



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 125 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 7, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 7, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP) moved that Bill C-389, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (gender identity and gender expression), be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to start and later finish the third reading debate on Bill C-389, An Act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code (gender identity and gender expression). I am pleased that the bill continues to make progress here in the House.

The bill would add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act, providing explicit protection for transsexual and transgender Canadians. It would also add gender identity and gender expression to the Criminal Code sections dealing with hate speech and sentencing for crimes where hate was a motivating factor.

The bill arose from in-person consultations with members of the transgender and transsexual communities in Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver, and with many transfolks online in communities all across Canada. It is routed in their hope of full and equal citizenship and their experience, often daily, of discrimination, prejudice, misunderstanding and violence.

It is my hope that with this bill this House and Canadian society will take a stand against transphobia and for the full equality of transCanadians.

Back on November 20, Canadians and people around the world marked Transgender Day of Remembrance. We remembered victims of transphobic murder and violence. Here in Ottawa, there was a march that started at the Ottawa police headquarters with a flag-raising ceremony supported by the Ottawa Police Service and proceeded to Parliament Hill for an historic rally for transrights and in support of Bill C-389.

I want to point out that this is not a bid for special rights but for equal rights for a very marginalized community in Canada. At earlier stages of the debate and in committee, the key concerns raised were about the need to define gender identity and gender expression and the question of redundancy.

On the matter of the definition, the Canadian Human Rights Act does not define each of the prohibited grounds of discrimination that it contains. This is intentional. It encourages living definitions, grounds that are defined by common usage, experience, jurisprudence, tribunal decisions and science. In keeping with that feature of the act, there is no definition of gender identity and gender expression in this bill. I hasten to point out that gender identity and gender expression are not new terms or new ideas. They have been in use for many years.

Also, while there have been successful human rights complaints launched by transpeople using the current law's provisions on "sex" and sometimes "disability", we should never forget the fact that successful challenges to discrimination have been made by transfolks using current law, including an explicit reference to gender identity and gender expression, which is still important. It is important for absolute clarity. Transpeople should not have to think their way into protection using other categories originally intended to cover other groups in our society.

It is also important that a group that is marginalized in our society and that suffers significant discrimination and prejudice actually see themselves in the law, and that those who would discriminate against them know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that their actions are not acceptable.

It is also important that the Canadian Human Rights Commission has an explicit educational mandate on issues related to the experience of transsexual and transgender Canadians.

There is a helpful document on both the issue of the definition and the need for explicit reference in law: the Yogyakarta Principles: The Application of International Human Rights Law in relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

Private Members' Business

The Yogyakarta Principles were developed by the International Commission of Jurists and the International Service for Human Rights on behalf of a coalition of human rights organizations. They were adopted by a distinguished group of 29 human rights experts from 25 countries in November 2006. Included in that group of experts were: a former United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Mary Robinson; eight UN rapporteurs on human rights in specific countries or specific human rights related issues; two members of the UN human rights committee; the former chair of the UN committee on the elimination of discrimination against women; and one member of the UN committee on the rights of the child.

How did this expert panel define gender identity and gender expression? It said:

...each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

For the record, that is a very formal definition. A more informal one is that gender identity is an individual's self-conception as male or female or both or neither, as distinguished from one's birth-assigned sex. Gender expression refers to how a person's gender identity is communicated to others through emphasizing, de-emphasizing or changing behaviour, dress, speech and/or mannerism.

The Yogyakarta Principles have been used in many different settings. They have been cited favourably by courts in India and Nepal; the UN committee on economic, social and cultural rights; by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in a guidance note; and by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navanethem Pillay, on a number of occasions.

During the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly in December 2008, Ms. Pillay said:

No human being should be denied their human rights simply because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. No human being should be subject to discrimination, violence, criminal sanctions or abuse simply because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity....

This past September, Ms. Pillay said:

Also of relevance, we have the Yogyakarta Principles.... These principles, which were developed by experts, offer additional guidance on the obligations of States under existing international legal instruments and also contain useful recommendations for implementation at the national level.

The definition provided by the Yogyakarta Principles, as well as Yogyakarta Principle 2, have also been part of the United Nations universal periodic review human rights process.

The universal periodic review, or UPR, is a unique process that involves the review of the human rights' records of all 192 UN member states once every four years. The UPR is a state-driven process under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each state to declare what actions it has taken to improve the human rights situations in its country and to fulfill its human rights obligations.

As part of the UPR process last year, Canada accepted a recommendation from the Netherlands to apply the Yogyakarta Principles as a guide to assist in future policy developments. Principle 2 explicitly calls on states to include gender identity within

non-discrimination legislation. Bill C-389, which we are debating today, would provide Canada and our government the opportunity to fulfill the commitment made to this process.

There are also critics of the bill and I want to deal with some of the issues they have raised. Some critics base their concerns on a larger issue that questions the current framework of human rights law in Canada. I recognize that this is an issue in some quarters and some people believe we should review how we deal with human rights law in Canada. I personally do not share this concern but I do recognize that this is a serious argument to be debated.

I would say to proponents of this argument that, with great respect, this is not the time or place to make that stand. We are discussing including a group of citizens into our current human rights law framework. This is a group of citizens who, without doubt, today face serious discrimination and prejudice.

The approach of this bill is clearly in line with the current structure of human rights law. I would encourage those who take this position to make their arguments about the larger system, bring on the debate on that system, but, the meantime, we must not make transpeople wait. We must not make the equality of transCanadians the line in the sand in that other debate.

Another group of critics focus on one issue, the issue of public bathrooms. I will state clearly and emphatically that nothing in this bill would allow inappropriate conduct in public washrooms. It would not change criminal and other sanctions that exist for assault, sexual assault, pedophilia, indecency, harassment, exhibitionism or voyeurism. For example, peeping Toms or men disguised as women who enter a women's washroom to harass or assault women or girls would still be subject to criminal charges. This bill does nothing to change the sanctions against such inappropriate behaviour.

• (1115)

Raising this issue in the way it has been raised is purely and simply alarmist. It implies, too, that transpeople are somehow criminal by nature, an idea that is patently false.

However, this matter is hinted at, in perhaps a more subtle criticism of the bill, that it would somehow lead to "unintended consequences".

The reality is that today we all share public washrooms with transsexual and transgender people and that we always have. As is appropriate, most of us never consider the gender of a person using a washroom when we do. We never know if we are sharing such a facility with a transperson. There is no reason for this to be or become a concern. Washrooms are intended for a specific purpose and when used for that purpose there is no problem. Jurisdictions that have implemented this change to their human rights law have seen no increase in crimes committed in public washrooms or gendered spaces as a result.

In reality, it is transpeople who face serious problems in public washrooms. They are the ones who have been assaulted, insulted and denied access. This is the actual problem and it is a serious problem that should demand our attention. Transgender and transsexual people should be able to go about the activities of daily living without fear or discrimination.

There is great support for this bill here in Canada. There is support in all parties represented here in the House, and that support is greatly appreciated. Many other support the bill as well, including: the Green Party of Canada, the City Council of Vancouver, the United Church of Canada, the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Professional Association for Transgender Health, human rights commissions, the Canadian Federation of Students, Egale Canada, ARC International, Amnesty International, the Rainbow Health Network, le Association des transexuels et transexuelles du Québec, Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, project Jer's Vision and the Trans Alliance Society. There is also very strong support in the trade union movement, including, among others, CUPEs Pink Triangle Committee, PSAC Equal Opportunities Committee and the Canadian Labour Congress itself.

I want to thank many people for their work on this project. I want to recognize four people in particular, which I realize is often problematic, but I want to thank Denise Jessica Freedman, who is a social work intern from Carleton University and works in my office. She has taught me a lot about the situation of transgender and transsexual people in Canada and, in particular, the experience of the transsexual community.

