending with a dollar-for-dollar rule to bring down the interest rates and inflation. Conservatives said we will not support the government in its budget unless it does these things, so we will vote non-confidence if the government does not axe the tax; build more homes, not bureaucracy; and cap the spending.

It is the spending that brings us here today. We have seen that the ArriveCAN app, an app that could have cost only \$80,000 to produce, ended up costing over \$60 million. We have seen some unsavoury contractors taking advantage of the government, but the government also failed to maintain records.

This is a classic case of a time when we see a critical situation. Oftentimes this happens, and it is always very suspicious. There is a crime scene, a camera is recording the crime scene, but during the two minutes the crime happened, the camera seems to be mysteriously turned off, and then the camera comes back on after that. This is again one of these cases where we can smell that something is wrong and see that something is wrong.

We have the scathing Auditor General's report, which says that a massive amount of money was spent, and she cannot find what the money was spent on. She anticipates that 67% of the subcontractors did no actual work, yet here we are with a scandal of grand proportion. It appears that the tape was not running, that the camera was turned off for that period of time. The Auditor General says it could be as little as \$60 million, and it could be far more.

Privilege

We are debating a privilege motion here today. A privilege motion has to do with the ability of members of Parliament to do their jobs. Members of Parliament have particular privileges that are not broadly used by citizens. Taking a seat in the House of Commons is a privilege that only members of Parliament have, but the government has particular privileges as well. The government gets to write the cheques for Canada. It holds the chequebook. That is not an opposition party job. That is a job of the government. Therefore, it is incredibly important that the government maintains control of the chequebook and maintains the scrutiny of where the cheques are going. That is a massive failure, and we are trying to get to the bottom of that.

If we listen to the Liberals, they would have us believe that it is these evil contractors, and I am not denying that, who have been taking advantage of the government, which, by all accounts, appears to be the case, but where were the checks and balances? Where was the trust and verify? Why did it not ask if we were getting good value for money? This has been a common problem with the Liberals for a long time, that whenever they are questioned about a government failure, they point out how much money they have spent on a particular issue, whether it is border security, policing or managing vehicle crimes. They talk about how much money they are spending on a particular program, when the problem only seems to be getting worse.

Contractors have figured out that limiting the money being spent has not been an active priority for the government. Maintaining some sort of fiscal restraint is not something the government has been known for, and contractors have been taking advantage of that, for sure.

• (1725)

Common-sense Conservatives, after eight years of the Prime Minister, are putting forward a plan to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime, and that is really what this comes down to.

We have heard some incredible things that have come out of committee. First is the fact that the Auditor General said that it was incredibly hard to track down what this money was spent on, as the contracts that GS Strategies got were more and more vague as time went on. They were for longer and longer periods of time and for larger and larger amounts of money. However, there have been some other interesting things, such as resumés that had been submitted to get the contracts being forged, which appears to be just straight-up fraud. There was a requirement for experience and qualifications, and GC Strategies admitted that it doctored these resumés to make sure that they fit in order to get the contracts.

The other really interesting thing that happened, which we discovered last week at committee, was that KPMG was approached by the government to do an audit of the effectiveness of the app, but rather than the government contracting KPMG directly to do this audit, the government employee suggested to KPMG that it should approach GC Strategies to do this audit rather than just doing it directly, even though it was the government that approached KPMG. There does seem to be something very interesting going on between the bureaucracy and GC Strategies.

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Again, going back to this video camera that, for some apparent reason, seems to have been shut off just when the crime seemed to be happening, interestingly, all of the emails associated with this discussion of the KPMG contract have disappeared. The government employee who had been communicating on this deleted all of his emails and is no longer affiliated with the department that he worked with. I am not sure, but I think he has been suspended from the public service, so we do not have the documents.

Members might say, “Well, that’s the actions of one individual” or “Mr. Firth is not answering our questions, and that’s the actions of a particular individual”, but I would say that this has been the MO of the government. I remember back in 2015 when the Liberals came into power with the grand slogan of being “open by default”. That is what it said, yet we have seen more redactions, and we have seen the government take the Speaker of the House of Commons to court to prevent documents from coming to this place. We have seen endless amounts of redactions. We have an ATIP process that is completely dysfunctional. We will get an ATIP back, and it will be entirely blacked out. We have also seen the Prime Minister call an election to prevent the Winnipeg lab documents from coming to this place. He first sued the Speaker to prevent it, and then called an election to prevent the truth coming to light on a number of things.

It is not a far leap that, when citizens see the government refusing to answer questions and redacting or not allowing documents to come forth, citizens who are then called before Parliament would not treat Parliament with the respect that is required or would not be as forthright with Parliament as they should be, which is why we are calling on Mr. Firth to come to the bar so he can be questioned on a number of these issues. However, we also want to point out that we wish the government would be more forthright with documentation as well so we can get to the bottom of a number of these scandals.

● (1730)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just so that we are clear on this, the government actually supports, which I have been indicating throughout the day, the individual in question coming to the bar. From the very beginning of the ArriveCAN app, there have been concerns with the government, and the government has taken tangible actions. We have been very supportive of the Auditor General and the recommendations that came forward, and we continue to look at ways in which we can improve the system.

The challenge I give to the Conservatives, which is why at times I get fairly animated, regards their positioning, which seems to be more partisan and politically motivated, as opposed to looking to improve the system. I am wondering if the member opposite can give an indication as to how he envisions going forward when Mr. Firth comes to the bar because it is a very serious issue.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, I hope we can restore some trust in our democratic institutions, and that we can make it so that, when people are required to come to committee and are sworn in, they tell the truth and help us get to the bottom of it.

The member opposite wants to cast this narrowly as being about one individual coming to the bar so he can be questioned and we

can get the truth from him, but it is likely that, when we get the truth from him, it will only lead us to more questions on the extent of the corruption, the extent of the taxpayer money waste and all of these things. The member may want to narrowly cast this, but this is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to investigating the ArriveCAN app.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of the good people of Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. The member mentioned the importance of maintaining our democratic institutions. We have a choice in this place, and I am happy to see co-operation across both sides of the House when someone is seeking to not give the information that was asked for and, in some cases, has fabricated and given testimony that was then proven to be false. We should demand better.

Does the member agree? Does he have further thoughts about how we can work in this place to build Parliament up and not let the important work Parliament needs to do on this matter fall aside?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Madam Speaker, it is precisely the ability for members to hold the government to account. I hear from constituents all of the time who are wondering what will be done about this. It seems obvious that money was wasted and somebody was defrauding the government. It seems obvious that the government was asleep at the switch, not paying attention to where this money was going and not considering the value for money.

All of those things lead to the derogation of the trust in our institutions. People want to see justice, and when they do not see that justice, they ask what that institution is good for if it is incapable of capturing the thing it is supposed to capture.

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limoulu, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are all on the same page when it comes to summoning this individual to the bar and the fact that we need to get the answers we are entitled to. Having said that, my question is very simple. We can say anything, but it all depends on the tone in which it is said. I just want to make sure that such a historic appearance at the bar does not become a spectacle, but rather that it allows us to get the answers to our questions.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. That is precisely why this privilege motion has been brought forward.

We are trying to get the answers to who authorized these contracts and what funny business was going on when the government allowed the company to write its own contracts and also suggested that other companies contract through GC Strategies, rather than directly with the government.

These are all important questions that we would like to get the answers to, so we can get to the bottom of this and root out corruption, if there is any.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I get into my question of privilege today, I just wanted to pass my condolences on to the family of the honourable John Fraser, a former Speaker of the House and B.C. member of Parliament who served honourably for both the Clark and Mulroney governments. I send my best to his family and friends.

I rise on a question of privilege to address what I believe is a matter of fundamental importance to every member in this place. I respect all members' time as valuable, so I will cut to the chase and get to the facts of this matter and why I believe they are of vital importance to all members.

I believe every person in this place understands the importance of Order Paper questions. At some level, we need a mechanism whereby democratically elected members of Parliament can get the truth from our government about its actions. My Order Paper question was not a complicated or a trivial one.

I will summarize my Order Paper question as this: I asked the government how many times it has asked social media companies to censor and remove posted online content. Obviously, my question was very detailed, and it requested specific information, but that is the basic summary of what I asked.

What do members think the answer was that I received? Do members think I got a list of specific requests detailing what departments were involved and the reasons censorship removal was requested and to whom? I did not.

The answer I received from our current Speaker, then in his former capacity as a parliamentary secretary, was the following: "Since January 1, 2016, the Privy Council Office has not made any requests to censor information." Having heard that, I believe we all can agree that the Privy Council Office was crystal clear: It had never done anything like that.

Here is the problem: Late last week, on Friday, April 5, Allen Sutherland, who is an assistant secretary to the cabinet at the Privy Council Office, testified at the public inquiry on foreign interference. What did Mr. Sutherland say? He told us that, in 2019, the Privy Council Office had requested Facebook to remove a posting about the Prime Minister that appeared on *The Buffalo Chronicle*. Mr. Sutherland further disclosed that Facebook complied with the request from the Privy Council Office, and the content was subsequently removed from Facebook.

As some members may know, the Privy Council Office believed this post was disinformation that could harm the integrity of the 2019 election. It was also testified that the Privy Council Office was aware of misinformation targeting Conservative candidates. However, in that situation, the Privy Council took no action. It did nothing.

To be clear, I am not raising privilege here to revisit this discrepancy in action. My reason for raising privilege is that the Privy

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Council Office has fully admitted that, yes, it did ask Facebook to remove and censor a post. The facts show this. Likewise, the facts will also show that Facebook did indeed remove the post after the request from the Privy Council Office. These facts are not in dispute.

I ask every member of this place the obvious question: If the Privy Council Office, by its own admission, asked Facebook to remove a post from social media, how is it possible that, in the answer to my Order Paper question, it could state that it had not made any requests to censor information since January 1, 2016?

One of these things is not true, so which is false? We all know the answer to that question. The Privy Council was dishonest in its answer to the Order Paper question, and the dishonesty was fully signed off on by the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, who is now the Speaker.

I am going to ask everyone present this: Does any other MP here care? If this can happen to me, it can happen to anyone in this place. If the government can be wilfully dishonest, without accountability, and we, as members of Parliament, do nothing about it, how can we expect to maintain the trust and integrity of the people we serve?

Let us never forget that we elect the Speaker to represent us in this place. It is the Speaker's job to ensure that we, as parliamentarians, have the tools we need to execute our duties as elected members to this place. The Speaker is not elected to shield the government from accountability or to help the government advance its agenda. The Speaker is elected to collectively represent all members of this place and to ensure that this place is accountable to the members and the Canadians we represent by being here. That is how the House of Commons is meant to and intended to work.

• (1740)

Order Paper questions were intended to be a tool for members to hold the government accountable. Order Paper questions were never intended to allow the government to deceive and mislead, which is precisely what happened to me here. Now, the Speaker will have two choices. The Speaker can set a new precedent, take action and say that enough is enough, or he can look the other way and say it is not his job to determine whether the contents the documents tabled in the House are accurate. Sadly, I suspect the Speaker will do the latter and not the former.

This is why Canadians are growing so incredibly frustrated. Even when it is proven that the government has been dishonest with them, those who are responsible will say that it is not their job. However, as a parliamentarian, it is my job to raise the issue of privilege. If we, as members of this House, are unwilling to stand up when our rights to the truth from the government are taken away from us, and if we say nothing, we will only see more of the same. I submit that it is completely and totally unacceptable.

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Before I close, I would like to leave members with this thought: We have a government that desires the power to police the Internet and appoint people who would declare what hate speech is and what the punishment for it should be. That would be an extremely powerful and dangerous tool. I am not here to enter into debate. That is not what raising privilege is.

What is not up for debate is that the government, by its own admission, requested a social media site to remove posted online content. Again, I am not here to debate that action. Afterward, the government denied ever having done that in a document intended to provide truthful accountability of its own conduct to elected MPs. The government failed that one simple but critically important task: to disclose the truth of its actions. That point is not up for debate. It is an issue of fundamental importance that should matter to all members of this place.

I humbly conclude my comments and ask that the Speaker approach this situation with the seriousness it deserves and send a powerful message to the government. He can send the message that, in our Canadian democracy, all elected members deserve the truth from their government.

If you rule in favour of my question of privilege, Mr. Speaker, I would be ready to move the appropriate motion.

• (1745)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to review the member's comments and get back to you.

The Deputy Speaker: That seems to be the procedure we have accepted over the last little bit, if not the normal procedure. We will wait for other members to make interventions on this issue, if that is a requirement. We will look at this fully in due time.

WITNESS RESPONSES AT STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely shocking to be standing here in this place and bearing witness to events that, in and of themselves, are difficult to believe. However, when one stacks them all up together, this situation reeks of the Liberal cronyism, corruption and incompetence that we have become all too familiar with under the Prime Minister and his government.

Although my colleagues have so ably made the case throughout the day for why it is important that this motion passes, I am grateful to rise and speak to it and to be sharing my time with my esteemed colleague, the member for Brantford—Brant.

This motion relates to the study of the ArriveCAN app taking place at the government operations and estimates committee. This study, I might add, started in October 2022. I have been a member of this committee since the beginning of the study, and I have seen the government repeatedly try to obstruct investigations of the app, and, I should say, the government members.

Members in this chamber will surely recall how the government voted against the Conservative motion to have the Auditor General audit the ArriveCAN app. Now that the Auditor General's report has been released, we know why.

The NDP-Liberal coalition tried to minimize the issue, stall the study and filibuster, but this only served to confirm to Conservatives on the committee that we needed to continue pressing for the truth. We have seen a number of instances of the Liberals on the committee covering up issues, usually supported by their NDP coalition partners.

We can take, for example, the committee's study on the government's explosion in contracting with McKinsey, a company that drove the opioid crisis. During that study, the NDP-Liberal coalition members blocked Conservatives from getting these documents at committee for several months. To this day, a year and a half later, we have not received a single one of the unredacted documents we requested. They also blocked a motion to force the disclosure of the documents from coming to the House, essentially killing the study on the outrageous level of outsourcing by the Liberal government.

Despite the many attempts by the Liberals to cover up their arrive scam, Conservatives have pushed forward on the investigation and pressured their NDP coalition partners to hold the government to account. With at least a dozen investigations into the \$60-million arrive scam, it is obvious that there is much more to this issue than simply another ineffective, money-wasting government program. The government spent at least \$60 million on an app that started with a price tag of just \$80,000.

From the beginning of this study, it was obvious that there were far more problems than the outrageous government overspending. During testimony at committee, we have heard allegations of corruption, fraud, forgery, bid rigging, reprisals, destruction of evidence and a large-scale cover-up. The cover-up extends beyond members in this chamber trying to shut down investigations into the scandal, with public servants and owners of companies being involved in the ArriveCAN contracting.

On several occasions, the committee has been forced to issue summonses for witnesses to appear at committee after they refused to attend. After they refused to comply with those summonses, we have been forced to invoke powers that have rarely been used since Confederation to force witnesses to show up and testify under threat of arrest. We still have another witness who continues to fail to show up.

The disdain for the powers of Parliament, particularly parliamentary committees, is born, I believe, out of an attitude pushed by the NDP-Liberal coalition. It denies accountability and allows the powers of standing committees to be subverted and outright denied in order to cover up for its failings.

Currently, a dozen investigations have been launched into the arrive scam. We have already had two major reports, published by the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman. They have found widespread incompetence and several instances of misconduct and potential criminality, which have been referred to the RCMP.

• (1750)

The Auditor General found a distressing lack of documentation across the three departments involved, making it difficult to determine who made the decisions, how much the app actually cost and where all the money went, or, rather, who got rich.

She also found that Kristian Firth's company, GC Strategies, sat at the table to draft the requirements for a \$25-million contract that was later awarded to GC Strategies under the guise of a competitive process. She also found that public servants at the CBSA directed KPMG, one of the largest international consulting firms, to work with GC Strategies. This inexplicable decision cost the government more money and gave GC Strategies a larger profit.

Despite being at the heart of this scandal, Kristian Firth continued to refuse to answer questions at the committee after being directed to do so. He also gave testimony on the amount he claims was paid to his company for the development of the ArriveCAN app, but his number differs from the amounts on the invoices that he provided to the committee. As a result, we have had difficulty getting to the truth regarding Mr. Firth's and his company's actions, as he has both misled and lied to the committee, on top of admitting to submitting fraudulent résumés to a federal department in order to have one of his clients qualify for a contract.

To summarize, this witness has refused several summonses to appear at a parliamentary committee, and after being forced to attend under threat of arrest, has both refused to answer questions and given misleading testimony to committee members. This impedes the committee's ability to conduct its study on the arrive scam and must be dealt with directly and swiftly to ensure that this behaviour is not allowed to become commonplace. If we value the privileges of Parliamentary standing committees to send for documents, call for witnesses and expect truthful and fulsome testimony, we must shut down any attempts to infringe on the rights of Parliament. This is an opportunity for all members in this place to stand up for the sanctity of the institution of Parliament.

I understand my colleagues on the government benches will have a knee-jerk reaction to protect Liberal insiders and cover up for their friends, but this motion must be passed in order to protect the integrity of Parliament and its ability to fulfill its duties. The powers of Parliament are clear, and they are necessary for the functioning of Parliament and our ability to do our jobs. The powers granted to committees are particularly necessary when opposition parties must hold an ethically challenged government to account, such as this NDP-Liberal coalition has shown itself to be with its repeated ethics violations.

I encourage every member in this place to vote in favour of this motion. It is of extreme importance that this motion pass and that we demonstrate that there are consequences for attempting to defy Parliament and the powers granted to Parliament and its committees. Future parliamentarians deserve no less from us.

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Conservatives will stand up for the rights and privileges of members and hold to account all those who defy them. I will be voting in favour of this motion and I hope to see my colleagues join me.

• (1755)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before I go to questions and comments, I have a point of order.

The hon. official opposition House leader.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Madam Speaker, if you were to seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion.

I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order, Special Order or usual practice of the House,

(a) at the ordinary hour of daily adjournment later this day or when no Member rises to speak, whichever is earlier, the motion on the question of privilege standing in the name of the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes regarding summoning Kristian Firth to the bar of the House and the amendment standing in the name of the member for Kingston and the Islands, be deemed withdrawn, and

(b) the House, having considered the unanimous views of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates, expressed in its 17th report, find Kristian Firth to be in contempt for his refusal to answer certain questions and for prevaricating in his answers to other questions and, accordingly, order him to attend at the bar of this House, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on Wednesday, April 17, 2024, for the purposes of:

(i) receiving an admonishment delivered by the Speaker;

(ii) providing responses to the questions referred to in the 17th report;

(iii) responding to supplementary questions arising from his responses to the questions referred to in the 17th report;

provided that

(iv) during Mr. Firth's attendance at the bar for the purpose of responding to questions, which shall be asked by Members, with questions and answers being addressed through the Speaker,

(A) ten minutes be allocated to each recognized party for the first and second rounds in the following order: Liberal Party, Conservative Party, Bloc Québécois and New Democratic Party,

(B) during the third round, five minutes be allocated to each of the recognized parties with an additional five-minute period for the Green Party,

(C) within each 10- or five-minute period of questioning, each party may allocate time to one or more of its members,

(D) in the case of questions and answers, Mr. Firth's answers shall approximately reflect the time taken by the question,

(v) at the expiry of time provided herein, and after Mr. Firth has been excused from further attendance, the House shall resume consideration of the usual business of the House for a Wednesday,

(vi) it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates to consider Mr. Firth's testimony at the bar of the House and, if necessary, recommend further action.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed to the hon. member's moving the motion will please say nay.

It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

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(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the motion we just passed unanimously in the House reinforces what I have been saying all day, which is that the Government of Canada very much wants to see accountability on this issue. It is one of the reasons that we wanted Mr. Firth to come before the bar. I have literally been saying that all day.

I also question the motivation factor of the official opposition on the issue, as its members tend to be far more partisan in trying to pin political blame as opposed to getting a better understanding of what has taken place and taking actions to prevent it from happening in the future.

My question to the member is this: Does she agree there is far more value to be had if we take an approach to improve the system?

The system is what needs to be improved. I could go back to when her leader was the parliamentary secretary and there was a \$400-million scandal, but I will not go into detail on that. I would ask her whether or not she agrees with my thoughts.

• (1800)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear from the member that he supports the unanimous decision by the committee to call Mr. Firth to the bar.

What I can also share with the House is that it has taken us a long time to get here. This study has been going on for 18 months, and what we observed time and time again as we were trying to get to the bottom of the arrive scam scandal was members of his caucus who serve on that committee continuing to try to stall this study, filibuster and keep us from getting the answers that we believe Canadians deserve.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, it seems to me that we are seeing more and more of this kind of attitude, with half answers, evasive comments, a lot of nonsense and a general lack of seriousness.

Does my colleague think that we are starting to see a pattern of refusing to answer questions at committee?

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, I think what we continue to see is that the Liberal government refuses to take responsibility for its own failures.

The Liberals try to distract and misdirect so that no one will actually focus on their abysmal record. The Liberals and their mountain of scandals are setting records for ethics violations, and that is what they really want to try to distract Canadians from paying attention to. The government members have continually shown disdain for the rule of Parliament by not answering questions and stalling studies in committee and have tried to subvert any attempt to hold them accountable.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, with regard to the importance of bringing someone to the bar who has not answered questions before and bringing him to the House of Commons, before all Canadians, in a televised format, with the media paying attention, what is the value this might bring to dealing with this situation?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Madam Speaker, it has taken us a long time to get to this point. We have exhausted every avenue we have had as a committee to use the tools we have to get to the bottom of this scandal, and time and time again we have been stalled. Witnesses have refused to answer questions and have refused to show up to committee. It is time for the government to be held accountable for its role in this and it is time for Mr. Firth to be held accountable for his role in this. We have had to impose this mechanism because we have been forced to.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Madam Speaker, it appears as if I am the last Conservative speaker on this particular privilege debate. I think it is fitting that I be given the last opportunity.

The wind has sort of been taken out of my sails in light of the unanimous consent motion that has been passed by the House. I am not going to spend a lot of time trying to justify why the House should have passed the original motion of privilege as presented by my colleague, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, but rather I would impress upon the House the importance of the supremacy of Parliament, which I think is at the heart of this debate. I am probably going to allow my colleagues the opportunity to ask further questions of me and make commentary beyond the five-minute allowance.