I also want to thank Matt McLaughlin and Susan Gapka, who are co-chairs of the NDPs' LGBT commission. I also want to thank my legislative assistant, Sonja van Dien, for her work.

In conclusion, I want to paraphrase a statement from the Canadian Labour Congress and an earlier work by the Canadian Auto Workers Union in its handbook called "To our allies:", a handbook on LGBT rights and how people can work in support and solidarity of those rights:

- Until we're considered equal, and not simply 'tolerated'.
- Until our youth aren't forced to leave home for the streets.
- Until our partners are welcome at all family, social and workplace events.
- Until the police are there to protect us not harass us.
- Until sex trade workers are not seen as criminals.
- Until our children see our families reflected in school curriculum and story books.
- Until our differences and our cultures are celebrated not denied.
- Until it's safe to come out at work.
- Until it's safe to come out at school.
- Until hospitals, banks, travel agents, and insurance companies see us as people not problems or profits.
- Until we're not stereotyped into certain jobs or denied others.
- Until parents aren't freaked out by having lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender children.
- Until we don't have to justify, explain, educate and expose our private lives.
- Until harassment at work stops.
- Until our streets are safe for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people.
- For our Allies 31
- Until religions open their doors to our celebrations and expressions of faith.
- Until we can express our gender without fear of reprisal or ridicule.
- Until gender stereotyping stops and we are all free to be wholly human.
- Until the cure for homophobia is discovered.

Private Members' Business

Until we can love and be loved, with joy and gay abandon.

Here in the House this week we can ensure that at least in part "until" becomes now for transgender and transsexual Canadians.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, some of the rationale that was given for not supporting the bill was the judgment by some experienced prosecutors that when an offence is particularized it can be more difficult to get a conviction under whatever the provision is.

I wonder if my colleague has a comment on that or if he could tell the House his position from the legal side, that making it too specific would actually make it more difficult to accomplish the aim, which everybody agrees on, and that is to eliminate discrimination at every chance we get.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence has made great strides on the whole issue of transgender and transsexual Canadians' place in that organization. There recently has been some positive publicity about the way the Department of National Defence has supported transgender and transsexual people transitioning from one gender to the other who are members of the Canadian armed forces or working with the forces. The department is to be congratulated for that enlightened policy. It is one place in our federal government where there is the positive aspect of full inclusion and where equality and the gifts and talents of transpeople are recognized.

With regard to particularization of offences, we have good legislation around hate crimes. Judges are allowed to increase sentences if they determine that hate was a motivating factor in a crime. This section of the law has been used a number of times and more recently it has been used in relation to the experience of gay and lesbian Canadians in particular.

There has been some confusion about how to use that law but that should not put into question the value of that kind of legislation, the value of that aspect of the Criminal Code. It has received great public support at times where it has been clearly determined that hate was a motivating factor when a crime was committed, particularly an assault or a murder. That kind of provision has incredible support among communities that have been affected by discrimination.

I would take exception by saying that being more particular somehow limits the application of that law. It has been used appropriately and it gives the courts and judges appropriate mechanisms to deal with particular kinds of crime.

● (1120)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could give any examples of how it is working in countries that have followed the direction of the United Nations. I wonder if he could give us any examples of where it is not working under the general provisions that we have and what the problem is.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his strong public support of this legislation and for being one of the seconders of the bill.

In jurisdictions where this change has been made in law, the outcomes have been almost if not completely universally positive. It gives transgender and transsexual people the clear indication that they are valued members of society, that they are protected under human rights law and that they have access to remedies under human rights law in those jurisdictions that have adopted the change.

Here in Canada a number of municipalities have made the change and, in terms of their workforce and in their areas of jurisdiction, I believe it has been a positive change. The Northwest Territories has made the change. It included gender identity in its list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in its human rights law a number of years ago. My understanding is that it has been a positive change and I am sure the member for Yukon would concur in that.

I believe that jurisdictions that have moved this way have seen better protection for their citizens and a better appreciation for the contributions that transmembers of their communities make. Other jurisdictions have taken a stand to say that they believe there is a full and equal place for transcitizens in society and in their communities.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to contribute to the debate on Bill C-389 as presented by the member for Burnaby—Douglas.

During previous debates on the bill, some have spoken about the discrimination faced by members of the transgender communities. I am aware, and I think all members are aware, of the need to protect all Canadians from violence and discrimination. I am proud that Canada is recognized on the international stage as a country that is committed to the promotion of diversity and equality and that this protection is provided by our Constitution and laws to all Canadians.

However, recognizing this, we need to consider whether the amendments proposed by Bill C-389 are clear or whether they are necessary. I submit that they are not and, for the reasons that I will describe in the next few minutes, I will be opposing the bill.

Before I begin discussing the details of the bill, I will take a couple of moments to discuss my concerns with the vagueness of the bill as drafted.

As hon. members who have studied the bill will notice, the terms “gender identity” and “gender expression” are not defined in the bill.

When the member for Burnaby—Douglas appeared before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, on which I sit, he was asked if there was a generally accepted definition of these terms. With regard to the definition of “gender identity”, he said that there were a number of definitions but noted that the one he used more often than not was an individual's self-conception as male or female, both or neither as distinguished from one's birth assigned sex. He also quoted the definition of “gender identity” found in the Yogyakarta Principles, which he just referred to in his comments, which he said was a United Nations' document well-known in human rights circles. That document defines “gender identity” as follows:

...each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal

sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

With regard to the definition of gender expression, the same hon. member and sponsor of the bill stated:

The definition I...use for gender expression is that gender expression refers to how a person's gender identity is communicated to others through emphasizing, de-emphasizing, or changing behaviour, dress, speech and/or mannerisms.

However, the definition of “gender identity” given in the Yogyakarta Principles includes specific reference to forms of gender expression. Why then is gender expression also used as a separate term in this bill? Is that term not superfluous? If not, then what does it mean?

I respectfully submit to all members of the House that, as a result, we are left with uncertainty and vagueness about what these concepts mean. As all members know, if undefined important terms such as “gender expression” and “gender identity” would create a lack of clarity and a real problem for the bill and for those who will be called upon to interpret the bill.

In this regard, it is instructive to look at imperative legislation in other democratic countries. In 2009, Scotland passed legislation allowing for an aggravated sentence where a crime is committed, in part, on the grounds of prejudice toward transgender identity. The term “transgender identity” is defined but the term “gender expression” is not used.

Our neighbours to the south in the United States at the federal level passed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. hate crimes prevention act and it uses the term “gender identity”, which is define, but does not use the separate term “gender expression”. In my view, this shows that the bill is deficient by failing to provide definitions of these integral and important terms.

I will now examine the bill's proposal to add the terms “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the hate propaganda provisions of the Criminal Code and the sentencing provisions found in paragraph 718.2(a)(i).

• (1125)

Subsection 718.2(a) of the code uses general wording as follows:

(a) a sentence should be increased or reduced to account for any relevant aggravating or mitigating circumstances relating to the offence or the offender, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing,—

Paragraph 718.2(a)(i) then goes on to list certain criteria deemed to be aggravating factors used to increase a penalty for a crime beyond its usual range where the crime is motivated by bias, prejudice or hate, as follows:

(i) evidence that the offence was motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor,—

The words “without limiting the generality of the foregoing” and “or any other similar factor”, I submit, make it abundantly clear that factors, other than those specifically enumerated, can be considered in cases where crime is motivated by hatred, bias or prejudice. In my view, adding the terms “gender identity” and “gender expression” adds nothing to these sections and is therefore unnecessary.

Private Members' Business

I would now like to turn my focus to the amendments proposed in the bill that propose to make additions to the Canadian Human Rights Act. Some members have argued that this bill is necessary because transgender Canadians have faced discrimination in the workplace and in obtaining housing and services. However, these members downplayed the fact that under the federal Canadian Human Rights Act, transsexuals have already been protected from discrimination on the grounds of sex.

I would like to remind members of the House that both federal and provincial human rights tribunals have already protected transsexuals from discrimination in employment and in services. The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal followed the approach taken by the human rights tribunals in British Columbia, Quebec and several other provinces, and have found discrimination against transsexuals to be covered by the existing ground of sex. This interpretation has subsequently been confirmed by the courts. Again, these additions would appear to be unnecessary.

In fact, the ground of sex in anti-discrimination laws is interpreted very broadly and has evolved over the years. It is usually understood to cover discrimination complaints based not just on sex, but also on gender attributes, pregnancy, childbirth, and more recently, transsexualism.

Given this history, I would ask all hon. members to consider whether an amendment to add the terms “gender identity” to the Canada Human Rights Act is really necessary. As members can see, in the moments preceding this, I have argued that they are not, that the proposed amendments in Bill C-389, although well-intentioned, are both unclear and unnecessary, and for all of those reasons I will be opposing the bill.

• (1130)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to speak to Bill C-389, affectionately known as the trans rights bill.

I was here for the first hour of debate at second reading when my colleague, the member for Burnaby—Douglas, moved the bill and spoke to it. He pointed out what a historic moment it was, a moment to actually have a debate on transgender issues in Parliament and that it was the first time that this issue had even been discussed within these four walls, in the House of Commons.

The member for Burnaby—Douglas, who is a tireless advocate for issues in the rainbow community and also the NDP critic on sexual orientation and gender identity policy, pointed out that while it was a historic moment in the House, his one regret was that, to our knowledge, there were no transgendered MPs in the House who could speak to this bill and provide a first voice perspective to the importance of this legislation.

I have been thinking a lot about that since we heard from the member for Burnaby—Douglas on that point. I am a queer rights activist. Since my first meeting at TBLGAY at York University in my undergrad year, I have done what I could to stand up for the rights of gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual people in Canada. I have done what I could to be an ally to the rainbow community.

However, nothing that I can say about our trans rights bill in this House could be a replacement for hearing from the lived experiences of transgendered Canadians.

I am going to use my time today to bring the voices of people, some from Halifax and others from around Canada, who contacted me about this bill.

Some of them have identified themselves to me as being transgendered, some as trans allies, and some have not identified themselves one way or another, but they have identified themselves as supporters of this bill.

They have all contacted me because they care deeply about what happens to this legislation. They care deeply about transgender and transsexual rights.

I want to share their voices with everyone in this House, so that these people have an opportunity to be heard by all MPs in this important debate.

Sandra Bornemann is a young woman with whom I have had the privilege of working with in Halifax. She works for the youth project in Halifax. We worked on some projects together. We worked on some issues together. Sandra wrote to me and said quite simply, “Trans people are often victims of discrimination, harassment and violence. They are all too often denied employment, housing, access to health care and face difficulties obtaining identification. Trans people are workers, citizens and beloved members of our families. They deserve respect, equality and protection from discrimination and violence”.

Krista McLellan wrote: “I am writing to you as a constituent to ask that you support Bill C-389 when it comes up for third reading in December and that you ask your caucus to do the same”.

Another constituent of mine wrote: “I am a resident of Halifax and am a transgendered person. While I have spent much of my career advocating for the rights of others (e.g. African Nova Scotians, persons with disabilities, new Canadians, single parents, gay, lesbian and bi) within my community, I have never been able to find the courage to identify that I am transgendered or to advocate for myself. It was only a few years ago that I disclosed to my wife and adult children that I am transgendered. Perhaps the reasons for keeping this a secret have been numerous. For example, not wanting to distract attention from the groups I worked with. Also, there was certainly fear. The fear of discrimination, loss of employment, hurt to my family and friends, etc. There was also the fear of being labelled sick, as I have heard others refer to transgendered people so many times. I have become aware of Bill C-389, an Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code and I am asking that you support this bill. As I am sure you are aware, transgendered people cover a wide range of expressions. This includes, most typically, transsexuals and crossdressers. In my case, I believe the aboriginal term “two spirited” best describes what I am (both male and female). For years I believed this was a curse, but I have come to realize it is a blessing. It has allowed me to truly achieve all I have in life and to gain a unique perspective in the world. In closing, I do hope that now you can help advocate for me and others by supporting this very important bill”.

Private Members' Business

John Ross and Rev. Warren Schell co-wrote a letter to me, and it reads: "We are writing to you today to ask you to support Bill C-389. We are very aware that transsexual and transgender people are among the most marginalized persons in our society. They often encounter great difficulty in finding places to live, employment and services".

● (1135)

That was obviously an excerpt.

I would like to read another excerpt from a letter I received from Mercedes Allen, who said, "I would like to express my deepest appreciation for your support of Bill C-389 at second reading, and hope that you will continue to do so when the bill comes up for discussion and final discussion and vote on Wednesday, February 9th".

She discusses her thoughts about the legislation and finishes her letter by saying, "Again, I thank you for your support...and all that you have done to support our community. I am not a "spokesman" for the trans community per se, but nevertheless believe I can say that your support is much appreciated by many.

I will read from another letter that I received, which states: "I am writing today to contribute my support for Bill C-389. Currently, transpeople are only protected implicitly, and often face extreme violence and discrimination. Many people live in poverty and have difficulty paying for the daily costs of living and health care. This is largely due to the discrimination and violence that they are subjugated to, including difficulty in finding employment, residence, support networks, and services. It is a testament to the strength of many transpeople who have overcome all odds to stand up for their rights. Currently, transpeople are underrepresented in governments worldwide. There have been only two openly transsexual members of Parliament in the world, Georgina Beyer (New Zealand) and Vladimir Luxuria (Italy). While a few places in the world offer explicit protections to trans people, Canada does not. I feel it is time for Canada to again become a leader in human rights and offer explicit protections for transgender, transsexual and gender-variant members of our community. I urge you and your colleagues to be a voice for members of your constituency whose protections are at stake and support Bill C-389".

This letter was from April Friesen.

Another constituent from Halifax, Stephanie Ehler, wrote to me and stated the following: "It's an unfortunate travesty that more hasn't been done before now for the rights of persons who are transgendered. The current situation really puts the pressure on you to do all you can to make positive steps forward and you have my support and encouragement in doing so".

Matthew McLaughlin and Susan Gapka, two utterly tireless trans rights advocates, sent me a quick update even this morning just to let me know that two studies came out just this week in the United States showing that trans people do face discrimination despite what we may hear from opponents to this bill.

They also pointed out that the areas of federal jurisdiction covered by the bill are some of the most sensitive areas where trans people are affected and where they are more likely to be harassed: banks, air

travel, immigration, customs, prisons, and the list goes on. These are really important areas that we need to address.

Matt dispelled the so-called bathroom argument pretty succinctly when he said to me, "On the bathroom scare, it's pretty hypocritical considering that this has never happened in any of the more than 100 U.S. and overseas jurisdictions with protection, but washroom harassment has happened to nearly every trans person". That is a good point.

The letters that I have shared with MPs in the House do not even come close to the number of face-to-face contacts I have had with trans people from Halifax and their allies, who thank me for our support of this bill and share with me their stories of courage, fear, bravery, anger, terror, love, hate, pride, power, and stories about themselves or people that they love. I really believe that if every MP had the opportunity to hear the stories and look people in the eye while listening to them, they would have no choice but to support this bill.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be able to participate in the debate on Bill C-389, which aims to add gender identity and gender expression to the Canadian Human Rights Act and to the hate crimes provisions of the Criminal Code.