At the heart of this particular motion is the directing partner of GC Strategies and, notwithstanding a number of interventions from Liberal members at various committees that I have attended studying this particular issue, the arrive scam issue that has dominated the news for close to 18 months.

Whenever I rephrase the name GC Strategies, I am often met with opposition from the Liberal benches on a point of privilege suggesting that I am misleading the committee in some way and that “GC” does not necessarily stand for “Government of Canada”. I would use that phrase, “Government of Canada Strategies” deliberately, but not because I cleverly thought of that. I know that some political pundits use that particular phrase often in their media interviews. I have heard some political pundits using the phrase, “get cash”. It would appear as if that is essentially what GC Strategies does.

On the issue of “Government of Canada”, these are the words used by Kristian Firth at committee. He was asked what “GC” stood for. He very proudly identified GC Strategies as “Government of Canada Strategies”. When we look at the bigger picture of what GC Strategies has been able to do, Government of Canada Strategies, over the course of some several years, coincidentally, since the Prime Minister took government, has made close to \$60 million, 60 million taxpayer dollars for being nothing more than a conduit between government ministries and IT professionals.

Why is this important? At the time the Prime Minister formed government in 2015, he promised transparency, he promised accountability, he promised responsible government and he promised, more importantly, to reduce the number of external consultants. Did he live up to that promise? Did he live up to the litany of promises we have heard from the Prime Minister since 2015? Absolutely not. What he has done is that he has exceeded the amount, year after year, spent on external consultants. This is notwithstanding the fact that the Prime Minister and his government have increased the size of our professional federal public service by 40%.

We have heard at various committees from union heads representing that professional public service that they were never consulted. They were never asked whether or not we had federal public servants who could have performed the role that GC did, which was simply picking up the phone, sending an email, sending a text and connecting government with the professionals.

• (1805)

However, no, the corrupt, inept Liberal-NDP government did not want to rely upon their professional public service. They had to hire “Government of Canada Strategies”, which, very proudly, has taken anywhere from 15% to 30% of that \$60 million in government contracts. We can appreciate, which clearly the government does not, why there was such an interest in getting to the heart of this matter. There is not one but several committees studying how this was allowed to happen. At the heart of this, there is a smug, arrogant individual by the name of Kristian Firth who thinks that he is in control, that he is paramount and that he can dictate the terms under which he will respond to questions by using the spectre of an RCMP investigation.

The only thing that Canadians have been able to learn about this is a confirmation from an RCMP spokesperson that they have expanded the study. Following the release of the Auditor General's report, they have expanded the study to now look at the arrive scam scandal. That does not necessarily translate into the RCMP actively investigating the number of criminal charges recently identified by my colleague: the frauds, the forgeries, the government fraud, the obstruction, the deletion of emails. We do not know what they are investigating or if they are investigating that, but it allowed Kristian Firth an opportunity to deflect and impede Parliament's privileges in seeking the truth as to what really transpired.

If he did not use that as an excuse, he used the excuse of solicitor-client privilege. I am not going to spend any time reciting the authorities to refute that particular claim by a witness. Solicitor-client privilege does not apply at committee. People are still compelled to answer questions, but the questions put to Mr. Firth, in the Conservatives' respectful opinion, would be very damning to the government, particularly in light of the glowing references on the website of “Government of Canada Strategies” and all the glowing accolades from senior government officials.

Most recently, last week, there was a really damning admission by two professionals at KPMG, an international tax advisory consultant company with over 10,000 employees in Canada alone. They told the committee that in terms of the work that they performed on the arrive scam, which was just over \$400,000, instead of working with the federal public service, which the government is

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so proud of and talks about its pride in how professional the public service is, which I agree with, it bypassed that and directed that KPMG should at all times work with GC Strategies, not the government itself, not the ministry itself and not the professionals but GC Strategies. In my opinion, it really gives new meaning to the whole concept of really being aligned closely, professionally and in a friendly way with the Government of Canada, the Prime Minister and his minister.

I could speak for hours on the issue, but, for all of those reasons, Conservatives have impressed upon the entire House the importance of compelling Kristian Firth to come to the House to answer the questions that not only parliamentarians are demanding answers to but that Canadians deserve to know the truth about.

• (1810)

Mr. John Brassard: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would love to hear the member for Brantford—Brant speak for another 20 minutes, so I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House to allow him to do that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I already hear a no, so there is no unanimous consent.

I do want to remind members that, if they are looking for unanimous consent, they should be collaborating with other parties to make sure they have it before they come to the floor.

On another point of order, the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, I am rising today to inform the House that the finance committee will be debating a motion to have Canada's premiers testify on the Prime Minister's 23% carbon tax increase. Eight provincial premiers are now opposed to the Prime Minister's carbon tax. I hope all parties will vote yes to allow premiers to testify on the Prime Minister's carbon tax scam.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Can the hon. member make a connection to the Standing Orders on that?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Speaker, it is 53(3).

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): If members want to rise on a point of order or want to speak to one of the Standing Orders, they should be referencing that standing order. Also, members can raise during debate the information they want to bring forward and make it related to that point of debate.

Questions and comments, the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Government Orders

• (1815)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I indicated earlier, we just had a unanimous consent motion that in essence shows very clearly how the government demonstrates accountability and transparency, even on this particular file of wanting Mr. Firth to come before the bar. This is nothing new. We have been consistent with regard to accountability and transparency, no matter how the member opposite, in particular, tries to mislead Canadians with certain types of assertions.

Would the member not agree that it would be most beneficial for Canadians if we approached this issue in terms of how we can better prevent these types of things from taking place in the future as opposed to playing the blatant partisan politics that we see coming from the Conservative Party? I think Canadians deserve an honest answer to that.

Mr. Larry Brock: Madam Speaker, what I think Canadians really deserve, particularly from my colleague, is a little bit of remorse: “Yes, we are sorry as a government that we have allowed this to happen, that we have allowed a two-person company working out of a basement doing no IT work to collect upwards of \$60 million in contracts.” That is not a partisan point; that is a fact. It is a fact that the Liberals should be embarrassed about, and it is a fact, quite frankly, that they should be apologizing to Canadians for. They need to show that they are doing better.

To answer the member's initial question about—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member will have to add his comment somewhere else. However, I do want to remind the hon. parliamentary secretary, who tended to be heckling during that time, to wait until questions and comments if he has anything to add.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Beauport—Limouilou.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Julie Vignola (Beauport—Limouilou, BQ): Madam Speaker, we have been working on ArriveCAN for several months. I am looking at this not from a partisan angle, but for the long term. For the long term, we seem to have a process that does not work. If we do not fix it, it will not work any better, no matter which party forms government.

Does my colleague believe that the purpose of everything we are doing right now is to improve the process and also to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used wisely and responsibly?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Brock: Madam Speaker, I could not agree more, and I thank the member from the Bloc for her question.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Seeing no other speakers, pursuant to an order made earlier today, the motion on the question of privilege standing in the name of the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes and the amendment standing in the name of the member for Kingston and the Islands are deemed withdrawn.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House you would find unanimous consent at this time to call it 6:30 so we can begin the take-note debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 21, 2024, the House will now resolve itself into a committee of the whole to consider Government Business No. 38.

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1820)

[*English*]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 38, Mrs. Carol Hughes in the chair)

The Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members how the proceedings will unfold.

Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments. Pursuant to order made on Thursday, March 21, members may divide their time with another member.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the debate may be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 12 periods of 20 minutes each. The Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

[*English*]

We will now begin tonight's take-note debate accordingly.

Hon. Gudie Hutchings (for the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons) moved:

That this committee take note of softwood lumber.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important take-note debate and to speak about the significant actions the government has been taking to support Canada's interests in the ongoing softwood lumber dispute with the United States.

Government Orders[*Translation*]

First of all, I can assure members that we are in constant dialogue with the U.S. government at all levels to convey the importance of reaching a satisfactory resolution to this long-running dispute. We have made it abundantly clear that Canada believes a negotiated settlement with the U.S. is in the best interests of both our countries. However, we will only accept an agreement that is in the best interests of our softwood lumber industry, our workers and our communities. Such an agreement has to make sense for both sides.

Reaching an agreement that protects Canadian jobs is a priority, because the forestry industry plays a vital role in the Canadian economy. Domestically, it helps create jobs for hundreds of thousands of Canadians and generates significant revenues for rural and indigenous communities across the country. What is more, it provides essential commodities that are used in a multitude of industries, from construction to paper to lumber products.

In Quebec specifically, the forestry industry is a major economic pillar that supports tens of thousands of direct and indirect jobs in various regions such as Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the north shore and the Gaspé. It also contributes to the vitality of regional communities by providing economic opportunities and promoting regional development. In short, the forestry industry is much more than an economic sector. It is a key aspect of the identity and prosperity of Canada and Quebec.

Historically, the United States has always relied on imports of Canadian lumber to fill the gap between its domestic production capacity and domestic demand for lumber. Canada has always been a stable and reliable supplier of high-quality products for American consumers. For example, imports from Canada have historically met about one-third of U.S. demand for softwood lumber. In 2022, 90% of Canada's softwood lumber exports went to the United States, at a value of \$12 billion. Now more than ever, Canadian softwood lumber products are essential for addressing insufficient production and the affordable housing shortage in the United States.

It is clearly counterproductive to impose unwarranted duties on such a large portion of U.S. consumption when the U.S. is trying to combat rising inflation and housing costs, which is also an issue in the United States.

The U.S. National Association of Home Builders has indicated that duties on Canadian softwood lumber exacerbate already high lumber prices and directly increase costs to consumers. American legislators on both sides of the political spectrum have even written to their government to say that a softwood lumber agreement is key to predictability in the housing market. Maintaining unfair duties on Canadian softwood lumber directly contradicts the United States' goal of making housing more affordable.

What is more, these unfair duties benefit third parties to the detriment of our supply chains and our very resilient and integrated economies. Since imposing these duties for the first time in the current round of this dispute, rather than protecting jobs and companies at home, the United States has seen a surge in overseas imports from suppliers in Asia and Europe to fill the gap between supply and demand in the U.S.

● (1825)

[*English*]

It is therefore easy to see that a negotiated settlement, which would bring stability and predictability to the softwood lumber industry, is the best outcome for everyone involved. That is what the current government has consistently advocated for, and that is what we will continue to do.

Therefore, it is truly unfortunate that certain businesses in the U.S. lumber industry encourage some American decision-makers to impose duties on Canada's lumber exports and to refrain from meaningfully engaging in negotiations, preferring the continued disruption to lumber supply caused by these duties, to the detriment of U.S. consumers. The domestic U.S. lumber industry, as a pretext, contends that Canada is responsible for injury to its producers. Time and time again, neutral and impartial international tribunals have found that Canadian softwood lumber producers respect our international obligations.

[*Translation*]

Nevertheless, our government continues to encourage the United States to return to the negotiating table to find a mutually acceptable agreement. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development have repeatedly stated that Canada is ready to hold constructive discussions on realistic solutions that would be acceptable to both parties. Minister Ng regularly discusses the softwood lumber dispute with her U.S. counterpart, Trade Representative Katherine Tai. Just recently, the minister stressed the importance of expeditious and impartial dispute settlement procedures under CUSMA as a means of resolving the situation. Unfortunately, we have yet to see any willingness on the part of the U.S. to commit to a lasting resolution of this long-running dispute.

Furthermore, the Minister of Foreign Affairs raised this issue with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, while senior Canadian officials, including our ambassador to the United States, Kirsten Hillman, remain in constant contact with their U.S. counterparts. As we repeatedly continue to urge the United States to negotiate mutually acceptable terms, we are not just standing idly by. Canada is defending our industry, our communities and our workers and is actively using every other means available to resolve their disputes, including the remedies provided under international trade agreements, while supporting Canada's softwood lumber producers and the communities that depend on this sector. Our efforts have yielded results in the past and we are getting there again.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Throughout the entire process, we have worked and will continue to work closely with provinces, territories, indigenous partners and industry stakeholders to ensure a united pan-Canadian approach to the dispute.

As recently announced by the Prime Minister, the government has renewed its commitment to a team Canada approach and is engaging with the United States to ensure the continued prosperity and well-being of Canadians.

- (1830)

[Translation]

Our strategy for ending the dispute centres on legal victories, strong partnerships and relationship building. With our allies in Canada and abroad, we are confident that we can reach a solution with the United States that benefits producers, workers and communities on both sides of the border.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Chair, it was wonderful to hear PMO speech number two.

It is interesting that we are debating softwood lumber, which is something that has been going on for eight years. It has cost tens of thousands of Canadian jobs, and the United States is holding 10 billion dollars' worth of duties, which is crippling our softwood lumber industry. The Minister of International Trade does not participate in the debate; that shows how important the issue actually is for the corrupt Liberal government.

The trade committee produced a report that said that the only way the softwood lumber dispute would be resolved is through direct head of government negotiations. Therefore, after eight years, the failure for there to be a resolution is because of the failure of the Prime Minister on this file, just like on every other file. Does the member agree with the trade committee that the reason the dispute is not resolved is the failure of head-to-head government negotiation, and that this lies at the feet of the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, this has been an ongoing problem since the 1980s. I believe we are on the fifth round of negotiations around softwood lumber. It is an important issue in the province of Quebec, and it is certainly one I am following closely. Indeed, we have seen the Prime Minister and our ministers engage very closely with their counterparts on this issue.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I think this is such an important issue, especially where I live in Port Alberni and the Alberni Valley, and on Vancouver Island. It is an issue where we actually need all sides to work together. This should not be a partisan issue. This should be all of us hammering Washington.

Over the last four decades plus, we have seen both Liberal and Conservative approaches in terms of their failed resolution to the softwood lumber dispute. The Liberal approach can be described as winning in court, but still losing as the U.S. has continued to levy tariffs against Canadian softwood lumber. The Conservative approach can be best described and characterized as appeasement through agreements, where Canada would not only impose an ex-

port tax on softwood lumber, but in return, the U.S. would remove its duties.

What new approach is the government going to bring? The sense of urgency is real. We have the first new mill in 15 years on Vancouver Island in my community, and it is struggling right now. The tariffs are crippling, and the sense of urgency is real.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, I have been following this dispute since I came into this House as a member of Parliament. The thing that struck me was, at the core of the long-standing dispute, the differences in how our two governments handle forest lands and the product thereof. In Canada, they are public lands and there is a stumpage fee that is charged to companies. In the United States, they are privately held interest.

I think that basic decision, which must have been made at some point many years ago, shows the difference. Here in Canada, this is a natural resource that belongs to the country, whereas the United States chose to go a different way. As it turns out, it is hurting its own citizens and consumers by not availing itself of Canadian lumber.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, that is still not good enough. We are looking for a strategy. The whole reason we are staying here late tonight is a sense of urgency. I am still not hearing anything new from the government.

As I cited earlier, there is a company in my community that employs literally hundreds of workers. There is already a fibre supply issue being dealt with in my community. We know the mills in my riding still need more money to retool and new markets. The government is moving at the pace of molasses, despite the fact that this is having such a huge financial impact on my community. The multiplier effect is massive.

Catalyst Port Alberni Mill, one of the mills in my riding, contributes 15% of the tax base to Port Alberni, just the mill itself. It is critical that we get a sense of urgency.

What new ideas are the Liberals going to talk about tonight?

- (1835)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, the team Canada approach that was critical in our government being able to arrive at NAFTA 2.0 was one that was widely hailed as being extremely innovative.

When I think of U.S. consumers and producers using Canadian softwood lumber, many of them are not aware and many of their state representatives are not aware of how important those industries are to them. The win-win solution for both sides is to understand that there is a mutual win when we work together, our two countries, in making the best use of this industry.

Government Orders

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Chair, the NDP members, particularly from B.C., should talk to their provincial government about getting more access to fibre. That is entirely a provincial problem and one of the NDP's own making in British Columbia. On the one hand, we have NDP governments limiting access to fibre, and on the other hand we have a Liberal government that is limiting our ability to market the softwood lumber around the world, particularly to the United States.

I do recall something that was called a “bromance” between the Prime Minister and Barack Obama when he was the prime minister. It was a complete failure by the current Prime Minister to get a softwood lumber agreement when Obama was in power.

What does the member have to say about that?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, I believe the hon. member is talking about the former president, Barack Obama, and not a prime minister. I get it that he is speaking to the strong relationship that the two leaders had at that time, and indeed it continues as a friendship, as with the current president.

As we know, it is not just friendship alone that is instrumental in international trade agreements. There are many interests at stake. I think that is where the team Canada approach is a very important one, where we work federally, provincially and territorially, and also with industry partners, again, reaching out to counterparts in the United States who may not realize that there are certain private interests that are trying to capitalize on this trade dispute to their own detriment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Chair, my colleague talked about a team Canada approach. The problem with that is that the federal government does not listen to the province that is paying the most in terms of U.S. softwood lumber tariffs.

Quebec accounts for 20% of Canada's softwood lumber exports to the United States, but it pays 48% of the tariffs. The federal government never wanted to lead the softwood lumber fight. Its main strategy in the dispute with the Americans was to protect the automotive industry to ensure that Canada can sell electric vehicles to the United States and benefit from the same tax credits. The federal government has never wanted to lead the fight. That is symptomatic of the problem that we have. We do not have enough leverage. Not one Liberal member is capable of defending Quebec's forestry industry.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Chair, I really appreciate my colleague's question, but I think he has it wrong.

This government has put a lot of effort into defending the forestry industry in co-operation with the Government of Quebec. At the same time, we are supporting the industry with many investments both in the industry and in communities.

• (1840)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Chair, I am going to be sharing my time with the member for Prince Albert.

What we have here with the softwood lumber dispute is—

The Deputy Chair: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to share his time?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, what we do is look at the softwood lumber dispute, but not in the vacuum of the dispute itself, because this is now an eight-year dispute. Within 79 days of Prime Minister Harper being elected in 2006, the softwood lumber dispute was resolved, and we had lumber peace for nine years. That agreement expired, and then the current incompetent government took over. We are now eight years down the road, and \$10 billion in duties have been collected and tens of thousands of jobs have been lost. If we actually look at the bankruptcies in the forestry sector, since 2016, 183 companies have gone bankrupt in the forestry sector as a result of countervailing and anti-dumping duties and as a result of the complete failure of the Liberal government and the Prime Minister to resolve this.

The consequences just continue. In 2024, at the Terrace Bay pulp mill, 400 jobs were lost. At West Fraser, in February 2024, 175 jobs were lost. In 2023, at the Canfor Prince George pulp and paper mill, 300 jobs were lost. These jobs are continuously being lost because of the absolute mismanagement of this issue. If members do not believe me that this issue has been mismanaged, all they have to do is look at the trade committee's report on this and the recommendation in that report, with which five Liberal members agreed. Five Liberal members actually agreed with the statement that “an agreement with the United States regarding...softwood lumber...ultimately will occur only through direct head-of-government negotiation.” That is the recommendation from the committee, which included five Liberals.

The fact that there has not been a resolution is because there has been a complete failure at the head-of-state level. This falls squarely at the feet of the Prime Minister. It is his job and his duty to resolve the dispute. He has failed miserably, and the Liberals keep coming back with these old bromides, like the “team Canada approach”. It has been eight years. Their so-called “team Canada approach” has produced absolutely no results.

In fact, it is getting worse, because the government has so badly mismanaged the trading relationship with the United States that we are just not as relevant as we once were. We are now the United States' third-largest trading partner, as a result of the incompetence of the Liberal government, and that has consequences, because we are not as important a trading partner of the United States as we once were.

The Liberals keep saying that trade is up. Trade is not up with the United States. Trade is up by price because of inflation, but the volume of trade with the United States is down. Again, the only people responsible for this are the Prime Minister and the trade minister, who is not even here for the debate on softwood lumber—

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry. The hon. member knows full well he is not to indicate who is in the House and who is not in the House.

Government Orders

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, the trade minister has not participated in this debate. It was not her who led off debate for the government. It shows us how important this issue actually is for the government, that the trade minister does not lead off debate on a simmering eight-year softwood lumber dispute.

It is worse than this. We have declined as the United States' trading partner, but we also have continuous own goals in the trading relationship. We have to look at things like Bill C-282, the supply management bill. That did not win us any friends in the United States, and now the Liberals are saying they are going to unilaterally impose a digital services tax, which the United States is adamantly against.

We have declined as a trading partner because of the incompetence of the government to manage the trading relationship. The Liberals bring in all of these trade irritants, and they wonder why they cannot resolve this dispute. It all goes back to the incompetence of the government, the incompetence of the Prime Minister and the incompetence of the trade minister. They are the people who are responsible for this, no one else. The buck stops with them.

I would love to see the Prime Minister come and contribute to this debate. I would love to see the trade minister come and contribute to this debate, but I suspect I will not, because it is actually not important for them to do so. That is what is causing all of the job losses we are seeing. We have gone from 33% market share down to 26%, and that is old data. That is actually from 2022. It is probably worse. We are probably down to 24%.

This is haemorrhaging jobs in British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec and the Maritimes, and the government's response is to not have the minister lead off debate and to talk about its team Canada approach. It is not doing anything. It will not do anything. Even the Liberals on the trade committee know it will only be resolved by Prime Minister-to-President negotiation. Unfortunately, we are snookered, because our leader has nothing to offer on this.

• (1845)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I do not want just keeping putting my hands up and saying that the government cannot figure it out and that we should walk away. I do believe in a team Canada approach, but the government has not truly done that. I think about members like my colleague who just spoke, and other colleagues in the House who are impacted, as their constituents and workers are impacted by the softwood lumber agreement. They have never corralled us all together and said for us to get organized, to head to Washington, to get into the regional branches of the Canada-U.S. Parliamentary association like PNWER in the Pacific Northwest region and to get out to meet with those state governors and state legislatures. They have not done that. There has not been a full-court press.

Does my colleague agree with me that there needs to be a full-court press, not just Prime Minister to president, and that it needs to be now? Some people in the U.S., on that side of the border, do not understand the ramifications of what they are doing to their own people, never mind to Canadians.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, the team Canada approach is one part of that, which should take place. The Liberals are failing miserably on that because they are not getting that groundswell of

support in the United States to bring that pressure upward. The real issue is that, ultimately, the American president has to force the United States softwood lumber industry into an agreement because it has legal rights to continue to pursue action. Those rights have to be negotiated away. That is what happened when we had lumber peace under former Prime Minister Harper. The only way to do that is to get the president involved.

The President of the United States will not get involved in this dispute because the Prime Minister has bungled the relationship so badly and our trading relationship has declined so precipitously that he could not be bothered. The only way to fix it would be to change the leader at the top. Thank goodness, when there is a carbon tax election, we will fix it. We will get the softwood lumber dispute resolved quickly; mark my words.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I listened to the speech of the hon. colleague with great interest. Regarding the international tribunals, I would like to hear his comments about how the international trade dispute mechanism works or does not work.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, the Liberals keep coming back to the possibility that they maybe might win a dispute here or a dispute there, and that would resolve the issue because it has resolved it in the past. What the member does not know is that the United States used to group these disputes together. If one was won, it would say that it would resolve all of them. However, it is not doing that now. It is saying that it does not care if we won the dispute from 2019, because we are then going to have to litigate the disputes from 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. It is ragging the puck. It is not interested in resolving the disputes.

We can get these little victories, but they will not matter because of the mismanagement of the relationship by the Liberal government. The only way we will resolve this, more than ever, is with some real leadership. Unfortunately for Canadians and for the softwood lumber sector, we have no leadership in the Prime Minister, the missing trade minister or the Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Chair, my colleague is bragging about the agreement that Mr. Harper negotiated, but I would just like to point out to him that people in the forestry sector lost \$1 billion at the time. A billion dollars in ransom money was left on the table, so it was not exactly the best deal.

I have a fairly simple question for him. Given that disputes with the United States are ongoing, would he agree that a mechanism is needed that would at least give people in the forestry sector access to liquidity, since significant portions of their earnings are being left in the hands of foreign governments?

• (1850)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Madam Chair, I fundamentally disagree. We had a good deal that returned almost all of the countervailing and anti-dumping duties to the softwood lumber industry. It was able to use that money to innovate. In addition, we secured market access in the United States and had lumber peace for nine years. That is a great deal. It is a deal that the Bloc Québécois will never sign because it will never be government.

We have to get the Prime Minister, or a new one, who will come soon, to find ways to repair the relationship with the United States. The only way we are going to resolve this dispute is if there is political will to do it. To get that political will, we have to repair the relationship.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Chair, I rise today to speak to the softwood lumber dispute between the United States and Canada, and the over \$8 billion in tariffs that the Americans have collected from Canadian businesses.

As adviser to the leader of the official opposition on Canada-U.S. relations, I wish to give my unique perspective on what I have learned in Washington and on the challenges that the Liberal government has created in reaching a negotiated deal.

This situation is one of the Prime Minister's own doing, and it is reflective of his lack of care for the forestry sector as a whole and for the thousands of Canadians who are impacted.

There has been \$8 billion in tariffs collected as a direct result of the Liberal government's failure to prioritize Canadian workers, indigenous communities and our natural resource sector. It did not need to be like that. There is a desire on both sides of the border to resolve this matter, as Americans and Canadians recognize the importance of the industry. There is no excuse for not reaching a negotiated deal.

Over the last 42 years, Canada and the United States have reached agreements on softwood lumber. The most recent agreement, softwood lumber agreement five, was in place from 2006 to 2016.

SLA 5 was in place because the former Conservative government understood the importance of the forestry sector to Canada. We understood that the forestry sector was mutually beneficial to both Canada and the United States. When we went to Washington, we made sure that we worked collaboratively with our American partners to reach an agreement.

The Liberal government has done the exact opposite. It has completely ignored the situation and has refused to address the dispute at the highest levels of government. When the agreement expired in 2016, the Liberal government should have made it a priority to negotiate a resolution with the Americans, but instead, it delayed and looked the other way.

Government Orders

As the years passed, the hon. ministers of international trade blamed the American government, claiming there was no desire to resolve the dispute in Washington. I wish to contest that point. Over the years, American legislators, associations and companies have publicly made it quite clear that they want the softwood lumber dispute resolved, and for good reasons.

The United States does not produce enough lumber for its own needs. In a letter dated May 17, 2021, addressed to the United States Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, over 90 members of both parties in the House of Representatives urged the U.S. federal government to resolve the matter with the Government of Canada, saying, "We now call upon you to represent American interests on this critical issue by pursuing a balanced agreement with Canada. We, as Members of Congress, stand ready to discuss this issue and potential solutions with you."

Additionally, on May 12, 2021, members of the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations wrote to the Secretary of Commerce and USTR Tai, saying, "We write to urge you to take action to resolve the longstanding trade dispute between the U.S. and Canada on softwood lumber" and also saying, "These imports are vital to support the ongoing housing boom".

It has not been American denial. It has been the Liberal government's refusal to acknowledge the issue at the highest levels of government and to advocate effectively for a solution to the softwood dispute.

Most interestingly is that the Standing Committee on International Trade published a report in November 2023 analyzing the problem and the possible remedies. During those hearings, Government of Canada officials noted that the Minister of International Trade raised the issue of the current dispute directly with President Biden. She raised the issue.

According to officials at Global Affairs Canada, the Prime Minister also emphasized the harm of American tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber producers and employees, yet in the report, recommendation 4 states, "achieving an agreement with the United States regarding trade in softwood lumber products ultimately will occur only through direct head-of-government negotiation", and it also says, "the...softwood lumber dispute should be made a high-level priority in dealings with the U.S."

They had the President of the United States in Ottawa last March, yet again, the Liberal government failed to advocate for Canadian jobs and Canadian interests adequately.

This report, the timeline and the situation we currently find ourselves in demonstrate that the Prime Minister has routinely failed to resolve the dispute and has failed to make the interests of Canadian workers a priority when dealing with the United States.

Government Orders

The previous Conservative government successfully negotiated a deal, yet the Prime Minister has failed to provide the attention this dispute so desperately requires over the last five years.

Why has he continued to fail to negotiate a deal if these Canadian jobs are so important to the Prime Minister? Why does the Liberal Government not give the issue the attention it desperately needs?

The softwood lumber dispute will not resolve itself overnight. It requires actual leadership to get it done. We, as Conservatives, know that we can get it done. We also know that the Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

• (1855)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, there were a couple of things in his speech. This is something that is not going to happen overnight, but indeed, it has been a long-standing dispute for a number of reasons. However, Canada has won in the arena of the neutral international trade dispute organizations.

I would like to hear his comments about that, and also hear why Conservatives voted against supports, time and time again, that our government put forward for the softwood lumber industry.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Chair, I give the member credit for being here tonight. I appreciate her being here and showing interest in the industry, even though it is not in her riding.

Twice in the current Liberal government's history, it came close to negotiating a deal. Both times, it required the Prime Minister to step up and get it across the finish line. He had a chance in 2021, and he did not do it. He had a chance in 2017, when it was down to disputes over the amount of wood over quota and lack of supply in the U.S. that Canada could fulfill. Ambassador MacNaughton almost got it done. If the Prime Minister had paid attention, it probably would have been done. That is the problem. When it was done in 2006, President Bush, Jr., and Prime Minister Harper sat in a room, negotiated and got it done, president to prime minister, prime minister to president.

In reality, it does not matter what one does for the team Canada approach with regard to this file; it comes back to those two people having the political will to do it. The Prime Minister has not shown that political will.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague, a fellow member of the Standing Committee on International Trade in the last Parliament. I think we were both on the committee together in this Parliament, and I believe he was there when I moved the softwood lumber motion he just quoted. We have even been on one or two missions to Washington together. We advocate for this issue there a lot.

Financial support for oil is in the billions of dollars; for forestry, it is in the millions of dollars, and most of that is in the form of loans. Does my colleague agree that there is a bit of an imbalance here?

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Chair, I appreciate the fact that the member took the initiative to show up in Washington and to work on behalf of all Canadians, including those from Quebec.

In fact, the forestry workers in Quebec should be the most upset with regard to this file. They made the changes to their system to meet the requirements that the U.S. set, yet the government has not been able to take the sacrifices and the changes they made in Quebec and to sell it across the line. What happened? They still pay a tariff. It still comes back to president to prime minister and prime minister to president.

If the Prime Minister does not know what he is talking about, if he does not have the political will or does not have the initiative to support Quebec forestry workers, I will guarantee one thing: prime minister Poilievre would.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member knows he is not to name individuals.

The hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, the Conservatives keep going back to when they were in power. They gave away a billion dollars U.S. of collected funds, which legitimately belonged to Canadian softwood lumber producers, and about half of that amount went to the U.S. lobby group that started the whole thing. In the agreement, they sent half a billion dollars to those lobbyists. Does my colleague think that was a good deal? Is that what Conservatives want to bring back?

Conservatives taxed our producers with that deal, and I have not heard them come forward with a proposal that is not going to revert back to their failed deal when it was Prime Minister Harper or Prime Minister Mulroney. That is 42 years of failure. They cannot absolve themselves of it.

• (1900)

Mr. Randy Hoback: Madam Chair, the reality is we had 10 years of bankability in the forestry sector under the Harper government. Right now, there is \$8 billion tied up with the U.S. government. A lot of that belongs to first nations. That money could have been used in first nations.

The Prime Minister has not shown up. Does he care? He does not care. I am trying to get that point across to people here in Canada. If we had a Prime Minister who actually cared, this deal could have been done in 2016 or 2017. He does not care. The reality is that Canadians pay for it. The Prime Minister is not worth the cost.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Chair, on this eclipse day, I rise to take part in a take-note debate, not about the eclipse—we are probably the only place not talking about it—but about the ongoing softwood lumber crisis that has been going on for some 40 years. I have the impression, however, and I say this candidly, that I am wasting my time. I will explain why.

On February 1, 2024, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced plans to substantially increase the countervailing and anti-dumping duties it levies on Canadian and Quebec softwood lumber. In the days that followed, shortly thereafter, I requested an emergency debate in the House. We all know the procedure. A written request must be submitted and then it must be verbally requested. The Speaker, of course, refused, saying that other avenues had to be explored first, that a take-note debate should happen first. I thought, okay, I will try for a take-note debate. I went to see my House leader. The Bloc Québécois said it wanted such a debate, and negotiations began. Like the messiah we were waiting for, we finally got it this evening, on April 8, more than two months later.

That is how much interest the government has in this issue. When the Minister of International Trade attended the World Trade Organization's ministerial conference in Abu Dhabi on March 2, did she take advantage of the opportunity to raise this issue? It was not on the agenda. Is that the great team Canada approach that the government is always going on about? I think that I will stick with team Quebec. I will be better off. It is more reliable.

This crisis has been going on for 30 years. The ups and downs continue. On November 24, 2021, the U.S. administration announced that the tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber would double in 2022, going from an average of 9% to 18%. A week or two later, we held a take-note debate here in the House. Admittedly, two weeks is better than two months. The problem is that the forestry industry is not the oil industry or the automotive industry, in other words, it is not a strategic industry for the rest of Canada. While the federal government provides billions of dollars in support for the Canadian oil industry, it provides only millions for the forestry industry, mainly in the form of loans. Lumber will never be one of Ottawa's top priorities, despite the lumbering rhetoric we hear from key officials in successive governments in Ottawa. In fact, that may be the only time lumber is given any attention. The trade war over softwood lumber is an old and never-ending issue. There have been countless missed opportunities to resolve this problem, even though Quebec has done what it takes to meet the international trade requirements. This issue has been ongoing for 40 years.

Let us come back to the last episode of December 16, 2021. We know that a month earlier, the U.S. government announced an increase in countervailing duties. Taking advantage of the fact that the House of Commons had just adjourned for the holidays, the government disclosed the contents of the ministerial mandate letters. The House being adjourned, the opposition cannot react, cannot ask questions, and that is when we saw the mandate letters. As we know, this is an exercise where the Prime Minister puts in writing the priorities he wants to see his ministers work on. When these letters came out, I naturally acquainted myself with the one dealing with my file, the letter for the Minister of International Trade. I saw

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that there was an entire paragraph devoted to the challenges of U.S. protectionism. I thought that was great. Then I looked for the words “softwood lumber”. I never did find them. I reread the letter four times. They were not there. I did not misread the letter. The words were not there. Ottawa is not even pretending any more that the problem exists.

In 2021 and 2022, when the U.S. Congress was debating the possibility of offering a tax credit for the sale of electric vehicles, but only those assembled in the U.S., which would have had serious consequences, the international trade minister organized a visit to Washington. We supported the government in that. She wrote a letter to the U.S. Senate threatening countermeasures if Congress decided to go ahead. In the case of softwood lumber, however, there was no visit to Washington, no letter, no announcement of retaliation, no assistance programs for the industry; nothing, nyet, a big fat “O” as in Ottawa.

● (1905)

The forestry industry accounts for 11% of Quebec's exports. Our forests are a source of economic development, jobs and government revenue in the form of taxes. The two members seated behind me are actually from forestry regions. They could talk at length about how important forests are to their regions. The tariff war hurts virtually all of the parties. It could increase the price of wood in Quebec and Canada significantly. It could threaten our businesses and the thousands of jobs directly related to the sale of wood to the United States.

Things will be no better in the United States. The National Association of Home Builders in the United States understands that. I have met with association members in Washington, and they understand that very well. They are against these anti-dumping duties because housing prices will go up, denying more Americans access to home ownership despite the Biden administration's claim that access to housing is one of its priorities. Who comes out ahead? The American lumber lobby and a few American politicians attempting to make political hay.

In the aftermath of tariff wars, Canada has repeatedly filed complaints with WTO and North American Free Trade Agreement tribunals and has always won its case. I hear representatives of the governing party tell us today that Canada is going to win again. It is true that we will win again. Spoiler alert—we are going to win again. We might not know the exact moment, much like with the eclipse earlier, but we know that we are going to win. I am announcing it. It is scientific too.

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In May 2020, the WTO stated that Washington had not acted objectively or fairly and that its tariffs were unlawful. Free trade agreements impose time limits to prevent disputes from dragging on for an excessive amount of time. The problem is that delay tactics are common. Knowing that they are going to lose their case, the Americans are using every trick in the book to slow the arbitration tribunals' work. For example, they file petitions to waste time or drag their feet when appointing arbitrators. As time goes by, the situation facing our forestry industry keeps deteriorating. We are losing jobs. We are losing money. We cannot modernize. It is as simple as that.

It makes no difference that Ottawa claims to want to challenge the decisions in court; the problem is not going to go away. That said, there have been missed opportunities everywhere. When NAFTA was renegotiated a few years ago, Ottawa could have seized that opportunity to plug the gaps in the litigation process, to strengthen the framework, to avoid excessively long delays when time is our enemy. CUSMA was passed by Parliament in March 2020, yet this issue was not settled.

That was not the only missed opportunity. As I proposed in the House, CUSMA could have included a permanent advisory council on softwood lumber. That would have ensured ongoing monitoring. Not only does the Quebec plan fully pass the free-trade test, it was even designed specifically for that purpose in 2013. This is a good example of what it costs us to not be at the negotiating table defending our own reality. Meanwhile, Ottawa tells us that softwood lumber is a priority and that it is vigorously defending it. This is an eclipse, an eclipse even more obvious than the one we saw today.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague for such an interesting speech.

I do have some questions. We heard the Conservatives say that their party negotiated an agreement when Mr. Harper was in power. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that agreement.

• (1910)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, this agreement has been very problematic. It has divided the sector and the regions, and has objectively cost the sector. I recognize that progress has been made. For example, the Conservatives have not said that the softwood lumber crisis started because of the carbon tax. I will give them that. At this point, it is fair game to say that things were going better when they were in power, except that the softwood lumber crisis has been going on for 40 years. In some cases, they tried to plug the holes, but they got it wrong. This has been going on for 40 years, and that is the crux of the problem.

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Madam Chair, I remember when this first came up. Quebec had done the right thing. It changed its process. It changed the process it used to collect fees from logging within the province to comply with U.S. requirements. It relied on the federal government to negotiate on its behalf, whereas the Irvings, out of New Brunswick, said they were not going to trust the government and would do their own negotiation. The result was that the people who had relied on the federal gov-

ernment paid a tariff of around 21% or 23%, or somewhere within that range, and for the Irvings it was around 3% to 5%.

Would the member like to explain how he feels and how Quebec forestry producers must feel knowing the government let them down so badly? The proof is in the difference in the tariffs between what the Irvings paid and what other producers had to pay.

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, Quebec is obviously tired of these punitive tariffs, these countervailing duties that keep coming back. As my colleague knows, when we talk to American elected officials, they too would like this to end, but often these decisions are made by the administrations. Many will say that they look forward to the court's decision and that will be good, except for some states where this topic is more political.

I remember one meeting with the U.S. trade representative, they assumed and admitted that this was a political issue. People from his office said that a number of forestry producers are fiercely in favour of countervailing duties, but the opponents of these countervailing duties are home builders. This raises a major electoral issue.

Nevertheless, we have the burden of proof: We need to show the Americans that this penalizes them as well. This certainly penalizes Quebecers and Canadians, but it also penalizes Americans. It is up to us to do the work now.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, my colleague is trying to work on some solutions to move forward.

Back in 2006, the Bloc supported the Harper softwood agreement, which saddled Canadian softwood lumber producers with both an American import quota and a Canadian export tax, while paying the U.S. lumber lobby half a billion dollars. Does my colleague support reverting back to that approach, which creates more taxes?

The member is right, in that the Conservatives have not blamed this on the carbon tax yet, but we are still early in the debate, and I imagine that is coming. However, does he support the approach where, I think, the Conservatives would tax the axe if the Conservatives were to get their way?

[Translation]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, my colleague made a play on words when he said “tax the axe” instead of the Conservative's usual “axe the tax” line. I was listening to the French interpretation, which was probably not as punchy as the original English. I will have a chat with my colleague about this later.

Having said that, no, I do not support the Conservative approach at all. We do not. We have said it before, and we have no problem saying it again: This agreement was problematic during the Harper era. It was bad for people, for the industry and for everyone. It ended up just deferring the problem. That is not the approach we want at all.

We are after a long-term solution. Some things can be done in the short term. For example, Ottawa can invest in secondary and tertiary processing to reduce our dependence on exports to the United States.

However, I do think I provided a good summary of the many missed diplomatic opportunities in negotiations and meetings with the United States. Canada could have threatened retaliation against the United States, but never did. The Canada-United States-Mexico trade agreement is supposed to be renegotiated in 2025, if I am not mistaken. Those negotiations may end up presenting an opportunity worth seizing.

• (1915)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Chair, I thank my colleague for his very interesting speech.

We know full well that the softwood lumber dispute is causing considerable harm. I would like my colleague to say more about this harm and about the impact that the U.S. administration's findings and decisions since February 1, 2024 are having on the softwood lumber industry.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, it is simple, quite simple in fact.

First of all, forestry accounts for 11% of Quebec's exports. That alone makes it an important industry and an economic driver in the regions. Such is the case for my colleague's region, which was ravaged by forest fires almost a year ago. How time flies. It stands as a reminder of how important forestry is in her riding. I recall that she was often away from the House because she had to be there, on the ground. It cannot have been easy, and I want to assure her again that she has my support; I congratulate her on the work she has done in this regard.

That said, the forestry industry is extremely important to the regions and to workers. Yes, cases have been won, and the next case will be won as well. However, and I must stress this point, in the time leading up to the tribunal's ruling, all kinds of abuses are being committed to constantly push back or delay the date of the tribunal's ruling, and this is where the harm is being done. This delay is creating a situation where our industry fails to modernize, becomes less competitive, keeps losing money and workers, and is heading for bankruptcy. This is how this situation leads to absolutely devastating consequences.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, here we are again, and it is back to the same old blaming and pointing of fingers.

For 42 years, Conservative and Liberal governments have been failing the forestry sector miserably and eroding our market share in the United States. This is causing inflation for American citizens.

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Most Americans are not even aware that the lobbyists who are blocking this are actually causing more harm to their own people.

Does my colleague agree that Canada needs to do a better job of educating American citizens about the impact of this dispute? As well, does my colleague agree that there has not really been a team Canada approach? We have not been flooding the United States and those states that are impacted with information. Does he believe that we need to have a full-court press on this issue?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay: Madam Chair, I want to begin by saying that my colleague is probably right about that.

On various missions to the U.S., including missions I went on with colleagues from other parties in the House, missions with the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group and in the meetings we held, whether with senators or U.S. representatives, I was pretty much the only one who raised this issue, which says a lot. It is worth mentioning.

Allow me to repeat some of the examples I gave earlier. Softwood lumber was not on the agenda at the WTO in Abu Dhabi last month. In 2021, when the increase in countervailing duties was announced, the government was busy panicking over the electric vehicle issue and did nothing at all about softwood lumber. The House adjourned, and the words “softwood lumber” were nowhere to be seen in the paragraph devoted to American protectionism. A few weeks after the announcement of new countervailing duties, and the words “softwood lumber” do not even appear in the paragraph about American protectionism in the mandate letters. I do not know what happened there.

Obviously, there is work to be done to raise awareness among the American citizens. The National Association of Home Builders in the United States is doing a remarkable job, but we need to pull out all the stops.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, it is an honour and privilege tonight to join this debate. This is a debate that is long overdue.

We need new ideas around the softwood lumber dispute and we need a different approach. Canada and the United States have been fighting over this softwood lumber issue for over 42 years, and it is time to stop the partisan politics. We need to work collectively in this place, come up with new ideas and take a team Canada approach, a united approach.

I live in a community that has been hit hard by this dispute, and believe me when I say that many of the people, the mills and the businesses in our community will not be here for another 42 years if this dispute carries on.

It is time to change our approach. Forty-two years might be a long career for someone working in our mills or in the forests, for people who are working hard, but I can tell members that they cannot wait another 42 years, and our communities will not make it.

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Mill workers, timber workers, lumber workers and forestry workers and those who are out felling in our forests are the backbone of the community where I live. We know that the fallers get up before dawn. They are ready to face some of Canada's most rugged and dangerous terrain. April 28 is a day of mourning, a day when we recognize those who are lost at work, and many of those people are foresters and mill workers. They do some of the most dangerous jobs in our country, and their work is crucial for Port Alberni, for the Alberni valley, for Vancouver Island and for the Canadian economy from coast to coast.