I have always been an ardent defender of human rights, including the rights of transgendered people. Transgendered Canadians face an unacceptable amount of discrimination in their everyday lives. Any amount of discrimination is unacceptable, but I must point out that transgendered Canadians face a much higher level of discrimination than others. Too often they are the victims of discrimination in the workplace and health care system, and they are more likely to become victims of violence.

In no way will this bill lead to the decriminalization of any form of sexual exploitation. I believe that such crimes are the most reprehensible in our society. I also find it extremely offensive to categorize all transgendered individuals as peeping Toms, pedophiles or rapists, as some do. I am proud to support this bill.

There are a number of myths surrounding this bill and the impact it will have. I would like to speak about the eight main myths and show that they are not based on truth or fact.

[*English*]

As I just mentioned in French, there are eight principal myths that are being promoted to oppose Bill C-389 and I wish to debunk them in the House.

Myth number one is that Bill C-389 would provide an opportunity for pedophiles to hang out in bathrooms, waiting for young girls. This is completely false. Pedophilia is an heinous crime in all circumstances, without exception. Pedophilia is punishable under the Criminal Code of Canada under section 151. Section 151 stipulates:

Every person who, for a sexual purpose, touches, directly or indirectly, with a part of the body or with an object, any part of the body of a person under the age of 16 years

(a) is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years...

In no way whatsoever would the bill permit any form of sexual exploitation, including pedophilia. I find it offensive to characterize all transgendered individuals as pedophiles, as some have done in their opposition to the bill.

Myth number two is that the bill would expose our children to perverts in public showers and changing rooms. We already have heard members of the NDP, including the sponsor of the bill, address this, but I would like to address it again.

This is, again, a completely false statement. As indicated above, in no way whatsoever would the bill permit any form of sexual exploitation. Any form of sexual exploitation is punishable under our Criminal Code. Therefore, for people to claim that the bill would legalize sexual exploitation, in certain cases, is completely false. They know it is false, and shame on them for trying to use that as an argument against the bill.

Myth number three is that the bill would override other criminal laws. It is shameful that anyone would try to use that argument to oppose Bill C-389. Part V of the Criminal Code of Canada is clear on what constitutes a sexual offence. Nothing in Bill C-389 would supersede or override these provisions, regardless if one is transgendered or not. Therefore, for people to promote that myth, shame on them.

Myth number four is that teaching of gender expression in schools would become mandatory. There is not a single provision in the bill which would require the teaching of gender expression in schools. Anyone who claims there is should have the courage to stand and point out where that is in the bill. There is nothing in the bill that would require the teaching of gender expression in our schools.

Myth number five is that Bill C-389 would promote sexual confusion among vulnerable teens. According to the American Psychological Association, sexual orientation, “refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes”. That comes from “Answers to Your Questions For a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Homosexuality”, Washington, DC, United States, 2010.

The bill would not promote sexual confusion. If anything, it would promote sexual clarity. We have heard about how young teens who are transgendered are thrown out of their homes are subject to discrimination. For teens to feel safe about expressing their gender, sexuality and identity is necessary in a free and democratic society that promotes the rights of everyone and seeks to protect individuals and groups from discrimination. This bill would move that fight and that protection so much further in a positive way.

• (1145)

Myth number six is that Bill C-389 is being advanced for a tiny group of sexual activists. Again, this is completely false. Transgendered individuals face an unacceptable amount of discrimination in their everyday lives and are likely to become victims of violence. We have heard it again and again, whether it be from

Private Members' Business

testimonials, which were read by the member sponsoring the bill, or from the letters the member for Halifax has received from transgendered individuals, or from friends or relatives of transgendered individuals expressing the kind of violence that transgendered individuals face in our society today.

Although transgendered individuals constitute a small minority of the Canadian population, all Canadians have an equal right not to be subjected to discrimination. This bill is being advanced in the name of equal rights. It is not because there is one, or ten or a hundred that discrimination is justified. It is not justified. All Canadians, regardless of their sexual orientation, their gender expression or identity have a right to be safe, to work, to equal access to health services, to lodging and to move about in our society without fear of being victims of violence because of their gender expression or identity. If adopted, the bill will go a long way to ensuring that.

Myth number seven is that Bill C-389 would make any complaint against transgendered individuals a hate crime. Again, this is completely false. Not all complaints against transgendered individuals will be considered hate crimes. The Canadian Human Rights Act defines a hate message as:

—any matter that is likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt by reason of the fact that that person or those persons are identifiable on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination.

Only messages relating to transgendered individuals that fall within the above definition would be considered hate messages. This is currently the case for messages related to one's race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, or sex.

I will have to end there because my time is up. However, I support the bill and I urge all my colleagues, including those of my caucus, to support it. I am pleased it was adopted in the past vote.

• (1150)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of the MPs who participated in the debate on Bill C-389 here in the House, in committee and in the community. I want to express my appreciation to those who are supporting the bill. Please note too that members of the transgender and transsexual communities appreciate this support.

I would like to speak personally for a moment. As a gay man, I know that securing my place as a full and equal citizen has been a long journey and an often hard-fought struggle. As a gay man, I know that my liberation came about thanks to the hard work, risk-taking and sacrifice of many queer brothers and sisters, and many strong allies. As a gay man, I know that the battle for my equality in our society was often led, often championed, by members of the transgender and transsexual community. I know that it was the drag queens who helped us fight back, and perhaps taught us to fight back, against the oppression, discrimination, prejudice and violence that we faced.

Government Orders

At Stonewall, but also long before and long after Stonewall, it was members of the trans community who helped lead and motivate our fight, and who stood in solidarity with us time and time again. That is one reason why I am proud to stand in solidarity with the transgender and transsexual community, as we finally seek their full equality and seek to establish their full human rights in law in Canada.

I have been greatly honoured to have been taken into the confidence of the trans community to be an ally and to work in solidarity with the community. It has been an honour to hear their stories and learn of their struggles. I have learned to be a better ally, a better friend, a better citizen as a result.

I have met beautiful, strong, loving and articulate people who face challenges I can hardly imagine and I am sure I do not fully appreciate. I count as friends people who live proud lives and express their full humanity against many odds. My understanding of what it means to be fully human has been challenged and expanded greatly by what I have been taught.

I have seen and sometimes shared the frustration, the anger, the tears and the deep sadness of people who are not yet equal, who too often face violence, sometimes to the point of death, and who mourn the loss of friends and family for whom the pain was more than they could bear. I have been strengthened by their resolve to claim their true identity and their place in our society, to live full lives and to be fully human.

This week the House will make a decision on the explicit inclusion of transgender and transsexual Canadians in our human rights law. That vote on Wednesday night will likely be very close. We may see the bill pass, which will be a cause for celebration and an opportunity to continue our work as it moves to the Senate; but the bill may also be defeated, it is that close. If that happens, let us remember that things have changed since we began this particular project six years ago. Let us remember that this is not the only forum in the struggle for the full equality of trans people. Let us not forget the victories and progress we have made in other places. Let us bask in the support of the new friends and allies we have found here in this place and across the country, and let us get ready to resume our work with new strategies and new plans.

I am confident that the change we seek will come. Justice will be done, and perhaps very soon the open and proud voice of transgender and transsexual Canadians will be heard loudly and clearly in this place. I hope that very soon an open member of the trans community will be elected and be able to directly, and from personal experience, voice the concerns of the community here in the House of Commons. There are celebrations to come.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for debate has expired.

● (1155)

[*English*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 98, a recorded division on the proposed motion stands deferred until Wednesday, February 9, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): We will now suspend sitting until 12 o'clock.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:55 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1200)

[*Translation*]

CANADA-PANAMA FREE TRADE ACT

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of Bill C-46, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, as reported (without amendment) from the committee; and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will continue what I started the other day. The free trade agreement between Canada and Panama is in line with the Canada-U.S. strategy of signing a series of bilateral agreements.