It is time to spend way more time ensuring that we tie this issue into the need for people to have a place to live. We have an opportunity to use softwood lumber to build homes. I think about some of the mills in my riding, like San Group, where they mill western red cedar, yellow cedar, Douglas fir, hemlock and spruce. We use softwood lumber for the roof over our heads, and we need to capitalize on that, given that we have a housing crisis.

Timing is also critical, because we have wildfires and a changing climate, which obviously threaten those mills and our lumber industry, and loggers and mill workers need economic security now more than ever before.

I will cite that the United States, in moving forward, is looking at raising duties and causing even more harm. The bigger problem is that it is not only harming Canadians but is actually harming its own citizens and people around the world. It is driving up inflation. We have an inflation crisis, which we know is global because of global supply chains, but this is an absolutely unnecessary cost and impediment to people in the United States south of the border. We need to do a better job of educating Americans about the impact that those lobbyists are having on their own people.

Again, after 42 years, 13 Liberal and Conservative governments, eight prime ministers, three temporary agreements, two prime ministers with a last name that starts with T, which I am not allowed to say here, we are still dealing with the same trade dispute. For decades, the Liberals and Conservatives have bickered back and forth about who has achieved the best deal, but we know it is who has achieved the best of a bad deal, which is really what it has come down to.

I appreciate that the Liberals have been in court fighting the harmful duties set up by the United States, but it is important to uphold the rules that form the foundation of our international agreements. This needs to be fixed. This cannot keep going.

Every time Canada wins in court, we see that we have proved that the actions of the United States are not only harmful but in fact illegal. The American government just shrugs it off, despite the fact that this is illegal. Then there are more tariffs, more jobs lost in communities and cities like Port Alberni and on the west coast and across Canada. They are gone for good, and they are hard to get back. The San Group opened the first mill in 15 years on the coast of British Columbia just in the last few years. Now it is being hit with this.

We know that conservatives would like to cost our lumber industry more than it can afford by bringing in these tariffs. They call it

“certainty”, but it costs our lumber industry and those producers more, and they are at an unfair playing advantage.

● (1920)

I was sitting with Ken McRae, four-time mayor, just the other day. He was the negotiator for the Canadian Paperworkers Union for over a decade and also ran the labour council in Port Alberni for five years. He told me that back in 1995, he wrote a letter to Jean Chrétien, who was prime minister at the time, asking him to make this a top priority. I have not seen that priority as part of the Canada-U.S. agreement.

As my friend from the Bloc said, he has gone on these trips across the border and I have gone to PNWER repeatedly to talk about the impact of the softwood lumber agreement on our relationship, but we have not seen the Canadian government get organized and create a strategy of going across the border. I hope that comes out of tonight's debate.

In 1986 and 2006, the agreements the Conservatives established created export taxes on our softwood lumber in an attempt to appease the United States. Following the 2006 agreement, our lumber exports ended up being taxed by both Canada and the United States. We could say that the Conservatives taxed the axe. That is language they will understand.

For mill workers in Port Alberni, the Liberal court battle does not mean much. Mills are being overcharged for wood; some are closing their doors for good, and many mill workers will not see a dime of the money that the Liberals win in court. Another Conservative tax, though, would make sure those businesses would never recover. Either way, most mill workers cannot afford to wait another 42 years for real change.

It is time to fix it. It is time for the government to look at new possibilities instead of just trying the same thing over and over. It is time that we support our lumber industry in supporting itself. We have already taken a step in the right direction. Catalyst Paper, for example, in my riding, retooled its mill so it could make food-grade paper. When people go to Costco and buy a hot dog, that is where the paper is made. It is adding eight times the value per tonne of fibre.

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We brought forward a biomass expansion to the clean technology investment tax credit, working with the Minister of Natural Resources, and my riding led the charge, working with Catalyst Paper in my community. It is projected to save mills in British Columbia up to \$10 million per year. This was in the last economic statement in the fall. We are hoping legislation comes forward quickly to enact that tax credit, because this money would go back into communities, giving workers in the industry some breathing room and a little more security, but it is just a start.

After 42 years, we need to take another look at our dependence on raw softwood lumber. For 42 years, we have been propping up the same failing issue in how we manage with loans and programs, which only lead to more tariffs. Now we need to support our lumber industry in a transition toward more lucrative, environmentally friendly and future-forward enterprises. Port Alberni has seen prospective investors hoping to bring money into the community to create mass timber plants. Through targeted federal funding, we can support them and other lumber towns that rely on softwood lumber, creating new jobs in a growth industry that uses all the same resources that those communities already have.

Mass timber can benefit Canada in more than just the health of the lumber industry. My NDP colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay brought that forward. It could provide a new material that is more carbon-friendly than metal or cement, and we could use it to build infrastructure, skyscrapers and the housing that our nation desperately needs, a point that I raised earlier.

We also need to further support the growth in our domestic market by encouraging Canadian companies to use wood in place of less sustainable materials in manufacturing. New developments in wood alternatives to plastic could open up new industries to our supply of softwood lumber. We could reduce waste by helping the environment and generating Canadian wealth, as I talked about earlier with that tax credit. After 42 years, we could finally try to do something different. We can strengthen mass timber and other Canadian wood product manufacturing and we can improve domestic demand and ensure that softwood moves away from logging companies to Canadian mills and manufacturers. Funding for mass timber and wood manufacturing would create new jobs in regions where logging and mills have historically been a major industry.

Families in Port Alberni that have worked in lumber for generations can remain in their communities and harvest timber or create new, higher-value products, which then can be exported to the United States or other trading partners. We need to look at those other trading partners.

Those manufactured wood products, by the way, would be unaffected by the raw log tariffs. It is time that we stop repeating the failures of the last 42 years and start looking at what we can do to strengthen the timber industry for the next 42 years.

I know it is past my time, but it is certainly time to start something new.

● (1925)

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Chair, the forestry industry is significant, especially in Kootenay—

Columbia. There are a lot of family-owned saw mills, some owned for five generations.

Another problem in British Columbia is access to fibre. I am wondering whether my colleague could give some examples or ways he could see for our mills to get the wood, regardless of the fires. There is wood there, but we cannot seem to get access. Could the member explain what kind of ideas he has?

● (1930)

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, that is a great question. I hope this debate leads to all of us working collectively. I appreciate the demeanour and tone my colleague brings.

This is something that has come up. Mosaic, which owns private lands on Vancouver Island, actually asked the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development for relief during COVID, for 18 months to three years, whereby it could bypass B.C. timber sales, basically the raw log export board federally. If it had been granted that permission, it would have creamed everything. San Group and mills would have been closed. We would have lost hundreds of workers, and they would have never come back. We fought tooth and nail, and we got the minister to back down on that request. Thank God, because the price of timber went through the roof. It would have demolished that area.

We have an opportunity right now to change the structure of how logs are sold internationally. We should not have raw log export. At a time like this when we have issues when it comes to fibre, we should be focused on all of that fibre being manufactured here in our country. We also need provinces to demand changes in how the federal government works on international trade. They need to work together on this issue. The model is not working. It is not working for the environment. It is not working for workers. It is certainly not working for the future of British Columbians and Canada.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, for my colleague from Courtenay—Alberni, I have another question from Vancouver Island. I thank the member for the last round, as I was just going to ask where my hon. colleague thinks we should stand on the issue of raw log exports.

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Obviously Canadians need a team Canada effort. Tonight's take-note debate lets us focus on the quite unfair and unexpected increase in duties from the U.S. Department of Commerce, but let us look at the reality: Why do we let a single raw log get exported out of B.C. when we could be putting it through a mill? I will connect this back to the issue of productivity. The more we export only products that are value-added, the more it improves Canada's productivity. A productivity crisis is enhanced when we export any resource product without value added, which is a crime against the environment and our workers.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, I know the member has raised many times in the House her concerns around raw log export. Especially when we look at the Alberni Valley, where I live, she knows full well there are still boats being loaded to the hilt with raw logs right now, when our local mills cannot even get access to supply. It is absolutely ridiculous.

As I said, Mosaic came forward with a request for relief, basically to bypass putting its timber up for bid to local mills. It would have put them completely out of business. It was actually our party and I that went to the wall to get the federal government to back down. That is not good enough. We actually need a restructuring and a new model of how we do B.C. timber sales and how the raw log export board works.

We need to make sure that on fibre that is put up for bid we do everything we can to ensure that the fibre goes to our local mills. That is certainly not a priority right now for the federal government. If the timber companies go after the wood, they get blocked by the big players, and they get penalized. That is exactly what happens. They get hammered. We are seeing businesses sidelined and put out of business. Right now the big conglomerates can block and knock them right out. That is not working for small producers and small mills. It needs to be completely revisited.

I am glad my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands asked her excellent question. The Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development needs to show leadership on this. It has been going on for decades and has not been resolved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Chair, I am not entirely familiar with the reality of the forestry sector in British Columbia. I am more familiar with the situation in Quebec, but there is one fundamental issue, and that is processing. We need to process more wood. Unfortunately, we do not have the support of the federal government.

One simple measure would be to use the carbon footprint of federal government buildings as a criterion for awarding contracts. Unfortunately, the government does not want to implement this simple measure, which would allow us to use more wood in federal buildings. I wonder if my colleague agrees with that.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, I know the Bloc worked with the NDP when it came to the bill that was brought forward by my good friend and colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay, who lives in Penticton, on mass timber used by the federal government, in order to do exactly that. However, the federal government

has not done it. When it comes even to things that pass in the House, it is moving so slowly on getting direction from the House. Despite the fact that there is a housing crisis and that it is buying materials to build buildings, the government is ignoring the House. We passed legislation directing the federal government on what it has to do.

On the retooling of our mills and making sure we add value to every single board foot that goes through, I think of San Group, which is using small logs and processing them. It is not using big logs, but is processing small logs and creating more value. We need to create more value.

We need to make sure we purchase and support wood and timber through federal procurement, and we need to stop raw log exports, especially at a time like this, when we are seeing the impacts of climate and we know we are going to have fibre supply issues down the road. We need to do this immediately. It is critical to job security, to our communities and to the longevity of our forest sector. It is actually smart. I cannot think of another first world country, if we want to call it that, or a developed nation, that is mismanaging its forest like this. It is absolutely unbelievable that we are shipping raw logs when our mills are starved for fibre. It absolutely does not make sense.

● (1935)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Chair, the member is clearly very knowledgeable on the topic. On this side, we have always believed that the best deals are reached at the bargaining table. The government is prepared to negotiate in good faith with our American counterparts, but we are not willing to just accept any deal at any cost. When the government was renegotiating CUSMA with the Trump administration, former prime minister Harper urged the Canadian government to fold and capitulate. I wonder whether the member recalls that and can comment on it.

Mr. Gord Johns: Madam Chair, 42 years at the negotiating table is a long time. If I were the government, I would not be patting myself on the back or blaming another political party. Certainly, we know the Conservatives' approach did not work. Like I said earlier, it is taxing the axe, because their motto was tax from both sides of the border, which they agreed to. It was a billion-dollar hit to the B.C. lumber industry and producers in British Columbia, and half a billion of that went to lobbyists. That is what Stephen Harper negotiated.

The Liberals dragged this out. There has not been a full-court press on the issue. Clearly they have not negotiated well, and we need a different approach. We need to keep as much of our fibre as we can in Canada. We need to supply our mills. We need to end raw log exports. We need to add value to our fibre. We need to retool our mills. We need to invest heavily into ensuring that we keep up with the international market and are supplying the needs of countries that do not have access to fibre, as well as with emerging markets, where there is huge opportunity. There is mass timber, which we talked about.

We have seen some great models in British Columbia of small players that cannot access fibre. This is ridiculous. The federal government allows international trade and export of our fibre, and our local mills cannot get access. This is just absolutely bonkers. I cannot think of any country in the first world that is managing its forest sector like this. It is unbelievable.

The opportunity is here. It is right now. I hope next week, in the budget, that the federal government is going to take a different approach and is going to look at mass timber, value-added product, retooling and putting more money on the table. Catalyst mill in my riding received the most federal money ever in the history of the riding to retool the mill so we can make food-grade paper and replace plastic paper. When one goes to Costco and gets a hot dog, the packaging is from my riding. Eight times the value per tonne is what we are getting now because of that retooling. Let us do more of that.

• (1940)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Kenora.

We come forward tonight talking about the softwood lumber issue. It has been an issue I have been very close to for most of my life. My first job out of high school was working at the local pulp mill in construction in Taylor, B.C. That is where I learned to work hard, building the mill that was going to cost \$150 million but provide hundreds of jobs over generations using residual fibre, which normally would just be waste fibre, from the local mills. However, what we have seen from the current Liberal-NDP government, and the provincial NDP government particularly in my province, is inaction on the softwood file.

Let us put this into context a bit first, because I think folks out there wonder what softwood lumber means. For me, it means jobs. I have already said that I have worked in the softwood sector, working on one of the mills. My kids have all worked in it, whether it was for a logging company, working on trucks, or at an OSB mill. We are all very familiar with the forestry sector.

However, a CBC article on January 11, 2023, reported, “‘We expect about 300 jobs in Prince George will be lost across the Canfor Pulp organization with the shutdown of the pulp line at PG Pulp and Paper Mill. This includes staff and hourly positions,’ a spokesperson for the company said in an emailed statement.” The CBC, on January 25, 2023, reported, “In an email to CBC News, Canfor said its plants in Chetwynd employ 157 people, adding that ‘where possible, employees will be prioritized for hiring and redeployment to other Canfor locations.’” This was after it was an-

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nounced that Canfor would shutter that particular mill, which was absolutely the backbone of Chetwynd. I recently talked to one of the former councillors in Chetwynd, and the parent has to go work in northern Alberta now, because there is no longer a mill for her dad to work at.

These were two different mills, both in my riding. Of Houston, B.C., which is slightly out of my riding, Canfor said, “it is too early in the project planning to fully understand how many of the 333 employees who work at that facility will be laid off.” Energetic City, in September 2022, reported about the mill that I worked at growing up, “In May, the company stated that the curtailment would most likely stay in place until the fall. At this time, Ward had confirmed that around 80 employees had been affected, saying the company ‘sincerely regrets its impact’” and that another 20 jobs would be lost.

This all comes around to the inaction on the softwood lumber file. I was criticizing the trade minister for her lack of action. I would ask her regularly, when she was meeting with our trading partner, Katherine Tai, on the U.S. side, whether she was actually negotiating the softwood lumber agreement. I would constantly get no answer back. We know in this place that when someone is not answering, it probably means it is not being discussed. On May 16, 2021, CTV reported from Washington:

Tai told U.S. senators that despite higher prices, the fundamental dispute remains and there have been no talks on a new lumber quota arrangement.

“In order to have an agreement and in order to have a negotiation, you need to have a partner. And thus far, the Canadians have not expressed interest in engaging,” Tai said.

This was in 2021. Now the government has come to the table, and it is finally talking about softwood lumber. That is great, but what happened about six years before? It did absolutely nothing about it, and that is why our mills were closing. This is the government's game: protecting 25% of lands and waters by 2025 and upping that to 30% by 2030. It is all part of the game to shut this stuff down with a bunch of other different excuses as the reason to do so. What we need is better forest management, and according to Jesse Zeman, “Forestry could play a critical role in mitigating the effects of wildfire by reducing fuel loads and thinning forests.”

It is about time we had a government that takes our softwood sector seriously, and I hope that with this conversation we cause the government to do so.

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• (1945)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I listened to the speech of my colleague with great interest. Clearly, he wants to tell us that he supports the softwood lumber industry, and I know the Conservatives in general talk a big game when it comes to supporting the industry and Canadian workers, but unfortunately it is all talk and no action. We hear a lot of buzzwords, and we hear a lot of slogans, but the simple fact of the matter is that, when it came to voting for funding support for the management of the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber file, every single Conservative in the House voted against it. Therefore, I would like to know how the member can defend that vote to the companies and workers they care so much about.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Chair, it would be funny if it were not so sad. Here is a member of a government that has done absolutely nothing, and I just proved it. The minister responsible did nothing for six years, even as evidenced by Katherine Tai, the U.S. trade secretary. It did nothing when we got it done within six months.

Here is a government that has done absolutely nothing. It has been the government for almost nine years, and it is still not there. We got it done within six months. We did pretty well. My hope is that the officials get to the U.S. and negotiate a softwood lumber agreement.

With respect to the mills that I talked about, I am seeing jobs being lost by the hundreds in my very own riding. Mills are being shut down by the hundreds. Is it for a lack of trees? I fly over our forests twice a week, and there are lots of trees in British Columbia. We just need to make sure that the companies have a reason to go in and log.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Chair, there is a fairly simple solution to support forestry companies. It was actually people in the forestry sector who came up with this solution. They have to be given access to liquidity. To get through the current crisis, with its tariffs that are totally unfair, what people in the forestry sector are telling us is that they need access to liquidity so they can invest in their infrastructure.

Would my colleague agree that a federal program is needed to give forestry companies access to liquidity?

[English]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Chair, I cannot speak to what the Bloc's plan is for equity in the forest sector, but when I had my job as a 19-year-old working on a construction site where we were building a pulp mill, the company did not need the equity. It got it because there were good business cases for developing a lumber mill or using the residual fibres from a lumber mill for making paper and other products. It was not necessary.

We had a great, flourishing forest sector, especially after we had our softwood lumber dispute settled in 2006. We need to get back to having a government that cares about our softwood sector, cares about our forests and wants to better manage our forests. However, what I can see with the environment minister and the fisheries and oceans minister is that it is all about shutting it down.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleague's speech and his passion on this. Again, we need a team Canada approach, but he keeps going back to the agreement under the Harper government. That agreement gave away \$1 billion U.S. of collected duties, which legitimately belonged to Canadian softwood producers. About half of that amount went to the U.S. lobby group that started the dispute.

Therefore, it is an agreement that sent half a billion dollars U.S. to those who started the whole thing, and they are our opponents if we want to call them that. They are not really partners when they are taking that approach. Is that the kind of agreement that my colleague wants to reinstate?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Chair, I appreciate what the member has to say, but from my perspective, I just read many news articles talking about literally hundreds of jobs being lost in the current situation without a softwood lumber agreement. Again, when we came into government in 2006, it was done within six months. That is what we are proposing. We would get it done again, and we would bring it home.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is an honour to rise on this important issue this evening.

Of course, forestry is a major employer and economic driver for people in my region of northwestern Ontario and right across northern Ontario. I think about the people in Dryden, Kenora, Ear Falls and Ignace, along with a number of first nations across Treaty No. 3 that have partnered in groundbreaking partnerships and revenue-sharing agreements to find prosperity in the forestry industry. It is an industry that provides powerful paycheques to many people across northern Ontario. It is also an industry that is very environmentally positive and environmentally sustainable.

I heard a few comments about that already today, that the forestry industry is one that can help mitigate the effects of climate change. It can help to mitigate the effects of fires if we are able to harvest forests and harness the carbon dioxide that has been absorbed through the trees. Unfortunately, it is also an industry that has been under attack by the current NDP-Liberal government.

I want to just share one related issue of caribou in northern Ontario. The environment minister had, last year, issued an ultimatum saying that he was going to block harvesting thousands of kilometres of Ontario forests. It was through the guise of caribou protection. He was saying that and doing so without any acknowledgement of what has been happening at the provincial level or what has been happening with first nations and their local knowledge and local leadership to ensure that there is a protection plan in place for caribou. The minister was planning to move forward with that order just to block development. He seems to have this personal vendetta against development of any kind. It was very sad to see that the government was planning to move forward on that. We will see where that stands going forward.

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It is important that any plans that are put in place have to account for the provincial, territorial and local plans that are already in place and that are already working to help ensure that we can harvest forests in northern Ontario and across the country in an environmentally sustainable way and in a way that provides good jobs and good economic growth and, of course, is viable from an environmental standpoint as well.

I share that because it is just one example of how the government has failed the forestry sector. I could go on, but unfortunately I am limited for time. Another issue is the softwood lumber issue we are dealing with right now.

This dispute has had real ramifications for people in my riding. It has led to people losing their jobs. It has led to idling of the former Kenora Forest Products mill and the eventual bankruptcy of Prendiville Industries as a result of that. We are happy that GreenFirst is now involved in that operation, but these tariffs and this trade dispute continue to hang over the heads of the workers across northern Ontario. Unfortunately, it is only going to get worse because the U.S. plans to increase these tariffs from the current 8% to over 13% on our softwood lumber industry. That will bring even more economic devastation to people across northern Ontario. This has already also cost billions of dollars to our industry, Canadian companies. It is first nations that have stakes in this industry that are now without those funds as a result of the government's inaction.

It was mentioned already that, under the previous Conservative government, there was an agreement reached within six months. The current government has had over eight years, yet has still not been able to come to an agreement. The best the Liberals can say is that they are working on it. They are raising the issue. They are talking about the issue. We do not know if that is even true. One thing is true. It is either that they are completely ignoring the softwood lumber issue or that they are raising this issue with U.S. counterparts and getting nowhere through two different administrations. It does not seem to matter who is in the White House as the current government has not been able to get a deal done competently. It is completely unable to fight for Canadian workers and Canadian industry.

● (1950)

Canada's Conservatives are going to continue to stand for Canada's forestry sector and the hard-working people who make it thrive.

● (1955)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the hon. member for his speech and just say how grateful I was to hear the term “climate change” mentioned by a Conservative member. There were even a couple of other words in there, such as indigenous knowledge, and something to do with acknowledging that wildfires are an issue in this country and need to be addressed.

This government has made significant investments in supporting the forest industry, especially as global demand for sustainable forest products grows. As the hon. member mentioned, the forestry sector continues to innovate, grow and support good jobs for Canadians.

Why did he vote against our investments in budget 2023 of over \$368.4 million over three years to renew and update the forest sector's support?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, in the five years I have had the honour to represent the people in the Kenora riding in Parliament, it has been a pleasure each and every time I have had an opportunity to vote against one of the NDP-Liberal budgets because I am voting non-confidence in the government.

It is a government that is tired and out of ideas. It is corrupt and has no plan to support our forest industry or to get back to a balanced budget and make life more affordable for Canadians. All of its plans have been failing, and that is why I am proud to stand with my Conservative colleagues and continue to vote non-confidence in the government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Chair, I would like to ask my colleague what he thinks of the fact that softwood lumber was not mentioned in either the minister's mandate letter, or the agenda for the WTO ministerial in Abu Dhabi. In both cases, it was a month after the announcement of new countervailing duties. The Liberals agreed to holding this take-note debate more than two months after we started talking about it.

Are we witnessing a rather clear display of this government's complete disinterest in this issue?

[*English*]

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, I think a very good point was raised. It is something that is urgent for people in northern Ontario, Quebec and right across the country, but the government has really been dragging its heels on this. The member points out a very obvious example. The fact that we are even here debating it all this time later, after eight years, is perhaps the greatest example of all that the government has been largely ignoring this issue and has been absent from this issue.

As I said, even if we take the government's word for it that it has been working on it, then it is clearly incapable of delivering on this issue because it has had eight years to get it done. It is definitely time for change. The Conservatives are going to bring it home.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, I want to talk about solutions. My colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung sent me a letter from the mayor of Kapuskasing, and he wanted to talk about solutions to Canada's housing crisis. He cites that they can be found in the forest.

He cites that Canada can:

Actively promote Canadian wood and mass timber solutions within a federal affordable housing strategy.

Establish a harmonized regulatory framework for permitting processes to expedite approvals safely and responsibly.

Adopt a performance-based approach and increasing tall wood building height allowances in the National Building Code.

Promote nationally certified, prefabricated building typologies for wood-based structures that meet municipal standards.

Offer incentives for developers using a high proportion of Canadian wood products in new construction.

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Support the development of a future-ready skilled workforce through standardized green education and training programs.

That is something my colleague from Timmins—James Bay has been working very hard on.

Does my colleague agree with those great recommendations from the mayor of Kapuskasing?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Mr. Chair, I really love the community of Kapuskasing. Last summer, I had the opportunity to travel there with the leader of Canada's Conservatives. We met with forestry workers, many of whom felt left behind by the NDP-Liberal government. They were very upset with the fact that their NDP representative continues to support the Liberal government and continues to support a government that is dragging its feet on the softwood lumber deal and not delivering for the people of northern Ontario. That is what Conservatives are going to do: deliver for northern Ontario.

● (2000)

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Chair, Canada and the United States are close neighbours with an unprecedented, mutually beneficial relationship when it comes to trade. That said, as we all know, even among good neighbours, irritants are bound to arise. The softwood lumber dispute with the United States is a long-standing trade irritant that, unfortunately, has resurfaced on several occasions. We are in the fifth round of the dispute since the 1980s. In past rounds, we have seen a certain pattern develop.

First, unfair U.S. duties are imposed against Canadian softwood lumber products at the behest of the U.S. lumber industry. Canada then prevails in contesting these unwarranted duties in neutral international fora. Finally, a negotiated outcome providing predictability and stability to the sector is reached. Right now, we are in the second phase, a phase of active litigation to vigorously defend the interests of our world-leading softwood lumber industry.

Members should make no mistake: This trade dispute negatively impacts the Canadian softwood lumber industry, which is a key component of our highly integrated forest sector. Nowhere is it more important than Surrey Centre, a riding that has the highest number of softwood lumber employees per capita in Canada, or at least in British Columbia. The softwood lumber industry provides thousands of jobs across the country and is an economic anchor to many communities, particularly in rural regions.

Canada is a trading nation, and our softwood lumber industry is no different. Almost two-thirds of the total softwood lumber production in Canada is exported. The United States is our largest export market. Unfair U.S. trade measures on most of Canada's softwood lumber exports not only undermine our industry's competitiveness in the U.S. market but also affect communities and workers at home.

Our government recognizes this burden; at every step of the way, we have supported our industry, our communities and our workers. Our government is mounting a strong legal defence of Canada's interests against the U.S. duties, in close collaboration with provincial governments and industry stakeholders.

That is why Canada currently has a total of 13 ongoing legal challenges against the U.S. duties. The hon. Minister of Export, Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development recently announced the latest of our challenges, which contests a biased U.S. decision to maintain both anti-dumping and countervailing duties on Canadian products instead of revoking them.

The government has contested every single U.S. decision that has led to the imposition or maintenance of unfair trade measures on our softwood lumber industry. These legal challenges are being heard through various venues. Most of Canada's challenges are proceeding under chapter 19 of NAFTA or chapter 10 of its successor, CUSMA. We have two ongoing challenges through the WTO dispute settlement mechanism and one that is being heard by the U.S. Court of International Trade.

Through the many iterations of this dispute, Canada has consistently been found to be a reliable and fair trading partner, while U.S. duties have repeatedly been judged to be inconsistent both with U.S. law and the United States' international trade obligations. We are confident that this will ultimately be the outcome once again. In fact, we have already seen a number of decisions in Canada's favour in the current round of this dispute. We know that the facts and the law are on our side, and we will never waver in our support of Canadian businesses and our workers.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank the member for reading PMO speech number six.

Where we are is that this is catastrophic for the softwood lumber industry in Canada. While these members talk about how the wheels are in motion and how the dog ate their homework, 183 companies in the forestry sector have gone bankrupt since 2016, with tens of thousands of jobs, real livelihoods. In 2016, we had the expiration of the softwood lumber agreement that was put together by former prime minister Harper.

What they are doing is not working. It has been almost nine years. This has cost the sector billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of jobs.

What are they going to do differently, other than talk and talk?

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● (2005)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, we all know that the mechanism to fight these unfair duties is through legal means, through NAFTA chapter 11 or CUSMA chapter 10. We have fought those, but we can only have a favourable outcome and settlement if the other party is willing. Unfortunately, despite continuous legal victories on Canada's behalf, we need a willing trading partner who agrees to abide by those. We have seen that the Americans have been inconsistent in that regard, and it takes a long time to pressure them into doing that.

I am very confident that our government and our minister of trade will continue to do those talks, and we will get to a resolution so that our softwood exports will be traded at a fair and an appropriate value, free of any trade barriers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Chair, does my colleague not find it odd that at no time in the minister's mandate letter, when it talks about trade disputes, is there any mention of the words "softwood lumber"?

Is that not a clear admission that the Government of Canada does not care about the softwood lumber dispute and that it is trying to use the regions of Canada that live from the forestry sector as a bargaining chip to secure the automobile sector with U.S. partners?

Does my colleague interpret the absence of the words "softwood lumber" in the minister's mandate letter as clear evidence of what I just described?

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, I could not disagree more with my colleague. I think Canada fights equally for these. I regularly meet with stakeholders, particularly small and medium-sized sawmills and even larger privately owned sawmills that are located in my constituency of Surrey Centre. They have faith that the government is fully trying and that our trade minister is working on it; they receive regular updates in regard to that. Therefore, I am confident that there is no impropriety being done between one region and the other. When Canada speaks, it speaks on behalf of all its provinces.

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, while the Conservative Party continues to debate whether climate change is even real, 2023 was the most severe wildfire season in history for British Columbia and Canada. The impact that wildfires will have on our forestry sector going forward is obvious to everyone, except for the Conservative Party.

Does the Conservative Party have a plan, any plan, to help our world-class forestry sector deal with the ravages of climate change? Do the Conservatives not recognize that failure to act on the climate file will have significant long-term impacts on the forestry sector?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, my colleague from Richmond Centre said it very well. The government actually recognizes that we have to create well-paying jobs. However, in order to have those jobs, we have to protect our environment, we have to clean our air, and we have to have practices that are sustainable so we will have a continuous and robust forestry sector for years, decades and millen-

nia to come. If we do not amend those practices, if we do not protect our forests, if we do not have practices to protect and preserve our forests, we will not have a forest sector in the future. Therefore, our government is doing both hand in hand: It is fighting to create the opportunities and fighting to protect our forests and create a future for our children.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, again, over 42 years, we have had 13 consecutive governments now that have not been able to figure this out. Liberals choose litigation. Conservatives choose to tax producers on their way out and agree, actually, that Americans can hit us on the way in. It is unbelievable. In fact, under the Harper government, we saw a billion-dollar take-away from softwood lumber producers. Half of that billion dollars went to the very lobbyists who started this whole thing.

We need a new approach, and we are not hearing the government talk about a new approach. We heard that the Conservatives want to revert back to tax the axe, which is language they will understand. However, does my colleague not agree that we need a transformational change in how we approach things?

Also, in terms of our fibre supply, raw log exports need to stop. We have mills that are starving for fibre, and the current model is not working. It is not sustainable, given the threats of climate change and given the threats to our mills.

I want to hear solutions. Is the member going to work on ending raw log exports? Is he going to work on mass timber? Is he going to support the motion that was passed in the House so that the federal government could actually procure using locally milled lumber and roll it into a national affordable housing strategy, and we could build homes out of local fibre?

● (2010)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, I agree with some points that my hon. colleague from British Columbia has made. We need to increase mass timber projects. We have been doing that by changing the building code to accept that, with the building of even 18-storey buildings now using mass timber. This is a renewable and carbon-sequestering methodology of building more homes. However, we also do not want to revert back to what the Conservatives did and tax \$1 billion on these sawmill owners and then give half to rich lobbyists who act on their behalf.

However, we need a willing partner on the other side. What we have been seeing is a very litigious partner. As lawyers can appreciate, it is no different from people who commence lawsuits frivolously time and time again. When the outcome is always the same, it is a very frustrating program.

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I agree that perhaps a new approach, a new agreement, with the Americans needs to be reached where this does not happen over and over again. When NAFTA was created, it was thought that the chapter 11 method would be safe and secure. We were able to retain it in this round, which the Americans did not want to have. However, we need to implement better teeth, so it is a quick, prompt decision that is executed right away.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

Usually, the best thing a person can do is to tell the truth. Let us tell the truth this evening. The government has never been willing to provide real support for the forestry industry. That is rather easy to prove. My colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot did so earlier when he said that the words “softwood lumber” do not appear anywhere in the Minister of International Trade’s mandate letter. That shows how much this government cares about the forestry industry.

Meanwhile, the forestry industry is currently facing a perfect storm. If we look at everything the forestry industry is dealing with, we see that this economic sector that supports our regions is in jeopardy. This evening we are talking about punitive tariffs. If nothing is done and if the minister does not grow a backbone by then, these tariffs may increase from 8% to almost 14% in August. The federal government’s financial support for the forestry industry is pathetic. I will come back to that later. It is absolutely nothing. It is peanuts compared to the support being given to another natural resources industry, the oil industry. It is downright appalling.

Our forestry sector has been going through major transformations over the past 15 years because the pulp and paper industry is gradually disappearing. We need to replace it with something else, but, unfortunately, we never get the financial support we need to make that happen. We also have a crisis caused by the woodland caribou, especially in Quebec, with the Minister of Environment threatening to enforce an order under the Species at Risk Act that would scuttle the efforts of many communities in Quebec that depend on the forestry sector. Then there was last summer’s forest fire crisis.

All these factors add up to a perfect storm for the forestry sector. I think the only person who does not see that is the Prime Minister. Quebec MPs do not see it either. I rarely hear Conservative Quebec MPs talk about forestry. It is not just rare, it is practically unheard of. I have never seen them show any interest in the forestry sector, even when we studied it at the Standing Committee on Natural Resources. I am sure that Quebec is, by far, the biggest player in Canada’s forestry sector. In 2000, the sector accounted for 95,000 jobs in Quebec. By 2010, that number had fallen to 64,000. The latest figures show 59,000 jobs in 2020. Why the decline? It is because the federal government refuses to support the forestry industry.

I would like to give members a very simple example. In the forest sector, no support is ever provided by Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions or any federal government program for primary processing. Why is that? Whenever primary processing is involved, people are automatically told to go through Global Af-

fairs Canada to request federal government support and, de facto, the request will be refused. Let us try to name another sector of economic activity unable to obtain any federal government support. They are few and far between. However, this is what happens. The federal government does not want to address this issue.

For small and medium-sized lumber mills that produce roughly 300,000 cubic metres a year, the main customers are local, in other words, in Quebec or Canada. Even if they do not do business with the United States, they are paying a heavy price for the trade dispute we are in, because they cannot get federal government support. The government bragged about planting two billion trees. Does anyone know why the government is having trouble sending those trees to the forestry people who could plant them? It is because there is a fear that they will be harvested. If those trees are harvested, the federal government says that would violate its trade agreements with the United States. That is fear for fear’s sake. They are essentially saying that since those trees might be harvested in 70 years, we might as well not plant them. That shows how much courage the federal government has.

In closing, I would say that this is a sad spectacle, one that has been going on for more than 20 years. There has never been any real willingness on the part of the Liberals or the Conservatives to support the forestry sector.

● (2015)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleagues’ speeches, including the speech by my colleague who just spoke on behalf of Quebec’s forestry industry.

This evening, we heard that an agreement had been reached under the Harper government that left something to be desired. I would like to hear my colleague’s thoughts on that. We want to conclude an agreement with the United States, but not at any cost. I would like my colleague to say a few words about a future agreement.

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, indeed, a billion dollars stayed on the table in the last softwood lumber agreement.

Now there are solutions that the current government could put in place. The majority of the key players in the forestry sector are asking us for a liquidity program. That has never been brought in by the government. The majority of people in the forestry sector are asking us to diversify. What they want is the opportunity to benefit from federal support either through BDC or CED, as all other sectors of economic activity have. The government has never wanted to offer this type of support to the forestry sector because it is too afraid of losing its cash cow. This would run counter to the trade agreements that benefit the automobile sector, the automobile sector being the federal government's cash cow. We are a bargaining chip and that is unfortunate.

[English]

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Chair, in British Columbia, especially in rural British Columbia, we have a lot of small mills with fifth-generation owners. They understand forestry management. They understand the business, and they have managed to stay in business even during these tough times.

It has been eight years since the government had the opportunity to deal with the softwood lumber issue, and nothing has happened. I think the member is onto something when he talks about how there is nothing in the mandate letter about lumber. If there is nothing in there about lumber, where is the accountability to even move forward on this, other than talking about it in a take-note debate?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, the major problem is the *laissez-faire* attitude that the government has had on this issue for over 20 years. The federal government has never had a strong, clear desire to support the forestry industry, even though it claims that the forestry industry is one of the most promising industries in the fight against climate change.

When we harvest a tree in the forest, we have just sequestered and captured carbon. The more we build from wood, the more carbon we sequester and capture and the better our record on greenhouse gas emissions becomes. However, there has never been a Conservative or Liberal government that has been willing to include the use of wood in its tendering in a binding way.

An NDP member introduced a bill to that effect, but it is not binding, so what does it really accomplish in the end? It is little more than a petition or wishful thinking. We need to use lumber more, but we are not giving ourselves the tools to do so. We are not giving ourselves the tools to help the forestry industry with measures that are actually very simple. We are doing even less when it comes to helping the forestry industry with economic levers. Those do not exist in Canada. The only explanation I can think of is that perhaps it is because Quebec is the biggest player in the forestry industry and because no one has enough power in their party to exert the influence necessary to change things.

The solution is fairly simple. We need to become independent. If we were a country, we could do it ourselves.

• (2020)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, the member is talking about solutions again. That is what we need

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more of tonight. It is good to see my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia bringing forward that approach as well. Let us talk about how we could move forward. What we have had for most of the night is partisan bickering about the 42 years of failed negotiations with the United States.

Tonight we have this take-note debate. What would be the outcome that my colleague would like to see tonight in terms of how we use the fibre in our communities and how we add value the most? There is this false dichotomy that we cannot protect the environment and have jobs at the same time. We have to do both, and we can do both.

Does my colleague see potential opportunity in tonight's debate, if the government were actually listening?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Mr. Chair, absolutely, there are plenty of opportunities. There are also success stories. One example is Chantiers Chibougamau, which will provide the beams and infrastructure for all the buildings at the Paris Olympic Games. These examples exist, but unfortunately, the main problem is that the entire forestry processing sector cannot get any support from the federal government, even though this sector could have a considerable influence on our greenhouse gas emissions.

I would simply point out that \$2.5 billion has been invested in carbon capture and storage strategies. Now the big companies are pulling out of these projects because, ultimately, they are doomed to fail. That is where our money is going.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to have the chance to rise in the House tonight, because I feel it is important to take part in this debate, which is more important than the solar eclipse. I say that because the forestry industry, sawmills and softwood lumber are important to the economy of Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou.

On February 1, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced plans to substantially increase the countervailing and anti-dumping duties it levies on Canadian softwood lumber. These duties could nearly double starting in August, with major negative consequences for us and elsewhere in Quebec and Canada.

As we know, the forestry industry has already been impacted by the forest fires that raged last summer. Some 4.5 million hectares of forest burned. As a result, local sawmills have had to slow down production or simply stop altogether. For example, at the end of March, Resolute Forest Products announced that it was suspending operations indefinitely at its sawmill in Comtois, near Lebel-sur-Quévillon. Members will recall that this town was hit hard by the forest fires, and all residents had to be evacuated because the town was in danger.

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The company blamed the weak lumber market and the rising cost of raw materials in the wake of last summer's wildfires. About 50 workers at the Comtois sawmill alone have been affected. Imagine how many more workers could be affected if the U.S. raises its countervailing and anti-dumping duties on softwood lumber. These are difficult times all round, and the government has an obligation to take action and find a solution to prevent these increases. All these good jobs have to be saved. As everyone knows, the cost of food and housing has gone up and is still going up. Now more than ever, families need to hold on to their sources of income.

The traditional approach, where the government issues a press release expressing its disappointment or challenges U.S. decisions in court, is not working. The government must do more and support our forestry sector more than ever. The Bloc Québécois urges Ottawa to staunchly defend Quebec's forestry industry in the face of increased U.S. tariffs on softwood lumber. It demands that the government step up and immediately implement concrete measures to protect the forestry industry from U.S. trade tactics.

Time is running out, and it is appalling that the federal government has still done nothing to support Quebec forestry companies facing a sharp increase in tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber imposed by the United States. As a key trading partner of the U.S., the federal government has a responsibility to secure acceptable trade terms for the representatives of the Canadian forestry industry, a sector that is strongly represented in Quebec.

Forestry is the economic backbone of many regions in Quebec, including my own. It accounts for thousands of jobs and a large portion of our exports. As I mentioned earlier, the forestry industry was hit hard by last summer's wildfires, and the same thing could happen again this year. Our forestry industries are facing a number of financial challenges, including trouble getting access to liquidity. The situation is fragile and could easily fall apart if our industry does not receive the necessary support. The federal government must act responsibly and intervene quickly on softwood lumber.

The Bloc Québécois is proposing meaningful steps that this government must take. First, the federal government must truly help the forestry industry get through the crisis with a loan and loan guarantee program, to match the amounts being withheld by the United States in taxes. Second, it must work to amend CUSMA, the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement, to better frame the litigation process and to no longer allow for unfair delay tactics. Third, it must call for a tax exemption for wood from private forests since the American lobbying allegations have to do only with the public forest. Fourth, it must recognize Quebec's forestry system, which operates via auction and is consistent with the requirements of free trade.

The conditions are right for the government to make the case to the U.S. government that it needs to end its unwarranted tariffs, which are harmful for both our economy and its own. Also, it is important for the government to make the U.S. understand that in trying to protect their forestry sector, the Americans might end up hurting their own economy by causing the price of building materials to increase in the U.S., preventing thousands of American families from becoming homeowners.

• (2025)

Let us protect our regions, our economy and our forests for a better future.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I really enjoyed my colleague's speech, and I understand that the forestry industry is very important in her riding. I understand that very well.

Earlier, several of our colleagues said that the past agreements were not good enough and that \$1 billion was even left on the table during the Harper years. We understand that we need to reach an agreement but not at any price. I would like to hear what my colleague thinks about the team Canada approach, where we work not only with the federal departments but also with the provinces, Quebec and the industry when dealing with our American counterparts.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Chair, there are solutions for the forestry industry in Quebec and Canada. The lethargy we are seeing right now is a result of the fact that nothing has been done for 20 to 40 years. The federal government does not stand up for our forests.

We all know what is happening with the forest fires and flooding. With the forest fires, think of the families who are worried and who do not know whether they will have a home. The animals in northern Quebec and Nunavik are not there any more. The caribou are disappearing. Black bears are now in Kuujuaq and elsewhere.

These are things we need to think about. This is not normal. The government needs to act quickly.

• (2030)

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Chair, this is a very serious issue. Since 2016, 183 companies in the forestry sector have gone bankrupt, and tens of thousands of Canadians in British Columbia, Quebec and all over Canada have lost their jobs.

Tonight, in this debate, we have heard the critic from the Bloc Québécois speak to this matter and we have heard the Conservative trade critic speak to this matter, but we have not heard from the minister of international trade from the government, nor have we heard from the parliamentary secretary to the minister of international trade.

Does my colleague agree with me that this shows just how unimportant this matter is to the Liberal government and that this is a big reason why this dispute has not been resolved?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his question. For once, I agree with the Conservatives.

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The fact is, the government is not acting on this issue. This cannot wait, yet that is exactly what is happening right now. The Comtois sawmill is closing and about 50 families will have to move. Label-sur-Quévillon is not that big. For these people, it is a matter of time. The government has to act quickly. Thousands of workers are at risk of losing their jobs.

What is the government doing to help Quebeckers?

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, the NDP has always been there, pushing the governments of the day to negotiate fair trade agreements, as opposed to free trade agreements that disadvantage Canadian workers and Canadian resources. When it comes to the softwood lumber agreement and the renewal of this agreement, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have failed to get the job done.

Earlier, I spoke of solutions that would help the forestry sector when I read quotes from the mayor of Kapuskasing. The member for Kenora never spoke to the solutions that Mayor Plourde put forward. Instead, he chose, as Conservatives have been doing all night, to focus on attacking a hard-working MP and other NDP MPs. He chose to attack the MP for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, who we know has always been there for her constituents.

Let us think about that. The member has been elected to this House five times since 2008. Conservatives were nowhere to be seen when the forestry sector workers were losing their jobs, not in Smooth Rock Falls, not in Dubreuilville and, most recently, not in Espanola. They prefer to score cheap political points instead of dealing with the real problems and finding solutions.