I will continue to talk about the testimony we heard at the Standing Committee on International Trade, in particular the testimony of Todd Tucker, who appeared before the committee on November 17, 2010. He said this:

I have two central points. First, Panama is one of the world's worst tax havens. It is home to an estimated 400,000 corporations, including offshore corporations and multinational subsidiaries. This is almost four times the number of corporations registered in Canada.

Second, the Canada-Panama trade agreement should not be thought of primarily in the traditional terms, or solely in the traditional terms, of cutting tariffs. Instead, it should be seen for what it is, which is hundreds of pages of text that commit Canada and Panama to follow certain domestic policies. The pact would give new rights to the Government of Panama, and to the hundreds of thousands of offshore corporations located there, to challenge Canadian anti-tax-haven initiatives outside of the Canadian judicial system.

Government Orders

...What makes Panama a particularly attractive location for tax dodgers and offshore corporations? Well, for decades, the Panamanian government has pursued an intentional tax haven strategy. It offers foreign banks and firms a special offshore licence to conduct business there. Not only are these businesses not taxed, but they're subject to little to no reporting requirements or regulations.

According to the OECD, the Panamanian government has little to no legal authority to ascertain key information about these offshore corporations, such as their ownership. Panama's financial secrecy practices also make it a major site for money laundering from places throughout the world. According to the U.S. State Department, major Colombian and Mexican drug cartels, as well as Colombian illegal armed groups, use Panama for drug trafficking and money laundering purposes. The funds generated from illegal activity are susceptible to being laundered through Panamanian banks, real estate developments, and more.

Panama's domestic legal regime is supplemented by a steadfast refusal, thus far, to engage in far-reaching tax information exchange agreements with its key trading partners. Up until last year, Panama had no international tax treaties of any kind. Now it is on track to have up to a dozen or more double-taxation treaties signed this year.

...The Canada-Panama trade deal would worsen the tax haven problem. As the OECD has noted, having a trade agreement without first tackling Panama's financial secrecy practices could incentivize even more offshore tax dodging. But there's a reason to believe that the trade deal will not only increase tax haven abuses but will also make fighting them that much harder.

• (1205)

[*English*]

I would like to take a few minutes, as we talk about this free trade agreement, to talk a little bit about free trade agreements in general.

What we hear on this side, and what I have been saying, is that we need to have fair trade as opposed to corporate free trade. Many of these agreements that our country or other countries have signed tend to emphasize giving more rights to the corporations, as evidenced by the agreement we signed with some European countries that has affected our shipbuilding industry by allowing more Norwegian ships to come in tariff-free.

Canada has always been a trading nation. Free trade has not been, in many instances, that positive, although there have been beneficial effects. There is some evidence, and I have been reading through some information on this, that when the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement was signed in the 1980s under the Mulroney government, there were some facts that were presented to provinces that were not quite the same documents circulated at the federal level. In other words, there is some question as to whether or not the provinces received enough information about the agreement. I will be studying that document further, just to see how it relates to what we are experiencing today.

We know that since our free trade agreements were signed, we have lost something like 300,000 manufacturing jobs in Canada. Just as an aside, it is shame that I cannot go into a store and buy a pair of shoes made in Canada. It is with difficulty that I found a jacket and winter boots made in Canada. Thank goodness we have a couple of companies in Montreal, Quebec that still manufacture winter boots.

We have seen the softwood lumber sellout. We have seen the hardship that has caused in our communities. We have seen cheap energy continuing to flow to the United States, knowing that we cannot cut back on that without cutting back on our own domestic consumption, thanks to NAFTA. We see in this time of instability in the world that east of Ottawa we have to import 90% of our oil. In fact, we are exporting our oil south from the west.

Chapter 11 of NAFTA allows corporations to sue Canadian governments, and millions of dollars of our taxpayers' money have gone to defending our provincial and federal governments as a result of these ludicrous lawsuits.

I would just like to conclude by saying that we really need to take a good look at these agreements so that they are in the best interests of the people of both countries.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is one of the New Democrat members most interested in agricultural issues. I was very interested to note that he did not address agricultural issues, at least in the portion of his speech that I heard. Maybe he did in the earlier portion.

I was wondering if the member would respond to that, because one of the things we heard in committee as we discussed the Canada-Panama trade agreement, as with most of them, is that the agreement would have marked benefits for our agricultural producers. We produce very different crops from what they do in Panama. Canada is not known for growing a lot of bananas. So we will not be competing with Panama in that way. However, be they our wheats, pulses, or processed foods, there are very good openings in Panama.

I am wondering why the hon. member has not talked about the advantages that the Canada-Panama trade agreement will have for our agriculture industry.

• (1210)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, the member asks a logical question.

My understanding is that we do trade with Panama at the current time. We trade with many other countries. In any trade agreement we have to look at the positive and the negative aspects.

The fact this country is or harbours a *paradis fiscal*, a tax haven that is sucking millions of dollars, and also that it should not be supporting the drug trade, I think overrules the fact that we may gain a few small markets in this country.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first I must inform you that I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Don Valley East.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-46, the free trade bill between Canada and Panama. This bill seeks to implement the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, the Canada-Panama agreement on labour co-operation and the Canada-Panama agreement on the environment. It is a bit of a mouthful.

I will also be—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I need to interrupt to tell the member that we are on 10-minute speeches now, so the hon. member for Halifax West has time allotted for a 10-minute speech with five minutes of questions and answers as opposed to splitting his time.

Government Orders

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarification.

I want to say a few words about the bill in the context of the reality of the government's trade policy and foreign policy generally.

Panama is a relatively small economy, but it is an important player in the Americas and an important market for Canada. In fact, it is a stable country which has made significant progress in recent years in terms of development and democracy, which Canada can play an important role in encouraging.

I had the experience four years ago of being part of a delegation led by the Speaker to three francophone countries in Africa, Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali, with the purpose of encouraging democratic development by holding conferences and discussing how our system works as opposed to theirs. That was an important process.

We talked, for example, about the role of an official opposition and how important it was to have one. Even if my colleagues opposite may not always enjoy that experience, they know it is important to have one. That was actually a novel concept for some of the parliamentarians we were talking to. We could see how the discussion was getting them thinking about ways they might want to see change in their own country. There are things that we as a country can do to encourage democratic development.

Of course, Canada is a trade-dependent nation. Eighty per cent of our economy depends on access to foreign markets for Canadian exports. Imagine that. That is incredible. Eighty per cent of our economy depends on access to foreign markets.

It used to be, 20 years ago, that 90% of our exports went to one country, the U.S., and these days it is about 80%. That has been a change, but is still a huge proportion of our exports and economy that is dependent upon one trading partner, the United States, a very important partner and good friend. It is a good sign that there has been some progress in increasing our trade elsewhere and we should keep trying to do so.

That is one of the reasons the Liberal Party supports the principle of free trade, because Canada is an exporting country. If we cannot get access to other markets, we have real problems. That is why the negotiations that led to the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement were started under the Trudeau government. I have some knowledge of that because my dad was the minister of international trade at the time. Interestingly, the secretary of trade for the U.S. had the same last name. His name was Donald Regan as opposed to Gerald Regan, who was my dad.

Hon. Scott Brison: And then there was Ronald Reagan.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Ronald Reagan was the president, but that is Reagan not Regan. Let us make that clear. He had an extra "a" in his name.

There are many benefits of trade and we have seen over the past 50 or 60 years, with increasing trade liberalization, an improvement in the standard of living for millions and billions of people. Clearly, there is a long way to go for lots of folks around the planet and we still want to see better lives for people in many countries, but trade can play a positive role in improving people's lives by giving them access to markets.

I mentioned Africa. One of the problems it has is getting access to markets in the U.S. and Europe for its cotton and textiles. It has beautiful cotton fabrics that were made into dresses and shirts. It had trouble getting access to those markets because of subsidies and tariffs, and so forth. These issues are real from both points of view.