I have a question for my colleague. She knows that this is happening tonight. They are not offering solutions at all. Maybe my colleague can speak about how disappointing it is. We are having this take-note debate, an opportunity for us to bring solutions to this House, to get some work done and to support workers in communities like my colleague's. Could she speak about the importance of actually using time in this House to do just that?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Mr. Chair, look at what happened last summer with the forest fires. The government did not take action after the forest fires in northern Quebec. We know that nearly all of northern Quebec went up in flames. The government needs to act quickly when there are disasters like that. I do not understand why the government cannot take action. It seems to act faster when things happen in western Canada than when they happen in Quebec. What is it doing for Quebec?

The best solution to all our problems would be for Quebec to become a country.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

I am honoured to rise tonight to speak in this take-note debate on softwood lumber as an elected representative of the hard-working forestry and related service-industry companies and their families

in the North Okanagan—Shuswap. In small towns with sawmills, like Lumby, Salmon Arm, Sicamous, Revelstoke, Enderby, Chase, Armstrong and others, the Canadian softwood lumber dispute is an important issue. It is important because of the jobs that so many families rely on to put food on the family dinner table, the jobs that pay for their children's clothes and schooling.

I want to take us back to March 2016. In a CBC News article dated March 12, 2016, Canada's international trade minister was noted as saying that the current Prime Minister's official visit to Washington helped secure a "real breakthrough" in the contentious softwood lumber negotiations. The trade minister at the time, now the federal finance minister, was quoted as saying, "I don't want people to think this is going to be done and dusted, and we don't have to worry about softwood negotiating for another 10 years. But what we have committed to is to make significant, meaningful progress towards a deal—to have the structure, the key elements there a 100 days from now." We are now in April 2024, eight years or 97 months or 2,929 days later, more than 29 times longer than the message that the trade minister, now finance minister, was so cheery about in March 2016. Tick-tock, tick-tock.

After eight years of the failing government's failed softwood lumber negotiations, sawmill owners, their employees and their families are still paying the price of the government's ineptitude. Sawmill companies have not invested capital in modernizing their mills to remain competitive because duty dollars are being collected and held by the U.S. Workers are still working with equipment that has not been updated, if they have not lost their jobs already. It is not just the sawmills' direct employees. It is the spinoff jobs, which are even greater in number. The loggers, the road builders, the mill equipment manufacturers and the service providers, from tire shops to lunch trucks and work clothing stores, could be doing greater business and making further contributions to our communities if only the government had done its job and gotten a deal done long before now.

The companies, employees and their families in places like the small towns I mentioned and other small communities across the country have waited patiently, getting their jobs done while waiting for the government to get its job done, but their patience has run thin and the government has failed to get the job done. These hard-working people need some certainty in their future, more than just promises. They need a government that is recognized as a valued partner in trade agreements, rather than one that can be taken advantage of. They need a government that understands the common-sense approach that is needed at negotiating tables. If the government strongly believes that the U.S. anti-dumping and countervailing duties on Canadian softwood lumber products are unfair and unwarranted, then why has it not resolved this issue before now, or is it because it simply does not care?

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The anti-dumping and countervailing duties charged, collected and held by the U.S. are now over \$8 billion or, according to some, over \$10 billion. One would think that the money-hungry NDP-Liberal government would be clamouring and bending over backwards to get those dollars into Canadian hands so it could find some way of taxing them. I am tempted to say that it baffles me and countless other Canadians as to why the government has failed so badly at getting a deal done, but it is not surprising after the many failed promises of the big-on-promises, small-on-delivery government. It is simply not worth the cost.

It is time the government recognized its commitment to serving the people of Canada, instead of making the people of Canada serve the government.

• (2035)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, like many of the speeches we heard from the Conservative members tonight, there were lots of slogans and buzzwords, but no actual substance. While our government was providing historic supports for the forestry sector, with over \$368.4 million over three years to renew and update forest sector support, over \$130 million to accelerate the adoption of transformative technologies and products, and over \$12 million to provide economic opportunities for indigenous communities in the forest sector, the Conservatives did nothing but oppose. I would like to hear from the member opposite why, if the Conservative Party truly cares about our softwood lumber industry, it dogmatically opposes any efforts to help support it.

• (2040)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, the member's question is a regurgitated question from the PMO. I am not sure how many times it has been asked tonight.

Conservatives do care about the softwood lumber agreement and the families who depend on the jobs that are so reliant on this industry. We are having this take-note debate tonight to draw attention to a minister who has failed to get this job done and a succession of ministers who have failed to get this job done.

As I quoted, it was March 2016 when the government said it would have a framework in place in 100 days. We are now at over 2,900 days. That is why it is important. It is why Conservatives believe it is important and why we keep pressuring the government to get the job done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, there is a key factor at play in the softwood lumber issue. Because of the decision to consider the softwood lumber issue unilaterally from coast to coast, everyone everywhere is subject to the same constraints.

My colleague comes from British Columbia. Obviously, we know how important the softwood lumber industry is to British Columbia. However, B.C. is the one imposing constraints that hurt Quebecers.

Would my colleague agree that each province should exercise its own sovereignty in entering agreements with the U.S.? That way, we in Quebec would not be penalized for compensations in British Columbia.

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, international trade agreements are the responsibility of a federal government. It is possible that the provinces may be able to work a better deal than what the current federal government has done because it has not negotiated anything. It has simply failed. In the province of British Columbia, the lumber industry is also struggling, under an NDP government that will not get permits processed in time. There is a continuous long backlog of applications sitting before a provincial NDP government in British Columbia that is crippling the forest industry sector.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, 42 years of finger pointing is not getting us anywhere. We can see that tonight.

I want to talk about solutions. I have been working closely with Catalyst paper in Port Alberni. This is a mill that has a ton of history. My grandfather worked in that mill. It is so proud of what it is doing. It has retooled its machines so it can do food-grade paper. It has also brought forward an innovative idea to change the clean investment tax credit portion of the Income Tax Act that was supported in the fall economic statement.

It is a technology involved in biomass conversion utilizing low-grade and wildfire-prone wood residues that are otherwise left to decompose and burn in forests or landfills. This renewable resource offers an accessible, affordable clean energy source for Canadians, which would help us to meet Canada's climate and emission reduction commitments. It will save mills, such as the one in my riding, up to \$10 million a year, but we would need legislation from the government to come forward this fall at the latest to get that moving.

Will the Conservatives, instead of pointing fingers, support this proposed change in legislation, which would protect jobs and protect workers? Will they do the right thing when it comes to using waste residue in our forests?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Mr. Chair, I enjoyed working with the member for Courtenay—Alberni when he was on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

His question is about legislation I have not had a chance to read yet, so I cannot say whether I would support it. However, he just talked about clean, affordable energy from wood products. A number of years ago, we put in a pellet stove. We took out the old wood-burning stove and put in the pellet stove because pellets were pretty affordable at that time. A ton of pellets, or fifty 40-pound bags, was about \$165. It is no longer affordable. It costs over \$6 or \$7 per bag, and a ton now costs in the neighbourhood of \$400.

Because of what the government has done, and because it has sold so much overseas instead of looking after Canadians, we are paying the price. It is not just me this is happening to. There are thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of others across the country who are paying higher energy prices because of the government.

● (2045)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Chair, since my riding bears the name of our national emblem, which is a tree, I am especially interested in the softwood lumber debate, even though maple is not a softwood. Softwood lumber plays an important role in all the regions of Quebec.

It was high time that we had a debate like this one in the House of Commons to talk about the importance of softwood lumber and the Liberals' incompetence and lack of ability and will when it comes to finding a solution to the dispute we are in with the U.S. over countervailing tariffs on softwood lumber.

This is nothing new. Since the early 1980s, the United States has been desperately trying to keep Canadian lumber out and to enable Americans to benefit from top-quality wood at very good prices by imposing unfair and unwarranted countervailing duties.

Since the 1980s, there was a time when we had an agreement with the U.S. and things were going well. That was under the Harper government, from 2006 to around 2016. However, unfortunately, right after the current Prime Minister got elected, we saw the government's will to find a solution for this industry, which is important to all regions, especially in Quebec, wither away to nothing.

The forestry industry is important to Quebec's regions. In the Lower St. Lawrence, there are 33 municipalities where the forestry sector accounts for 10% or more of local jobs. In Chaudière-Appalaches, there are 28 municipalities like that. In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, there are about 20 municipalities where more than 10% of workers are directly employed in the forestry sector. In the Eastern Townships, there are 17. In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, there are 15. That is the reality. These are people who have to live with the daily reality of U.S. countervailing duties. Every day, they wonder if these duties will end up killing their industry, their future and, by the same token, their community.

If we look at the share of employment in Quebec's administrative regions and look at the number of jobs in these regions compared to all Quebec regions, some regions clearly stand out. In the Lower St. Lawrence, it accounts for 6% of jobs. In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, the number is 8%. In Quebec's capital region, it is 6%. Yes, even the Quebec City area is impacted. People think that lumber is only produced and processed in remote regions of Quebec, but that is not true. In the Eastern Townships, it accounts for

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8.4% of jobs. In my region, Chaudière-Appalaches, it accounts for 12.3% of jobs. It is unfortunate that the Prime Minister has not had the will to find a solution since being elected in 2015. It is sad because these are jobs in the regions. Is it because the Prime Minister prefers to represent people in big cities, where there are more elected officials from his political party? It would be a shame to think so. Unfortunately, the facts bear this out.

I may be about to tell my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle, the only one speaking for the Liberals this evening, something she never knew. We have not heard from any ministers or parliamentary secretaries about this situation, about the problems facing the softwood lumber industry in Canada and Quebec. Let me give a few figures. Since 2016, there have been 183 bankruptcies in the softwood lumber industry. In 2020, there were 14 bankruptcies, including 12 in Quebec. In 2021, there were 12 bankruptcies in Canada, including seven in Quebec. In 2022, there were 29 bankruptcies in forestry and logging. Of the 29, 18 were in Quebec. The numbers speak for themselves and demonstrate the urgent need for action.

We cannot allow the situation to run its course just because the market price makes it cost-effective enough for us to still get by. That is not how it works. Someday, the price will drop. Someday, all of these companies being kept alive on life support because of artificially high prices caused by inflation will shut down too.

● (2050)

I implore the Prime Minister to take action, find a solution and reach an agreement. Lastly, I implore him to step outside his office for a bit and go see his U.S. counterpart to come up with a solution for the sake of all regions of Quebec.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the name of my riding will soon be Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville. That is coming, even though the opposition voted against my proposal to change the name, but that is another matter.

I listened to my colleague's speech. He talked a bit about the agreements that were signed under Prime Minister Harper. We know that recently, when our government was negotiating NAFTA, Mr. Harper once again gave the same advice, just as he did when he capitulated on softwood lumber in the past. Quebec was really the big loser in all of this. Is that really the kind of agreement my colleague would like to see?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle had the opportunity of a lifetime to introduce a private member's bill in the House of Commons. She could have helped the forestry industry or other businesses, but she chose to introduce a bill to change the name of her riding. With all due respect to my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle, I will take no lessons from her, because she did nothing when she had that rare opportunity. I myself have not yet had such an opportunity, in other words, the chance to do something for an industry, for the workers and the people of my riding.

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Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Chair, I agree with my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable. The current government is not doing much to support the forestry sector. Even worse is that no government has ever done much to help the forestry sector. Under the last agreement that was negotiated by the federal government, \$1 billion was left on the table.

To me, the future does not look bright, because if there were to be a Conservative government, I am not sure anyone in it would be interested in the forestry industry. Never in my life have I seen a single member of the Quebec caucus of the Conservative Party show up at the Standing Committee on Natural Resources and try to advance the issue of wood. I have never seen them there. I have never heard them there. I live in a forestry region. I have never seen them take part in any activity about caribou, tariffs or the forestry sector's urgent request for support. If the past is any indication, I fear that the same thing will happen under a Conservative government. I hope that my colleague can reassure me on this.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, I would like to point out to my colleague that the member for Carleton was the first to rise in the House to speak out against the Minister of Environment and Climate Change's desire to create a whole saga around woodland caribou. We expected the leader of the Bloc Québécois to ask a question about that, but he did not.

There is something else that I would like to add. My Conservative colleagues on the Standing Committee on Natural Resources have shown up and have been very clear and very vocal in defending the softwood lumber industry. We make a great team, and we are able to work together to defend the interests of Quebecers.

As it states in their platform, the Bloc Québécois's number one interest is to achieve Quebec sovereignty. Its members are applauding what I just said. We can therefore be certain that they will do anything they can and take every opportunity to try to stir up trouble, while we are trying to find solutions for producers, those I spoke about in my speech. In Quebec, 50% of forestry producers are basically going bankrupt because this government is incapable of finding solutions to the softwood lumber crisis, which has been affecting them for far too long.

• (2055)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, it has been 42 years and 13 governments. It is getting weird in here. We have each side blaming the other side for who is responsible, but neither has negotiated a good deal. One is on litigation. The Conservative approach is based on tax the axe, adding taxes to softwood lumber manufacturers.

The mayor of Kapuskasing has called on us and asked if we could support an approach that leverages affordable, expedient and climate-resilient solutions to address this crisis, one that leverages the benefits of wood-based products and mass timber construction. I want to get back to solutions instead of pointing fingers.

Maybe my colleague can actually talk about solutions, because what we have been doing for 42 years is not working. Again, tonight's debate is getting weird. Finger pointing is not why we

were sent here. We were sent here to get things done and find solutions to our problems.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Chair, with regard to the report of the Standing Committee on International Trade, which was approved by the NDP, I would point out that the recommendation is to entrust this to the Prime Minister, because he is the only one capable of speaking to the U.S. President to find a definitive solution to the softwood lumber crisis.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister is not doing his job. What is more, this Prime Minister is supported by the coalition with the NDP, which includes my colleague. Perhaps my colleague should have included some fine print in this agreement to the effect that the softwood lumber issue needs to be resolved. If he had, we would not be where we are today.

[English]

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to remind folks to keep the comments and questions short, so everybody can participate. I really want to keep us on time.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, I am proud to participate in this vital take-note debate and to highlight our government's steadfast support of Canada's softwood lumber industry.

We are here tonight because the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States is a long-standing trade irritant in an otherwise fruitful bilateral trading relationship. Unfortunately, this latest round is hardly the first time that the U.S. lumber industry has sought undue protections from fair competition with Canada's leading-edge softwood lumber products. Even worse is the fact that some of our American allies continue to succumb to protectionist pressures by imposing unjustified duties on Canadian softwood lumber products.

The current round of the dispute is the fifth of its kind in the last 40 years. While we will always stand shoulder to shoulder with the companies, workers, innovators and exporters who make Canada's lumber industry second to none, the fact that we have to yet again revisit this dispute speaks to the need for our continued engagement and advocacy on this file.

As members know, the unwarranted duties imposed by the United States on Canada's softwood lumber exports have caused harm to our industry and to the communities and workers that rely on it. The softwood lumber industry is a key component of our highly integrated forestry sector. It contributes to over 200,000 well-paying jobs for hard-working Canadians. The federal government recognizes the importance of the softwood lumber industry to communities across the country and to the Canadian economy more broadly.

That is why resolving the softwood lumber dispute has been a top priority of our government and will continue to be a priority until we see a resolution. The federal government has been relentless in its pursuit of legal challenges against U.S. duties. Canada has contested every U.S. decision imposing or maintaining unfair U.S. duties on Canadian softwood lumber.

The most recent example dates from just a few months ago, when the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development announced a legal challenge to a U.S. decision to maintain the duties on Canadian softwood lumber instead of revoking them. This decision implied that it would be harmful to the U.S. lumber industry if duties were removed from Canadian products. That is just plainly inaccurate and unfounded.

The truth is that the United States cannot produce enough lumber to meet its domestic demand, so it needs lumber imports. Fair competition from Canada should be treated fairly. To be clear, impartial international arbitrators have consistently found Canada to be a fair and reliable trading partner in previous rounds of the softwood lumber dispute. In the current round, we have already seen favourable decisions for Canada, which recognizes what we have said since the beginning, that the Canadian softwood lumber industry is not unfairly subsidized and does not dump its products in the U.S. market.

I will mention just two examples. In August 2020, a WTO panel ruled on Canada's challenge to U.S. countervailing duties. That panel ruled overwhelmingly in Canada's favour. In particular, it stated clearly that U.S. countervailing duties on Canadian softwood lumber are inconsistent with the United States' international obligations. More recently, in October 2023, a binational NAFTA chapter 19 panel reviewed the lawfulness of U.S. anti-dumping duties and issued a decision that was, overall, in Canada's favour.

Canada has 13 ongoing legal challenges against U.S. duties, and we firmly believe that, as these challenges proceed, we will see more and more of these legal rulings confirming our position that U.S. duties are not in compliance with WTO obligations or with U.S. law.

We expect additional developments in our legal cases this year and look forward to welcoming further recognition of Canada's fair trading practices. That said, our government recognizes that while these U.S. duties remain in place, they are having a negative impact on Canadians. That is why our government swiftly reacted to the imposition of U.S. trade measures in 2017 with the announcement of a comprehensive support package, the softwood lumber action plan. This package was designed to help mitigate the wide-ranging effects of the unjustified U.S. measures on our workers and communities in a manner consistent with Canada's international obligations.

• (2100)

In addition to our legal challenges to the U.S. duties, Canada is pressing the United States at every opportunity to find a mutually acceptable outcome to this dispute. The Prime Minister has stressed the importance of finding common ground to President Biden, including during President Biden's recent visit to Canada in March of last year.

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Moreover, the minister of international trade routinely raises concerns over the continued imposition of U.S. duties on softwood lumber products with her U.S. counterpart, Ambassador Katherine Tai, the U.S. trade representative. In those conversations the government has consistently reiterated to Ambassador Tai that Canada is, as always, ready and willing to work constructively toward a durable outcome that provides stability and predictability to the sector. Sadly, the United States has yet to demonstrate that same willingness.

However, we are confident that a positive outcome for all parties can be reached. It is in the United States' own interest to engage collaboratively on this issue. Its own domestic lumber industry remains unable to satisfy growing U.S. demand, and that is where Canadian industry steps in with high-quality products. Many Americans recognize how beneficial it is to have such a reliable source of lumber to build new homes and complete renovation projects. U.S. home builders and certain U.S. lawmakers have called for prompt U.S. action and the removal of U.S. duties, because they are rightfully concerned over housing affordability.

At a time when affordability is a significant issue for many, it is very disappointing that the United States recently signalled its intention to increase these unfair duties later this year, but this only strengthens our resolve. Canada will continue to push back and defend the interests of our softwood lumber industry through all available avenues.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight our close collaboration with the provinces and territories as well as industry stakeholders, indigenous partners and other key players in our effort to defend Canada's interests. For example, our government works closely with stakeholders and partners to mount the best legal defence possible. We provide information and support to companies about navigating the complex U.S. trade remedy proceedings, and we regularly consult with stakeholders on their specific interests within the broader context of this dispute.

As the parliamentary secretary, I have the honour of working closely with the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development to deliver upon her ambitious mandate and stand up for Canadian businesses, exporters and hard-working Canadians.

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Recently I have had the honour of visiting Kelowna, British Columbia, to visit with local businesses. I have travelled to Washington D.C., to help advocate for Canadian exporters, and to Nairobi, Kenya, to help enhance our trade ties with Africa. In all of these instances, as well as in my role on the Standing Committee on International Trade, I have been acutely aware of both how important the softwood lumber industry is to Canada's economy and how and why Canada must continue to be tireless in our advocacy for a fair, rules-based approach to international trade disputes.

I am convinced that the same approach is one we can and should take here tonight as part of this important debate. I know that everyone in the House stands united in their support of our softwood lumber industry. I am convinced that a true team Canada approach is the cornerstone to achieving a positive outcome for Canada in this dispute, and that is why we will continue to work closely with key stakeholders and partners, including members of the House from all parties, in all aspects of this unfortunate dispute.

The federal government's approach to this round of the softwood lumber dispute is comprehensive. We are taking concrete action through both legal avenues and through bilateral engagements to have these unfair U.S. duties revoked. Separately, we have also acted swiftly to mitigate the impacts of the U.S. trade measures on workers and communities.

While we continue to pursue a durable negotiated outcome, let there be no doubt that the Canadian softwood lumber industry and the communities and workers who rely on it know that we have their backs, and we will continue to have their backs.

• (2105)

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have never seen a government try to polish failure like I have watched members of the Liberal government today in this debate try to polish their failure. It has been almost nine years of this dispute. The last time there was a dispute it was resolved by Prime Minister Harper in 76 days. We are now at nine years. There have been 183 bankruptcies in the forestry industry and tens of thousands of jobs lost, and the Liberals keep saying that what they are doing is going to show success. It has been nine years. It is not working.

The softwood lumber industry actually had an idea. It wanted former ambassador David MacNaughton to be a special envoy to resolve the dispute. The minister refused to answer questions at committee about why the government would not do this, so all we are hearing is the same old same old, that the wheels are in motion and that the cheque is in the mail.

What are the Liberals going to do differently? Canadians in the softwood lumber industry cannot wait another 18 months or nine years. They have lost too much already. What are they going to do differently, specifically, other than have the minister send a letter expressing her disappointment?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the member opposite for that very important question.

We have heard time and time again today the Conservatives highlighting the supposed deal that former prime minister Stephen Harper signed. It is easy to sign a deal when one is going to fold

and capitulate on an industry. That is what the Conservatives urged us to do during the CUSMA negotiations, and that is what they are asking us to do now.

We are hearing about this 2006 softwood lumber deal. Do members know what that deal did? It required Canadian firms and exporters to pay heightened export taxes, ranging from 5% to 15%. Quite simply, the Conservatives shifted the burden to our softwood exporters and producers. That agreement remained in effect for seven years, and our softwood lumber industry had to carry that burden for seven years, which hurt exporters and producers in this country.

Under that deal reached by the Harper Conservatives, Canada also had to forfeit \$1 billion of disputed funds, which was then redistributed to American lobbyists and industry groups. Why will Conservative members not highlight that? They do not want to highlight the export tax that came about with this deal. However, I am happy to share that we will continue working with the lumber industry and not capitulate like the Conservatives did.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, I come from a forestry region where a number of towns were severely affected by the softwood lumber crisis of the 2000s.

After I was elected, I had the opportunity to accompany the Minister on a mission to Washington precisely concerning U.S. surtaxes. I thought this would be a great opportunity to talk about softwood lumber. Strategic critical minerals and electric vehicles were the main topics of discussion, but I felt it was important to raise the matter with the Americans. The response was surprising. They were told that their surtax would simply mean that fewer houses would be built under plans like the Build Back Better Act. Even with all that money, if lumber was more expensive, they were going to build fewer houses. It would be a lose-lose situation for them and for us. There was some openness. Two years later, however, here we are having to bring this debate before the House of Commons for discussion.

One of the very simple issues that I would like my colleague to commit to defending in his capacity as parliamentary secretary is the review of the infamous benchmarks that put Quebec at a disadvantage. Quebec has a forestry regime that takes into account the North American Free Trade Agreement, is respectful and should not have a surtax. If British Columbia wants to make its own choices, that is its prerogative. However, Quebec is suffering the consequences. Will my colleague undertake to raise this issue with the Americans so that we can stop putting this Quebec sector at a disadvantage, specifically an industry that is very underfunded compared to western oil?

• (2110)

[*English*]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, I hope to answer the member in French one day. I am working on my French.

Government Orders

The member opposite mentioned advocacy efforts. We take every opportunity and the Prime Minister takes every opportunity. Last year when President Biden visited Canada in March, the Prime Minister raised it with President Biden. At every opportunity, the trade minister brings this up, as do many ministers in cabinet. It is very important that we continue to raise these advocacy efforts.

The member opposite mentioned support, what we are doing and what more we can do. I want to highlight that budget 2023 provided an additional almost \$370 million over three years to renew and update the forestry sector supports, and this includes support for research and development, and indigenous and international leadership. We have also invested over \$130 million in the sector to accelerate the adoption of transformative technologies and products through the investments in forest industry transformation program as well as over \$12 million to provide economic opportunities for indigenous communities in the forestry sector through the indigenous forestry initiative.

Whether one is in B.C., Alberta, Quebec or any other province, we will continue to be there with the lumber industry, because we know that it supports over 200,000 jobs and it supports innovation in our sector.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, in British Columbia, we know that we have fibre supply issues that are impacting our mills. What did the B.C. NDP Premier David Eby do? He created a new minister of state for fibre supply. Andrew Mercier got the appointment, and it is an entirely new portfolio, the first time in the history of British Columbia. He already delivered a report, on March 31, to start implementing action to help deal with that.

We talked about the full-court press in here earlier and the need for it. However, I am not dismissing or disputing that my colleague and friend across the way is not working hard. He is the parliamentary secretary for export promotion, international trade and economic development, which is a lot to carry. Is this government going to take this issue seriously, like British Columbia did, and actually create a minister responsible to deal with the softwood lumber dispute or a parliamentary secretary dedicated just to this issue, someone on point and not dealing with anything else, just like the Province of British Columbia did. We are in a crisis, and we need to have someone completely and solely dedicated to this.

Is the member going back to the Prime Minister and saying that this portfolio is wide and that they need to hone it down and put someone just on this to work with members of Parliament across the aisle, like me and other MPs who are here tonight, so that we can do a full-court press in the United States and work with state governments and the federal government in the U.S.?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, that is a very important and very valid question. Recently, we launched our team Canada-U.S. engagement strategy, where we are doing just that. We are leading team Canada's efforts to engage with our counterparts in the U.S., whether through industry groups or on the government side. We want to make sure that we involve everyone in the House because it is a team Canada approach. We represent Canadians, at the end of the day.

Speaking about B.C. and innovation, people are really doing game-changing things out in B.C., and we are seeing that on the economic development side when the minister takes trade missions to the Indo-Pacific region. Recently, in Japan, she was joined by Bruce St. John, president of Canada Wood, Kamal Sanghera of San industries and Rob Gough of Mosaic Forest Management to talk about some of their innovative Canadian products. While we want to make sure we continue to advocate for results on the softwood lumber dispute, we also want to make sure that we are opening new markets. We now have over a dozen free trade agreements. That opens up 51 different countries with 1.5 billion consumers for our lumber and our innovative products from here in Canada. The minister will continue doing that, working alongside all of our colleagues in the House.

• (2115)

Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, we have always believed that the best deals are reached at the bargaining table. Our government is prepared to negotiate in good faith with our American counterparts, but we are not willing to accept just any deal at any cost. When our government was renegotiating CUSMA with the Trump administration, former prime minister Stephen Harper urged the Canadian government to fold and capitulate.

Can the hon. parliamentary secretary share with the House what is being done when it comes to resolving the softwood lumber dispute and supporting our lumber industry?

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my colleague from B.C. for his tireless advocacy on this very important topic and for his constituents.

Of course, we will continue to advocate on behalf of Canadian exporters and producers, but really when we come back to this agreement that the Conservatives keep highlighting from the Harper era, lumber producers are still feeling the impacts of that. Absolutely, we will take no lessons in terms of signing an agreement like that where we just fold and capitulate on the entire industry. They asked us to do that when we renegotiated the CUSMA. The Conservatives have consistently voted against measures to support the industry, and we are still feeling the impacts of the deal they desperately signed in 2006. For seven years, that burdened lumber producers across Canada. It really hurt employees and it hurt the innovation in the sector.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time.

Government Orders

There is a critical issue that has been plaguing Canada's economic landscape for decades: The softwood lumber dispute with the United States. This long-standing conflict has added strain on the livelihoods of countless Canadians who depend on the forestry industry. Softwood lumber, a vital component of Canada's forest sector, especially in Kootenay—Columbia, has been subjected to punitive tariffs by the United States under the pretext of unfair subsidies provided by Canadian governments to their lumber producers. The lasting resolution remains elusive due to the inability of the Liberals to close, leaving Canadian lumber producers, both large and small, in a constant state of uncertainty and vulnerability. These duties have devastating impacts on the small lumber producers, and the effects are felt right down to the employee loading wood on a belt, and if one has ever worked in a sawmill, it would be known as the “green chain”.

The forestry sector is 10% of the workforce in Kootenay—Columbia. The only industry larger is steel coal. Despite promising to prioritize the softwood lumber dispute and to work toward a fair and equitable solution, the government's actions have fallen short of expectations. Time and time again we have witnessed a lack of strategic foresight and proactive engagement from the current government, leading to prolonged periods of uncertainty and frustration.

Softwood lumber was not mentioned in the 2019 budget and, in 2021, I specifically asked the minister to take a stance to protect Canadian workers and the forestry industry. Here we are three years later with no action. The lack of action directly relates to the capital investments in mills when no agreements are in place. Just the other day, I was in Salmo, talking with the owner of a cedar mill. He is ready to invest \$10 million into modernization, but with no solid agreement in place and access to fibre, it is difficult. It is not only Porcupine, but also ATCO, Huscroft, Kalesnikoff, McDonalds and Galloway. Those are generational mills that contribute significantly to our communities and that know how to sustain the environment for future generations.

Instead of leveraging diplomatic channels and trade negotiations to secure a favourable outcome for Canadian lumber producers, the Liberal government is stuck in a cycle of inaction. Its failure to effectively address the underlying grievances of the United States, coupled with a lack of decisive action on the home front, has only made the situation worse, leaving our forestry industry at the mercy of arbitrary tariffs and of protectionist measures. The absence of any sort of plan to the softwood lumber issue has undermined Canada's credibility on the international stage and has shaken the confidence in our ability to safeguard the interests of our citizens. In the face of mounting economic pressures and global uncertainties, there is a need right now for strong and principled leadership, and that has never been more apparent.

Canadian manufacturers are currently facing the longest period without a negotiated settlement in the U.S. softwood lumber dispute, resulting in the accumulation of nearly \$10 billion in countervailing duties and duty fees. This ongoing issue has significantly impacted the industry, creating challenges and skepticism in the process. After speaking with the Interior Lumber Manufacturers' Association, we found that value-added producers are facing another unique challenge when it comes to the softwood lumber dispute.

They pay duties based on a higher sale price. As a result, it costs them more money to manufacture. When a raw material leaves Canada and goes to the U.S., we lose that. We used to have, in 2006, under a Conservative government, a \$500 per thousand board feet maximum duty. That was it. Now, we do not have that, so these high-end products are more expensive.

What is the Liberal plan moving forward? It is imperative that the government takes immediate action to resolve the softwood lumber dispute by engaging with our American counterparts. The softwood lumber issue represents a glaring failure of leadership on the part of the Liberal government. It is time for the government to step up to the plate, to demonstrate true commitment to the interests of the hard-working folks in the forest industry and to finally put an end to this dispute.

How long will Canadians have to wait for the government to deliver on its promises?

• (2120)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Chair, for many years, as a parliamentarian, one frustration has been the issue of softwood lumber. It is an issue that comes up far too often, but to say that it is the fault of the Government of Canada verus, let us say, the previous government and former prime minister, does a disservice to how the U.S. lumber barons control the market in the United States to the degree that it has been devastating for many companies here in Canada.

I would like to suggest to the member that we need to be talking about ways in which we can continue to walk with our producers and others, industry stakeholders, to protect Canadian interests from those large lumber barons in the United States. Could the member provide his thoughts on those barons?

Mr. Rob Morrison: Mr. Chair, right now, it is demonstrating that eight years has been a long time. It has been over eight years. For the last four years, I have been pushing for the minister to start looking at resolving it, with nothing. It is time now to show leadership.

When we were talking earlier about solutions, we need strong leadership so that we can actually start making some headway. Right now, we are not going anywhere. It is good to have this debate because I have so many sawmills in my area. I just named the smaller ones. I have big ones as well, which are suffering the same fate of losing staff. It is time to get somewhere. We have not moved forward in eight years. It is time to move forward.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, it is nice to have so many British Columbia MPs here tonight, standing up for our forests and for the industry. I am wondering if he would agree that while the U.S. is imposing these unfair duties, it would be a good time to ask the federal Minister of Trade to stop approving any permits for the export of sawlogs when our mills still need logs to process locally.

Government Orders

Mr. Rob Morrison: Mr. Chair, I live in the Kootenays, and one of the border crossings is Kingsgate. I see raw logs heading south, because that is the border. I have some sawmills that do laminated processes. They are trying to use all the wood, and they cannot compete with the price in the U.S. because the raw logs are going. That is where we are losing jobs.

That is one half. The other half, of course, is the fibre that we cannot get. Raw logs heading south just takes jobs away from Canadians.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Chair, one thing we have not talked a lot about tonight is rail service. We need to ensure that a rail service in and out of mills from coast to coast is dealt with. It is a huge deal, actually. We often find ourselves at the whim of our shippers, whether it is CN or CP, and we have no other options to get our product to market.

Does my colleague agree that the federal government needs to develop a strategy to improve rail service for rural and remote communities in the sector, so that we can actually get our products to market efficiently and affordably?

Mr. Rob Morrison: Mr. Chair, I totally agree. It is very challenging through the Rocky Mountains, through all our mountain passes, for rail. That is so much different from Europe, for example. We do need to be able to open the door to be more effective and efficient in our cross-border trade with the United States as well.

I have one sawmill that has its own train, which can go down into the U.S. right through Deer Trail. We do have one of those, but for the rest, we have one line. We only have CP in the southern part of the province, so to actually improve how we deliver the product will also keep the cost of our product down, which makes us the most competitive internationally.

• (2125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Chair, I know my colleague comes from a region where softwood lumber is an important issue.

Does he agree with me that the renegotiation of NAFTA, which became CUSMA, represents a major missed opportunity and that, when it comes time to renegotiate in 2025, we must not miss out on such an important opportunity?

[*English*]

Mr. Rob Morrison: Mr. Chair, absolutely. That should have been dealt with on the day we did CUSMA, and we did not do it. We are back to where we will have to do it now, and hopefully, we will get this done in the next short period. Otherwise, we will lose a lot more jobs in the upcoming years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Chair, the softwood lumber dispute between Canada and the United States has been going on for decades, generating significant trade tensions. If the temporary direction of the U.S. government holds, the countervailing and anti-dumping duties it imposes on Canadian

wood would go from 8.05% to 13.86%, which would cause considerable harm.

Of all the forestry companies in Quebec, nearly 250 are from first nations communities. These experienced entrepreneurs know the forestry well. We underestimate the concerns of these entrepreneurs during the forestry industry crises, which bring their own set of uncertainties. Think of how hard it is for the communities to get funding when their businesses are shaken by these crises. These problems are exacerbated. Think of the programs that are not adapted to the reality of first nations and to which these businesses are often ineligible because they are not incorporated under law, because they cannot be. When the forestry industry goes through a crisis, the most isolated first nations communities are the ones that are affected and impoverished.

Indigenous communities' involvement in the forestry industry is both economically and ecologically beneficial as a result of their deep ancestral connection to forest lands, which encourages sustainable and responsible practices. The companies help create local jobs, train qualified workers and diversify the economic opportunities available in remote or economically fragile regions. Over 80% of indigenous forestry companies are very small businesses, but they are also essential to our communities' economies. Only 20% of indigenous companies have the ability to offer greater employment opportunities in indigenous communities.

On another note, I want to reiterate that the Quebec forestry regime meets the requirements of international trade agreements and respects the principles of free trade. This is a very frustrating situation. The problem is not Quebec. The allegations that our companies practise dumping and benefit from backdoor subsidies are unfounded and completely unwarranted. The rulings of international courts have systematically rejected the Americans' arguments, but the United States continues to maintain these unfair, punitive tariffs. That jeopardizes our Quebec and indigenous companies and consequently, our jobs.

In light of this critical situation, the Bloc Québécois is proposing meaningful action and solutions to support our forestry industry and communities.

First, the federal government must implement a loan guarantee program sufficient to cover the amounts withheld by the United States through taxes. Second, it must officially recognize the Quebec forestry regime because it meets the free trade standards. The federal government must also amend the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement so that the litigation process is better regulated and leaves no room for unfair delay tactics. The government must also request a tax exemption for private lumber. These measures are essential to protect our jobs, our businesses and our resource regions from the United States' unfair trading practices.

Government Orders

It is time to take decisive, concerted action to defend our forestry industry and guarantee its prosperous future. In our regions, small towns like Nédélec have been hard hit by the softwood lumber crisis. They have suffered greatly as result of a government that invests billions of dollars in the oil industry while providing only tens of millions of dollars, mere peanuts, to Quebec's forestry industry. That has an impact on small towns in my region. Close to 26,000 jobs were lost in Quebec as a result of this dispute.

What is even more frustrating is that Quebec has developed its auction system, which means less investing. We are the victims. If ever there was an argument for how Quebec sovereignty would be an economic game-changer, particularly in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, it would be the fact that we could have our own free trade agreement with the United States, and we would not be penalized for British Columbia's decisions.

I should also say that I cannot wait for us to invest in processing so we can offer more than just planks, perhaps by driving a nail or two into them to create an item with some added value. We could eventually offset certain elements of the free trade agreement. Why not dream of creating a Quebec IKEA in La Sarre? Quebec's forestry industry can dream big.

● (2130)

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, I have been listening to industry and hearing about the impacts of wildfires on the lumber industry. As we know, wildfires have destroyed thousands and thousands of acres of forest land. When we talk about supporting industry and innovation, the conversation should also be about climate change and how we can help mitigate its impacts on industries such as the lumber industry.

What more can we do in working with the industry, according to my colleague, to ensure that we are supporting and protecting our environment?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I would especially like to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his question and his concern about the forest fires. This had a major impact on forestry entrepreneurs in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, northern Quebec, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and the north shore. These forestry entrepreneurs had invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment that they had placed in the woods and that was ravaged by the forest fires.

Unfortunately, the federal government has not stepped up to provide compensation. As a result, that wood must be harvested quickly. The government did not give these entrepreneurs any room to manoeuvre, any cash or liquidity to recover their machinery and equipment, to recover the wood and revitalize the industries.

Some EI assistance was also needed. The weeks lost by the workers could not be made up at the end of the summer. These people did not receive adequate compensation through EI. These are solutions. The federal government will have to find major solutions when it comes to investing in climate change programs. In agricul-

ture in particular, compensation will be absolutely crucial, because people are suffering on the ground.

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Chair, the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue mentioned government loans and government security to reinvest in businesses and the forestry sector. The forestry workers I know are very proud of their work. The small mill owners, the loggers and the road builders, I think, would far rather develop things on their own. However, they are not able to because of the billions of dollars, \$8 billion to \$10 billion, being held by the U.S. in these countervailing duties.

Would he agree that it would be far better if those companies could get those countervailing duty payments made to them, so they would not be reliant on government loans and security?

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from British Columbia for his thoughts for the workers and the business owners.

In this case, we are talking about a dispute that is political. Who is being political? It is the federal government, who should be there to defend us. If it does not, then it should pay the bill. It is not for the business owners to do that. It is not for the workers to pay with their jobs for the political risk that the government took because it did not want to go into battle with the Americans. It is not for the business owners and the workers to pay the cost of the Canadian government choosing to invest in the oil industry instead of the forestry industry, which is renewable. At some point, it will have to take action and give priority to sustainable, truly sustainable development.

If there is a political cost to pay, the workers should not have to cover that cost. If there is an economic cost to pay, it is simple. The money needs to be put in a fund and the workers on the ground need to be compensated. Obviously we are going to win against the Americans because we always win when we know that what they are doing is illegal. When the legal battle is won, the government will be reimbursed. Its pockets deep enough to do that.

● (2135)

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, one thing I really want to thank my colleague for is talking about the importance of indigenous-led forestry companies and the role they play.

There is a new forestry company that just launched last week called Iskum, which is basically a consortium of over 20 first nations in coastal British Columbia. It is led by Chief John Jack of the Huu-ay-aht Nation and the former elected chief, Robert Dennis.

Government Orders

We know the forest industry currently employs about 10,000 indigenous individuals, both directly and indirectly. It is crucial to provide more support for economic opportunities in indigenous and rural communities, fostering the development of the forest bioeconomy and encouraging diverse partnerships and collaborations.

The indigenous natural resource partnerships program led by Natural Resources Canada needs to be expanded. If this is done, it could play a crucial role in supporting projects related to forest management, workplace training and the production of conventional forest products. Especially, investing in the forest bioeconomy will establish community-based employment and businesses promoting diversification and scalability.

Does my colleague agree that the federal government needs to invest in renewing and expanding the Natural Resources Canada program as a broader strategy for the sector?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleague for his comment. It is indeed very important for me to talk about the indigenous file. Enabling indigenous communities to have better alternatives is part of reconciliation, so yes, that involves reviewing programs to invest in communities for and by indigenous people who will develop the forest in a very sustainable way. Just look at the forestry companies in Kebaowek, a very inspiring example in my riding.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Chair, it is an honour to rise at this hour to speak in this important take-note debate.

I feel compelled to start with the sad news that was originally shared earlier tonight by the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola about the Hon. John Fraser, former Speaker of the House, former member of Parliament and a valiant conservation champion. He served as minister of the environment in the government of the Right Hon. Joe Clark. He served as the minister of fisheries. He was a British Columbian, a Progressive Conservative and a very close friend, and he died a few days ago. There are flowers in the hallway outside under his portrait.

We are talking about British Columbia forests and softwood lumber disputes. Over many years, John was very involved in advocating for the protection of our forests. He played a key role, as I mentioned on the floor of this place not that long ago, with the Right Hon. Brian Mulroney with respect to the logging of the old-growth forests, the forests of what is now Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve. He played a key role in that even as Speaker of the House.

I will briefly reflect that in Centre Block, in the Speaker's chambers, with a number of visiting conservationists and first nations, he proposed a toast to "the conspiracy to save the planet". It was a non-partisan conspiracy, with Progressive Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats and members of the Bloc all working together. In his memory, I want to dedicate this reflection on the state of our forests and the ongoing softwood lumber disputes and to say how dearly he will be missed. He was 92 years old when he passed, but there is no stronger environmentalist in the history of this country than the Hon. John Fraser.

As these brief remarks and reflection might suggest, I have been following the softwood lumber dispute for some time and written much about it over the years, going back to what some Canadians will remember in the 1980s. It sounded like some kind of awful disease, that we had to deal with shakes and shingles, but it was not a joke. We have had relentless opposition from the U.S. to a fair shake for the Canadian forest industry. A very active participant in tonight's debate, my friend from Courtenay—Alberni, has reflected on the fact that it has been 42 years of being somehow unable to resolve what appears to be a long-running and bad soap opera. We have had moments of clarity and moments that fell apart.

I certainly think that the current Minister of Trade could be far more active in making it a top-priority issue when dealing with the United States, but I also think it is unfair to suggest that nothing has been done by the current government on trade disputes. I think it is quite remarkable that, again with the late Brian Mulroney's help, the current government was able to get to any trade agreement with the former U.S. administration and president. Let us hope to God we can continue to refer always to him as the former president, Donald Trump, who is, at his essence, protectionist and not really interested in liberalized trade, fair trading rules or even in the global trade regime, of which I also have many criticisms.

It is close to a miracle that we have CUSMA and that we were able to improve on the agreement by getting rid of chapter 11 and the investor-state dispute resolution processes, and to improve on the energy chapter. However, we were not able to improve on the perennial crisis of softwood lumber. We know that the deal we had did buy us quite a lot of time in 2006, but at a cost.

I should pause here again. In a take-note debate, there really is no such thing as a prize for best line of the night, so let this be a first. I wish I had a trophy, which I would not be able to use as it would be a prop, for the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni for "tax the axe". It should go down in history.

● (2140)

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, as my Bloc Québécois friends have already said, it is impossible to translate that into French, but it is a good joke.

[*English*]

For "tax the axe", hats off to the member for Courtenay—Alberni. I wish I had thought of it, but I give credit where credit is due.

Government Orders

We did not really protect our forest industry in the deal that bought time in 2006, and since it expired in 2015, we have had nothing in place instead. We keep winning. Let us be clear that we win in the World Trade Organization, before NAFTA panels and against the efforts of the U.S. Department of Commerce in saying that our industry is somehow unfair to the U.S. industry. On those arguments, with a fact-based approach in response, we win in the courts; however, the U.S. Department of Commerce is a domestic and political organization.