The Conservative government's mismanagement of our trading relations has resulted in trade deficits for the first time in 30 years. That is alarming for Canada and should be alarming for Canadians. For the first time in 30 years, under this regime, we are falling behind our competitors in emerging markets like China and India.

We suffered the embarrassment of not gaining a seat on the UN Security Council. Speaking of China, the government's clumsy approach in its attitude toward China was very much an element of that, one of the factors involved, as well as its decision to cut aid to many African nations. It certainly offended those nations and many Middle Eastern countries were unhappy with the government's approach on a variety of things.

It surprised me that the government actually decided to campaign for a seat on the UN Security Council when it ought to have been fairly obvious that with all the things it had done in recent years, it was unlikely to gain that seat and how badly it misjudged the number of votes it would have. For a Prime Minister who is often talked of as a political strategist, it is surprising that he would not see the dangers of that move.

• (1215)

However, the current government is also falling down on protecting Canadian interests vis-à-vis our largest trading partner, the U.S., not only on things like softwood lumber and other agricultural products, et cetera, but in relation to the current talks on the common perimeter where the government does not want to share with Canadians what it is planning to do and what it has in mind. It has not set out to the House or to Canadians what its approach is, what its attitude is, what its vision is for border issues and therefore, for issues such as immigration. We ought to have control over what happens with our immigration and refugee policies. Canadians are concerned that the government wants to surrender our sovereignty. We do not agree with surrendering any of that.

Recently we saw its approach to the situation in Egypt. The government has been slow to respond and very hesitant. We have been less forthcoming, in terms of supporting the protest, in terms of supporting principles like human rights and political freedoms, than the U.S. has been. That is disappointing. We need to have a long-term view and recognize that if we support regimes which do not allow those kinds of freedoms, in the long term, the effects would be negative for us. If we look at the history of many countries, we can see that.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is engaging in increasing protectionism which already has hurt Canadian business, yet the Conservative government is doing virtually nothing about it.

Government Orders

I could go on about other countries and the policies of the government in respect to them, but let us focus on Bill C-46 and Panama.

In spite of the global economic downturn, Panama's GDP actually grew at 10.7% in 2008. That is one of the highest in the Americas. It is forecast at 5.6% for 2010, which would put it well ahead of most other countries, including Canada, in terms of our growth last year.

In 2009, bilateral trade between the countries totalled \$132.1 million, with Canadian exports making up \$91.4 million and imports of \$40.7 million.

Primary Canadian merchandise exports to Panama include, and these are some of the major things that we sell to Panama: machinery; vehicles; electronic equipment; pharmaceutical equipment; frozen potato products; pulses, which are beans and lentils, important sources of protein; financial services; engineering; information and communications technology services. These are all important areas where we currently export and there is room for us to increase our exports to Panama, particularly in relation to agricultural products and things like fish, as we referred to earlier in the debate.

The existing Panama Canal is vital for the international trading system. It is being expanded with completion slated for 2014. That expansion, worth \$5.3 billion, is expected to generate opportunities for Canadian businesses in construction, environmental engineering and consulting services, capital projects, and more. There are many opportunities that we can see. There are no guarantees at all, but opening trade with Panama, in spite of some concerns we have, is a positive move.

• (1220)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the speech of the hon. member for Halifax West. I appreciate his support for Panama. I cannot say that I agree with everything he said in his speech, but it is nice to see the Liberals on board with our free trade agenda, especially in the Americas and on Panama.

Will we continue to see the Liberal Party support free trade agreements which are good for Canadian business and opportunities for Canadian workers, rather than as we saw in the 1993 election when the hon. member ran on a ballot against free trade?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I favour free trade. I have indicated that many times in the past. I do not recall personally having debated that issue in 1993. We had many other issues to talk about then and since. However, it was certainly an interesting election campaign, as my hon. colleague recalls. I believe he was involved in the campaign but not as a candidate at that stage. That came later.

We as a party do support the principle of free trade, but it is important to examine each agreement by itself and bargain from the point of view of strength.

My main concern regarding the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement is that Canada entered into its negotiations under the notion that this would be the economic policy as a government. The government of the day, under Mr. Mulroney, basically based its whole economic platform on establishing an agreement.

In that type of a situation the U.S. would expect to have good concessions or basically get whatever it wants. It would recognize it was in a strong position if Canada needed to have an agreement. I did not feel that was helpful, but in other respects there were many benefits which came from that agreement.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe the free trade agreement that was negotiated in 1993 offered too many concessions, wide concessions, and was not thought through properly. I am wondering whether the member believes the Panama deal has been thought through and if there are certain aspects of the deal that concern him.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Don Valley East, with whom apparently I am not sharing my time because we are giving 10 minute speeches, as has been explained.

That is an excellent question. We do have some concerns. There are concerns that have been raised regarding such things as whether or not Panama is a tax haven and what impact that may have.

We know that the two governments are in discussions regarding not only the sharing of tax information, which I believe is the primary thing Canada wants, but also the issue of double taxation, which both countries ought to want. In fact, it is important that we have that type of sharing if we are to avoid issues such as tax havens. It is vital that our tax authorities at Revenue Canada have access to the information that Panama has on our taxpayers if in fact they are trying to hide income illegally and improperly. We are not talking about what is being done properly. However, if something is done illegally that is a different matter and we ought to know that.

That is an important concern. We are happy to see that this discussion is going forward and are anxious to see that it concludes successfully. However, at the same time we feel the general principle of this agreement is a good one and we ought to support it.

• (1225)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could elaborate on the dismal performance of the Conservatives on freeing up the borders to the United States and other countries for trade.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): A quick answer from the hon. member for Halifax West regarding the bill.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Kings—Hants, the former trade critic, is suggesting I take my time, but I do not think I will be allowed to do that. I am sure he would love for me to go on at great length about this. I trust he would enjoy it.

The way the government has treated border issues and trade issues with a variety of countries, particularly with the U.S., is a concern. Until last August I was the Liberal critic for natural resources. When I look at the government's attitude toward the softwood lumber agreement I find it has been quite weak.

Government Orders

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of Bill C-46, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama.

As has been mentioned, Canada is a trading nation. In the global economy, it is important to get preferential agreements with countries, which is beneficial to both partners. We have seen the impact of relying too heavily on one trading partner. We have seen the government's lack of action on increasing U.S. protectionism and its failure to seize trade opportunities in China, South Korea and other countries.

The Conservative government's mismanagement of Canada's trade relations has led to the first trade deficit we have seen in over 30 years. The trade deficit record last July was \$2.7 billion. Therefore, it is important that as a country we need to increase our efforts and our engagement in order to improve the economic situation, increase international trade, and help the Canadian economy.

Canada has always supported free trade. Our origins are that of a trading nation, having started with fur, wood, and other natural resources. The portion of our economic activity attributed to trade is greater than that of most other nations. Indeed, approximately 80% of our economy and millions of Canadian jobs depend upon trade and our ability to access foreign markets. We are, after all, a very small country. Our population is 32 million which, one day the U.S. ambassador told me, could fit into the State of California. Taking that perspective, we need to ensure that we make agreements that are based in the interests of Canada.

If a free trade agreement is negotiated properly, Canadian exporters benefit from the reduction and elimination of tariffs on their goods destined for other countries. Canadian manufacturers benefit from the reduction and elimination of tariffs at the Canadian border on the various materials that go into their products. Canadian consumers benefit from lower prices of imported goods when tariffs on these goods are reduced or eliminated.

I think it is important to note that people do look at the best return on their investment, and everyone is an economical shopper. In this global age, where we are exposed to just about any goods and services, it is important that when we make deals we are able to ensure a better deal for Canada.

We have heard the debate on protectionism and what steps could best promote Canadian business success and generate Canadian jobs. However, most Canadian businesses that serve domestic markets do benefit from free trade because they are forced to innovate and compete with others from abroad, provided that those abroad comply with international rules on trade, tariffs and non-tariff barriers. In the long run, Canadian businesses are more than capable of being strong, innovative, and competitive without hiding behind protectionist walls.

We know that when we are promoting trade in our green technology, as we have seen in examples such RIM et cetera, we need to be strategic and smart because we live in a global village. In that village, everyone knows what the prices are. We could go on

eBay and get things from Australia that could be cheaper than what we could get in Canada. This makes businesses innovate, so they can compete in the global market.

The Liberal Party has always supported economic growth through proper free trade agreements. It also supports any initiatives that will improve access to foreign markets for Canadian businesses. It is important to note that we cannot rely heavily on one trading partner because, as was said, when the elephant rolls over, it is the poor mouse sitting next to it that might get hurt. It is important for us to be careful when we are negotiating but ensuring ensure there is freer trade with far more nations, rather than relying heavily on one partner.

● (1230)

Although Panama has a small economy and Canada's existing trade with that country is relatively limited, there are opportunities for Canadian businesses.

The expansion of the Panama Canal is currently underway and it is slated to be completed by 2014 at a projected cost of \$5.3 billion. That is an interesting sum of money. The expansion is expected to generate opportunities for Canadian companies in such areas as infrastructure and construction, as well as environmental, heavy engineering and consulting services. In the area of capital projects, opportunities will be generated in human capital development and construction materials.

Like the free trade agreements between Canada and Chile and Costa Rica, the North American free trade agreement, and the free trade agreement between Jordan, the Canada-Panama free trade agreement includes side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment. These are important aspects of the agreement.

The Canada-Panama labour co-operation agreement recognizes the obligations of both countries under the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Both countries are required to ensure that laws, regulations and national practises protect the following rights: the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced labour, and the elimination of discrimination.

The Canada-Panama labour co-operation agreement and the agreement on the environment both include complaints and dispute resolution processes that enable members of the public to request an investigation into the perceived failures of Canada or Panama to comply with these agreements.

The free trade agreement with Panama is another opportunity to increase access to more markets for Canadian farmers and businesses. As was pointed out, our farmers need access to more markets. We are a small country and our farmers need to be competitive and innovative. This agreement will give them access.

Government Orders

Panama is a relatively small economy. In 2009 we exported \$90 million in goods to that country, which is not as large as some trading partners. It is, however, a stable country which has made significant progress in recent years in terms of development and democracy. Canada is well placed to continue to encourage that.

In spite of the global economic downturn, Panama's GDP grew to 10.7% in 2008, one of the highest in the Americas, and is forecast at 5.6% for 2010. In 2009, bilateral trade between the two countries totalled \$132.1 million. Canadian exports made up \$91.4 million and \$40.7 million in imports.

In the merchandise area, exports to Panama include: machinery, vehicles, electronic equipment, pharmaceutical equipment, pulses and frozen potato products. In the area of service, Canadian exports include: engineering, information and communications technology.

Under the agreement Canada will eliminate over 99% of its tariffs on imports from Panama.

It is important to note that there is no debate here over the issue of human rights. As members of Parliament we may be concerned about it, but we defer on what approaches to take, whether it is through trade, opening up doors, or through the wagging of fingers. Wagging fingers is not a good idea. When I was in India, we discussed what Canada could export, and the first thing I was told was pluralism.

As the government is focusing on creating free trade agreements with other countries, it also needs to look at creating free trade agreements within provinces.

• (1235)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the human rights issue continues to concern me with respect to free trade agreements. When we are providing opportunities for free trade, we have to monitor human rights and labour rights.

These agreements may provide opportunities from a trade perspective, but how can they avoid exploiting some of the employees who would have additional work opportunities?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is very interested in labour law, and there is a side agreement on Labour co-operation that recognizes the obligations of both countries under the ILO.

On the other front, from a human rights perspective, I made a statement very quickly on whether we would like to engage with other countries. Through trade, we engage people, and through this engagement, people see how different people operate. If we were to shut the country, close the doors, close our borders, people would not understand how others operate. I gave a prime example of when I went to India, I was in the state of Gujarat, and I asked what would be the best Canadian expert and they said it was pluralism. We did not have to teach it to them. They understood how we, as Canadians, worked and lived in harmony, and respected our diversity.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-46 at report stage.

My opinion on the bill has not changed over the course of time of it being in committee. In fact, many of the things presented in

committee spoke very strongly against the nature of the bill and against the bilateral free trade agreement with a country like Panama.

Panama along with Colombia are two countries that the Conservative government has decided, in its wisdom, to pursue free trade agreements with and have brought them forward in this Parliament. Neither of these countries is appropriate for free trade deals with Canada.

Clearly Colombia had so many human rights violations that the nature of our protection for those human rights issues, which we hold so strongly in Canada, were simply not there.

In the case of Panama, quite clearly there are human rights issues, but more overwhelmingly are the issues surrounding the nature of the Panamanian business community. That has been brought forward, in great detail, to Parliament through our work, through the work of some of the other parties and through the witnesses at committee and clearly this is not a nation that holds the same level of integrity and honesty within its corporate structures as we do in Canada.

To enter into this free trade agreement, pushing investment with Panama is like injecting more poison into our system. Our system may falter because of the opportunities that exist in this.

Free trade agreements need careful scrutiny, and we have been calling for that. Careful benefit scrutiny, net benefit analysis should take place on any free trade deal with any country in the world. I know we are negotiating a number of those, so there should be work put into that.

Take for instance the much wanted European free trade agreement. Many holes are showing up in that deal already. For instance, today there is a report coming out that indicates Canadian drug costs, drug costs that are directly related to government costs, are going to go up substantially if we go ahead with the European free trade deal as outlined, with the provisions in which the Europeans are most interested.

The opportunity to use generic drugs will be made more difficult. That difficulty is estimated to cost us in the order of \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion a year. Where does that come from? From the pockets of Canadian taxpayers. What benefits do we get from that? By going along with the Europeans on that, the net total investment in new research and development would be in the order of \$400 million.

With the effect of marginal tax rate for corporations in this country of 18%, how much improvement to the economy has to go ahead to make up the difference of \$2 billion to the taxpayers? There are no answers for that. No analysis has been done. That directly affects our federal government and all the provinces as well.

There was a curious reception that I went to the other night with the Japanese automotive association. There were opportunities for speeches. The Minister of International Trade made a fine speech about his total belief in free trade, the need to sign these agreements and to work on these things. That was fine. I accept that as his position.

Government Orders

However, the president of the Japanese automotive association said that the European free trade deal was not the panacea for the association, that it would lose on the deal if we signed with Europe.

• (1240)

Let us look at the Japanese automotive industry, one of the clear winners for Canada in the last decade with the setting up of new plants. Of the total number of vehicles produced, most are exported to the United States. Not only are the Japanese in Canada, probably because of our good conditions and public health care, but their product is part of our export development in manufacturing, which everyone in the chamber must understand is very weak on every other front.

The people who are doing a successful job for us in manufacturing automobiles and exporting to the United States are saying that we should look at the provisions of the European free trade deal. Quite clearly, we have to look at trade deals very carefully in this new world. This is not the old world of the 1980s and 1990s when the free trade mantra was something that no one could resist, that no political party was able to completely ignore, that no political party of the right was able to say anything other than it agreed.

Let me get back to the free trade deal with Panama. It is not really a free trade deal. This is about investment. This is about Canadian companies investing their profits in Panama, perhaps on the new expansion of the Panama Canal or a number of other areas. That is what is going to happen. Investors will be taking the money they make in Canada and investing it in another country.