Again, if I were giving a prize, it would be to the champion lobbyists. The U.S. Lumber Coalition is able to come back over and over again. Tonight, we have a take-note debate, and again I am backing up to give credit where credit is due, to the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, and to say thanks.

[*Translation*]

I thank him for his attempt to hold an emergency debate on softwood lumber on February 5.

[*English*]

There was an attempt made by the Bloc in early February to have an emergency debate. Back in February, the U.S. Department of Commerce said that the duties it had been applying at about 8.05% were going to go up to 13.86%. That was just what it was doing, and it did not need to have a reason.

It is often the case that I look at the United States of America and say that Barack Obama is not George Bush, and George Bush is not Donald Trump, but the United States of America is the United States of America; it just keeps doing what it does. It is not fair or right, and Canada should be able to do something more. It is not nothing to go back to another international tribunal, as our government is doing, to complain of the unfairness of the situation and that it is not right to keep hiking duties. However, I will focus on solutions, as we have heard quite a few tonight.

Let us look at the solution that was originally put forward in the Bloc request for an emergency debate. In the budget coming up on April 16, let us put some money forward so Canadian industries that are being unfairly impacted by this can receive some compensation from our government. We will eventually try to get it out of the U.S. some other way, to keep our industry afloat and keep it whole.

The amount of U.S. structural lumber going into the U.S. has been going up steadily. That is why it is raising the tariffs. Over the last couple of years and the explosion in demand for construction materials, we are getting more of the pie for Canada than we did, say, even five years or six years ago. This is why American manufacturers in the lumber group are upset about it and looking for more duties to hit us hard.

What else could we do? We could make sure that Canadian structural lumber is used more in Canada. We could stop raw log exports, because that requires a federal permit. We could make sure our mills in Canada are not lacking for fibre supply to keep our workers going on triple shifts seven days a week if they want to. Shipping out raw logs is wrong.

Recently, at COP28 in Dubai, essentially all the countries on earth embraced something I do not think has been spoken of in this House. It is called a “circular economy”. The rip and strip idea, which is exemplified by logging in places that need to be protected, and particularly old growth forests, is that we just rip and strip and get that out, ship it someplace else and not create the jobs here. If we are serious about raising Canadian productivity, we want a circular economy.

If we are serious, I know we could stop raw log exports and make sure we take better care of the ecological health of our forests while also protecting our workers. Lastly, we need to act on the climate crisis, because the biggest threat to our forests is not the U.S. Lumber Coalition; it is the climate crisis.

• (2145)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, today we heard about this wonderful deal that was signed during the Harper era. It really hurt the industry and hurt jobs across the sector for seven straight years. It imposed an export tax on producers, from 5% to 15%.

Does the member opposite think that is a fair approach? What does the member opposite think about what the Conservatives are doing in terms of protecting our environment and fighting climate change? We know we need to protect the forest industry, but we also need to protect our environment.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, whether the parliamentary secretary intended to or not, he did allow me to sneak in something I ran out of time to mention, which is that the forest industry quite neatly overlays rural and remote areas of Canada, and a lot of indigenous territories and indigenous communities.

Yes, we need to do a better job protecting our forests. The forest industry in Canada, despite their press, is not perfect. The government could do a better job on its environmental performance. We could sequester more carbon in our forests.

Again, what I think of the Conservatives' lack of policy on climate is a long speech of nothing, but I am afraid that if I told the Liberal member what I think of the Liberal climate policies, he would not be very pleased either, so I will end it there.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Chair, I just have a quick question on forestry management, which, of course, in British Columbia is a significant question. I have been talking with the provincial party about forestry management, because it affects all of our forestry industry.

Government Orders

Would the member agree that perhaps a solution that has not been used, and should be, is all of the small, especially very small, generational sawmills, the four-, five- or six-generation sawmills? The people who work in those sawmills know forestry management better than anyone. They are there to make sure that their families can take over the business that has been going for years. They understand forestry management, yet they are not brought to the table.

Does the member think this is something that could be explored to help us with forestry management?

• (2150)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, there is no question that in this country we tend to have a default preference for people who describe themselves as professionals, as opposed to people who actually know what they are doing. I have always liked the quote, “Amateurs built the ark. Professionals built the *Titanic*.”

I do think we should bring to the table people who have intergenerational experience in managing their own lands, thinking of the seven generations and not thinking only of rip and strip.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Madam Chair, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the fact that our forests are not adequately protected. Also, does she agree that the government needs to support the forestry sector and stop ignoring it? Does she also agree that the government needs to stand up for that sector when dealing with the Americans?

I would like to hear her thoughts.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I thank my friend and colleague from the Bloc Québécois.

Absolutely, I think we need subsidies, with a preference for Canadian industry, at a time when the U.S. government wants to punish our industry. This is a good opportunity for the federal government to provide financial support to this sector.

At the same time, we must work with the United Nations and with indigenous peoples to better protect Canada's forests, the boreal forests. That is what we need to do to protect our forests in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I was just reading a quote from the release for Iskum Investments, the new consortium of indigenous companies on the coast of B.C. I was reading a quote from *waamiš* Ken Watts. He is the elected chief councillor of Tseshaht Nation. He said:

As First Nations decision-makers and leaders, it is our responsibility to help find positive and productive solutions and be proactive in our efforts to solve the complex problems that society faces.

I want to thank my colleague because that is what she has done tonight.

In addition, Chief Watts said:

Through the shared values of our Consortium, it is our goal to demonstrate how business can work with First Nations and facilitate this change with new ways of thinking. Our Nations have made a commitment to bring our paddles into the same canoe, together paddling as one as we move forward to exploratory opportunities.

What I would really like us to learn from Chief Watts, from the *waamiš*, is how to do that here, get ourselves in the same canoe and start paddling in the same direction, because 42 years of going back and forth like this is not working. It is failing everybody.

The government could expand the Natural Resources Canada program, which really helped indigenous communities. However, maybe my colleague could speak about the importance of indigenous ownership when it comes to forestry companies in Canada and the importance of indigenous knowledge.

I want to thank my colleague for her speech and for trying to force that debate to open up tonight, talking about solutions to deal with these problems that are facing us right now.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, the issue of forestry in the Canada-U.S. debate is structural. Let us recognize that most of our forest products are produced from land that is called Crown land, and in the U.S. it is from private land. The stumpage fees we charge are viewed by the U.S. as an unfair subsidy.

Let us strip all of that away. It is indigenous land. If it is called private land, who was it stolen from? If it is called Crown land, where did we take it from? What if we focused our efforts around forests on justice and reconciliation, on land back and economic value, while thinking about the seven generations around projects like the one that my friend, the member for Courtenay—Alberni, just mentioned and Chief Watts' impact there.

We also need to re-examine our Constitution. It is widely assumed that because in 1867 someone wrote down that provinces are in charge of forestry, the federal government should have very little to do with it. Let us back up and say that in 1867 we were not talking about climate change or indigenous rights. Yes, in terms of annual allowable cuts and logging allowances, forests are clearly provincial. However, the federal government has a much bigger role here for biodiversity protection, for reconciliation and for climate action.

Let us take off our 1867 blinkers and figure out how we get everybody into the same canoe.

• (2155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Chair, I heard my colleague make a very interesting pun. I am not sure if it was intentional or not.

First, some context. We have a proven and documented environmental measure that works, which is the carbon tax. We often hear MPs say “axe the tax”. He switched that up a bit. In this debate, what we should be saying is “stop taxing the axe”. We need to stop taxing the axe, because that axe is carried by our forestry workers, by the people who work in the forestry industry, and that is important.

Government Orders

The government's priority should be to stop taxing the axe, to promote jobs in our regions, to allow investment in our regions, should it not? There needs to be a meaningful environmental commitment. Investing in the forestry industry is also investing in the planet and sustainable development.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Chair, I have very little to add because I absolutely agree with my Bloc Québécois colleague.

I think it is important to point out that the debates we have here about carbon pricing are almost futile compared to the critical issue of the climate change threat. At the moment, we know that there is no greater threat, except perhaps that of nuclear war.

We need to do more. We need to have debates based on science, evidence and the reality of our current situation, which is so serious for our children and grandchildren.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Chair, I am pleased to be here this evening to talk about softwood lumber. I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Tobique—Mactaquac. I have had some good discussions with him on the issue of natural resources.

Speaking of natural resources, I would also like to thank my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois forestry caucus, including my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, the international trade critic, and my colleague from Jonquière, the natural resources critic. I am also thinking of the members from Abitibi, Trois-Rivières, the Lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé, the Magdalen Islands and Lac-Saint-Jean, because there certainly is quite a bit of forest in Quebec.

Quebec accounts for 20% of softwood lumber production. This industry supports entire communities. It is the backbone of the economy. I commend my colleagues. I also commend the Quebecers who are keeping that economy, these communities, these workers, these unions and these businesses going.

I am beginning my ninth year as an MP. I was elected in 2015, a year that could have given us hope. In 2013, Quebecers had adopted a new forestry system, one that we had worked on for several years. At the same time, an outdated agreement that had been signed by the Conservative government of the day expired. We were expecting something to be done about that.

However, it has been nine years, and I have to say that nothing has been done yet. We are still at the same point, despite the opportunities we have had. I think that every one of my colleagues talked about it in the House this evening. There were many opportunities, including NAFTA and CUSMA, but none of them were taken.

Being here tonight with my colleagues, I feel as though I should say that this is what the Bloc Québécois is all about. We are the only ones bringing this debate to the House. We almost never hear about forests. We do not hear about softwood lumber or countervailing or anti-dumping duties. They come up at times, such as every time the United States says it is going to impose these duties, then a minister stands up and says that the government is not going to let it happen this time, that Canada is not going to take it. Six months later, when the duties are imposed, the minister says the same thing, that the government will not let it happen and that it does not make any sense at all.

However, since 2015, unless I missed something, nothing has changed, but I am open to being corrected. Sometimes, I have seen strokes of genius. We figured that we were truly dependent on the United States and that the Canadian market depended on the United States, and we wondered what would happen. There was talk of diversifying the Quebec market and turning to Asia. There were programs like that and I specifically remember a minister who offered that. However, to us, that changes absolutely nothing.

The Bloc Québécois has asked for several measures, including loan guarantees. However, I talk to my industries. I am thinking of Mr. St-Gelais from Boisaco, who I talk to quite frequently. What we are asking is for the forestry regime to be recognized.

How is it that, on the other side of the border, no one says a word on this issue? I was listening to my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot earlier. He said that every time he goes to the U.S., he meets with congressional representatives and several people from the industry, including members of the National Association of Home Builders. He meets with them. The members of the National Association of Home Builders raise the issue, but the Canadian delegation members do not.

I am somewhat concerned that the same thing happened during the NAFTA renegotiations. I fear that softwood lumber was used as a bargaining chip. The government may have defended the auto sector and Ontario, but it could not be bothered to defend Quebec. New Brunswick does not have much to say regarding countervailing and anti-dumping duties. The same goes for British Columbia. Only Quebec seems to find this really difficult, but the government is saying too bad, that it is going to protect the auto sector instead.

Understandably, a debate like tonight's brings the softwood lumber issue to the fore once again. I would like the official opposition and the government to step up and say that they are going to do something. As my colleague from British Columbia said, for the past 42 years, which is nearly my age, nothing has changed and our businesses are still paying the price because they cannot invest, modernize or expand. Quebec is the one paying the price, because of both the official opposition and the government.

Government Orders

• (2200)

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, supporting the softwood lumber industry through innovation and diversifying trade is one of our key priorities, but it is also to stand up for lumber industries and the workers in the industry. Therefore, we are advocating and will continue to advocate. The Prime Minister has raised this on many occasions. The Minister of International Trade has raised this on many occasions. We will continue to make sure that we fight for our lumber industry, because we know it supports over 200,000 jobs across Canada, whether in Quebec, B.C., Alberta or the other provinces.

In terms of innovation in the lumber industry, what more does the member opposite think can be done to ensure that our state-of-the-art products, which people around the world are paying premium dollar for, get out to markets around the world?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Chair, the first thing I would say is, what can we do now? For 10 years now, since this party came to power, something has needed to be done about softwood lumber. The Liberals are talking about state-of-the-art products, but it is already hard enough to offload our two-by-fours.

The government needs to do two things. First, it needs to talk about the issue. I am not sure that it has. I have never heard the government talk about it. Perhaps the government discusses it behind closed doors, but I think that when a government wants to engage in diplomacy, it must ensure that the media relays its message so that people know that the issue is one of its priorities. I have never heard anything about that. Second, the Bloc Québécois has reminded the government many times of the measures that could be taken. We are prepared to work together and discuss the issue, but not like this, not in a way that I feel is very out of touch with the reality of our workers. I would invite people to come to my riding when workers are suffering because they are no longer able to sell their lumber, when shifts have to be cut, when people are sent home, when small towns think about shutting down. They will not talk the same way. I want the government to discuss the situation with us. We have all kinds of solutions. My colleagues all talked about them earlier.

• (2205)

[English]

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Chair, the member for Manicouagan and I worked on the fisheries committee earlier today and I always value her input.

The question for the member just now from the parliamentary secretary has me puzzled. He was asking her what she thought could be done better. I thought it was the government's job to do the best it can for Canadians. Obviously that is not happening because even he is asking what could be done better.

Would the member agree with me that the government has absolutely failed on this and that it is looking now to everyone else for answers because it does not have them itself?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Chair, indeed, not having a solution to offer the lumber industry and Quebec, I would say, is a failure of all governments. In my mind, it is just one more reason to gain independence.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, I too sat on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans with my colleague, and I really appreciated her fighting for rural Canada. Whether it be her in Quebec or me in British Columbia, we work well together.

I was reading a quote that was sent to the Standing Committee on Finance. It was in a pre-budget consultation submission put forward by Paper Excellence. The company wrote:

Greater Support for Indigenous Lead Development in the Forest Bioeconomy—

We are advocating for increased support for economic opportunities in Indigenous communities to foster the development of the forest bioeconomy and promote partnerships and collaborations through the expansion of the Indigenous Natural Resource Partnerships (INRP) program.

Does my colleague agree? Again, while we see Liberals and Conservatives pointing fingers at who is to blame for 42 years of failed softwood, what I have really liked about the Bloc is that the members have brought forward solutions tonight. We have to talk about solutions because what the Conservatives and the Liberals have been doing is not working.

Does my colleague agree, in the upcoming budget, that the federal government needs to invest in and expand the indigenous natural resource partnerships program, and how critical it is that we support indigenous-owned and indigenous-led businesses and initiatives?

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Madam Chair, I would like to thank my colleague for his question and tell him that I hold him in high esteem as well. We have worked a lot together on the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans.

In a riding like mine, talking about development always means working in partnership. This makes perfect sense to us. For example, we work with the Innu people and the Naskapi nation. We want that economy to develop, too. Whether we are talking about first nations, non-indigenous people or both, given that we work in partnership, the fact remains that we also need to be able to export our products. Of course, we can help first nations, but we also need the government to do its job. It has not done its job for nine years, or 42 years, even.

*Government Orders**[English]*

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Madam Chair, it is an honour to rise once again in the people's House to share about a very important subject that is near and dear to my heart. This dispute has been ongoing for now over eight years without resolution. Quite frankly, for all of the rhetoric saying that this is a top priority of the government, that it needs to be resolved and that the government is seized with the issue, we are now eight years out and there is still no solution. Workers across the country in the forestry sector are wondering at what point it will be resolved. They wonder what the future is for their livelihoods and for their families.

In the region that I represent in western New Brunswick, there are several forestry-related jobs at mills and factories. In fact, it is quite personal to me in that my father worked in a pulp and paper mill for over 50 years of his life. He carried a bucket to work every day with his lunch in it, the old lunch pail, the aluminum one. I have it in my office on my shelf as a reminder that I am here because of people like my dad who carry those buckets every day, who work hard in the forestry sector and keep our mills going. They keep the lumber moving and keep products going overseas to help nations over there, but they also provide good employment for people here at home.

I will never forget the time in the early 2000s when the mill went down. My dad, at that point, had worked over 30 years in the pulp industry. What does a man do after working in that one sector for over 30 years and then, all of a sudden, losing his employment plus his pensions and everything he paid into? Overnight it disappeared. It was devastating for that community, where several hundred jobs and several thousand indirect jobs were affected. The community was reeling. Thankfully, through some direct intervention and people getting very active, another company came in and took over. A year later, the mill was up and going again.

My dad was able to get back to work. He worked another 20 years there and was able to get back on his feet. Throughout those years, he was able to make a good living for our family. Whether it is a pulp mill in Nackawic, a softwood lumber mill in Florenceville-Bristol or the one in Plaster Rock, there are literally thousands of people in western New Brunswick whose livelihood depends upon a healthy forestry sector. These are good-paying jobs, and hard-working men and women work in the factories and mills to provide for their family.

We can no longer just talk about getting to a solution, getting to the table and perhaps someday seeing a solution come to this issue. We need a proactive government that will prioritize this. It can be done. We know what happened under the previous government when former prime minister Harper was in place. That government got to a resolution within 79 days. If it could be done then, it can be done now, but we need a government that is going to be at the table, aggressively fighting for the Canadian worker. The health and vitality of our rural communities depends upon, in part, a healthy forestry sector, including the softwood lumber trade.

Tragically we have seen, in the last eight years, over 183 forestry-related and logging-related companies go bankrupt. How many thousands of jobs does that represent, not only on the west

coast or the east coast but across the country? The time for prioritizing our forestry sector and getting to solutions around this issue, as it relates to the softwood lumber dispute, is now. How does that happen? It happens through direct engagement, through making it a priority and being relentless in our pursuit. Do not say it is a priority; prove it is a priority. Get to the table. Be forceful. Make sure something happens.

I know that our American friends are very much aware of the fact that their housing costs are increasing, in part for a reason. It is about supply and demand. Canada can help supply much-needed additional lumber for the construction of houses there that would help with their housing prices. There is a case to be made economically for more Canadian lumber getting into the U.S., and we can make that case.

I know from my conversations with some U.S. counterparts, on a personal level as I am in a border riding, that they have an appetite and a willingness to talk about that. They recognize the challenge and know how Canada can help meet their resource needs. The U.S. has resource needs; it is a big and growing country. Canada is its most valued trading partner and we are the closest in proximity. Canada can be the supplier of these things.

Let us get to the table and get this resolved as quickly as possible.

• (2210)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Chair, we know the Conservatives say that the Liberals have not made the softwood lumber agreement a priority, but I can tell members that the Conservatives have made partisan politics a priority.

I want to talk about solutions. I will read from a letter I sent to the minister calling for the federal government to support the biomass proposal that it did put in the fall economic statement. I cited that "With one-fifth of Canada's clean energy businesses being indigenous owned, biomass investments reassert Canada's commitment to their 94 Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous-owned biomass facilities, such as the [Natural Resources Canada]-supported Whitesand Bioeconomy Centre, can create hundreds of...jobs for local Indigenous communities while simultaneously meeting local energy needs."

Government Orders

Hopefully, we can actually get back to solutions. I want to know if my colleague supports expanding the indigenous national partnerships program and funding for companies like Iskum, the new consortium on the west coast of British Columbia. Does he believe that we should be prioritizing investing in indigenous-owned businesses and that we should be working toward solutions that are outside the box, instead of the 42 years of pointing fingers? Obviously, we need to do our due diligence on international trade, but we also need to change what we are doing here at home.

• (2215)

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, I thank my hon. colleague from the west coast.

We share a passion for getting to solutions on this issue, and engaging with our indigenous friends and indigenous partners on this is critical. It is a huge piece of the puzzle, but it must go beyond just one particular group of individuals or Canadians. It must take on all those who are affected by this across sectors and include what the stakeholders are saying, what the mill owners are saying, and include those who work in the sector. Many times, in the debates in the House, we make decisions and talk about things in esoteric terms, and we lose sight of the workers whose lives are most impacted by the decisions we make, whether it is in natural resources, in fisheries or in any of the energy sectors. Oftentimes, decisions are made without true consultation and without considering the lives and the livelihoods that are going to be most impacted by these decisions. I would encourage all of us to make sure that we are meaningfully at the table to make sure that this situation gets resolved sooner rather than later. It must be a priority.

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Madam Chair, I thank the member for his speech.

I recognize that you just got into town and that it has been a busy and hectic day for you.

It has been eight years, and I know for myself, personally, in the last four years, I have been asking for updates because it is so important for people in Kootenay—Columbia, for all the workers and for the forestry industry, which is one of my biggest industries.

Do you think that the time we have been waiting now is excessive, especially in the last eight years? Also, can you tell us how we would go to the people who are in this industry and say that it's just going to take a few more years?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would remind the hon. member that he should speak through me. I cannot answer the questions.

The hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, I thank my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia for the tremendous work he does on behalf of those in the forestry industry and for standing up for those who work in that sector, like I do in my region of the country, in eastern Canada and in Atlantic Canada as well as in western New Brunswick.

What is going to be so needed is that this becomes a priority, instead of just another talking point: “Oh, yes, we’re working on it”, or “We’re thinking about it”, or “We’re going to negotiate” or “These things take time”. We need urgency, and this needs to become a priority. The government can make what it wants to be a priority, and the workers from coast to coast need to become a priority for this government sooner rather than later.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, Lib.): Madam Chair, as members know, the lumber industry supports thousands of jobs and communities across the country. We are working collectively to make sure that we are protecting our softwood lumber industry, but I would like to know why the Conservatives, including the member opposite, voted against funding to support the softwood lumber industry that our government put forward.

Mr. Richard Bragdon: Madam Chair, once again, they love to play this game, but the role of the official opposition is to hold the government to account and to make sure that it comes up with better answers for Canadians' problems and with solutions to the challenges that Canadians are facing. However, that vote was not a vote on a particular line item within a big, huge budget or a spending bill; that was a vote of non-confidence in a government that needs to be replaced sooner rather than later.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Chair, I have only 20 seconds, but I can say it very succinctly.

It was promised within 100 days. We are now at eight years and 97 months, or 2,929 days. The Liberals have not gotten it done. It is time to get it done.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: It being 10:19 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Thursday, March 21, the committee will rise.

(Government Business No. 38 reported)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:19 p.m.)

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