What about agriculture? Riots are going on around the world right now over the price of agricultural products. Canada could do much better. A previous member spoke of pulses, the consortium of producers of lentils, peas and beans. I had an opportunity to speak with those people and they are not concerned about free trade. They are concerned about our railways that do not give them a proper deal on service. They have much more difficulty getting their products to the Canadian ports for export to the world market for produce that is ever-expanding and where the prices of products are going up.

When we talk about agriculture, we are talking about something that is going to be in great demand. When we think about agriculture in terms of free trade, what we should be thinking about is how to protect and enhance our agricultural capacity in our country. This is the way to deal with that.

What is Canada's trade? So much of it is energy and raw resources, the things the world needs, not what it wants. The world wants produced products, but it needs raw products and Canada is in a good position to provide those raw products. We do not want to sell them too cheap or give them away. We want to ensure that our children and grandchildren are well protected in our resources going forward. When we sign free trade deals with countries and say that we must give our resources in a fashion that we do not dictate anymore, we are giving up something, but what are we getting in return?

Let us talk about border security. A big issue right now is that the thickened border has slowed down free trade to the United States. That is nonsense. Trade since 9/11 to the United States has gone up consistently until 2008 when there was a recession and the value of

the Canadian dollar accelerated. Those two factors hit our trade very hard with the United States. It went down from about \$350 billion to about \$100 billion, but it had nothing to do with free trade. It had to do with currency and our ability to deal with our own issues.

As for the currency, we do not have the opportunity to do like the Liberals did in 1993 and lower the interest rate because we are already at rock bottom. We are in a bind. What can we do, quantitative easing? What do we do to improve our currency position vis-à-vis the United States? That is the problem we have with trade with the United States.

• (1245)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member mentioned a couple of countries with which it would not be acceptable to have free trade agreements. With which countries would he be willing to sign free trade agreements?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Yukon and I share many things.

I agree with him that there should be some countries we enter into fair trade agreements with that are based on careful analysis and that provide us the answers we want.

In some ways probably multilateral trade with Latin America would be better. It has trading group there called Mercosur. There are certain provisions within that trading group that it wants to maintain. Canada has to understand that fair trade means we deal with what the countries that have banded together want.

With some of those countries, though, we have a problem because we have very large subsidies and tariffs against things such as sugared-based ethanol from Brazil. That is a problem. How would we get around that and keep the subsidies in place for our farmers? Those are things that bar us from fair trade agreements with large expanding trading partners.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Western Arctic for clearly outlining why we should be opposed to this agreement. I have a question for him with regard to tax havens.

Back in November, Mr. Todd Tucker appeared before the committee that was examining the bill. He indicated that we were being told not to worry, that we were protected from the fact that Panama could continue to be a bad actor with the tax havens. He said that in the agreement there were clauses that would actually prevent Canada from taking any action, specifically article 9.10, which states:

Each Party shall permit transfers related to a covered investment to be made freely and without delay, into and out of its territory.

Government Orders

Then it goes on to talk about chapters 9 and 12 of the free trade agreement that have non-discrimination clauses.

Could the member for Western Arctic comment on the fact that Panama is noted for its tax havens and that we will not be protected under the agreement from the continuing abuse of the tax haven status in Panama?

• (1250)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, that question troubles and perplexes all of us. When we go into a free trade agreement with the kind of provisions we have proposed with Panama, we open a Pandora's box. There are 400,000 corporations in Panama. They are not there for the weather. They are there because the tax haven status is such that they can be there. Interestingly enough, many of them are also criminal organizations. These are things that will filter through to the Canadian side with this kind of agreement.

Panama refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement. Therefore, the country recognizes what it is doing with its laws for the corporations it shelters. It is not interested in changing, so why would we go ahead with this agreement?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many of the New Democrats give the impression that it is strictly the tax haven issue that prevents them from voting for the bill. I guess a hypothetical question for the member, and I would really appreciate a good answer, is this. If the issue were not a tax haven, would they then be more inclined to support the bill, the concept of freer trade?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, it is hypothetical and we do not deal with hypothetical issues here. We are dealing with a trade agreement between Panama and Canada. Once this passes the House, then that is the law of the land. Therefore, we cannot be hypothetical about it. We have to be practical and realistic about it.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to add my voice to the debate concerning Bill C-46.

As has already been said by many of my colleagues in the House, if passed by Parliament, Bill C-46 would implement a free trade agreement, an agreement on labour co-operation and an environmental accord between Canada and the Republic of Panama.

I share many of the positive comments that have already been made during the debate. Canada is after all a trading nation that has, for the past 30 years, maintained a trade surplus with our global neighbours and our competitors, or at least that was the case until now.

Canada is still a nation on which 80% of our economy is trade-dependent, but despite the lofty trade talk, the Conservative government has presided over a tremendous decline in our national trade advantage. Now, for the first time in more than a generation Canada is in a trade deficit situation.

That is right, the nation that was created and has since maintained itself by trading with our neighbours is importing more than we are selling globally. This new dependency must concern all of us. It is disappointing to me, but for Canadian farmers, manufacturers, and other exporters of Canadian goods and expertise, this is simply a disaster.

As members can imagine, I am pleased to see that the government is starting to focus its attention on trade matters, even if I would rather have seen that focus be on larger, more robust and growing markets, markets that could provide a greater growth potential for Canadian goods and labour expansion.

I want to be clear, I am not suggesting that Panama is not worth the effort; just the opposite. Canada and Panama had more than \$132 million worth of bilateral trade in 2009 alone. Then, despite the recession in 2010, Panama's GDP grew by just over 5%. Put another way, while Panama's market potential for trade is relatively small, it is moving in the right direction.

In contrast to the Conservative approach to trade, when the Liberals devised the team Canada approach to opening new trading opportunities, we set our focus on much larger markets, such as the U.S., China, the U.K., the Netherlands and Italy. I suppose the difference is that the Liberals were confident that Canada could and should compete at the highest levels on the global stage, while Conservatives continue to concern themselves with smaller, short-term goals.

That was then and this is now, so I need to be thankful for smaller steps. With this in mind, I want to congratulate the Minister of International Trade for his efforts to make this agreement possible.

What does this agreement actually do for Canada and for the people of Panama? Right now, Panama levies tariffs on Canadian agricultural products in the range of 13% to 260%. That means that Canadian agricultural products such as pulses, frozen potatoes, processed foods and beef are taxed in a way that makes them uncompetitive when directly compared with some of our Panamanian goods. We clearly know that our agricultural community continues to be under fire and under huge stress, and we need to do everything we can to decrease those problems.

As an example, a bushel of soybeans that would sell for \$13.98 in Canada would face a tax in Panama of 47%, or \$6.57. With that extra taxation, that bushel would cost \$20.55 to a further processor in Panama. That is unfair for our marketplace and unfair for our agricultural industry. This means Panamanians would be more apt to buy Panamanian produced goods when given that choice rather than pay the premium for a top notch Canadian product, understood by all of us.

The agreement would put an end to that artificially prompted competitive disadvantage for our farmers and it would allow Canadian farmers to start to compete on a level playing field, something they have consistently proven their ability to do effectively in many other jurisdictions.

• (1255)

On non-agricultural goods, Panama currently maintains an average-applied tariff of between 6.2% and 81%.

The passage of Bill C-46 means that Canadian fish, construction materials, paper products, and vehicle and auto parts will no longer face this kind of harmful taxation. Again, this kind of tariff reduction means that Canadian industry will have the option of opening and exploring Panama's market potential from a position of strength rather than one of initial economic disadvantage.

Government Orders

In return, Canada will eliminate almost all tariffs on currently imported Panamanian goods. This deal will allow the market to sort out which industry is the most competitive and which products are of the greatest quality and desire to consumers. As I look back on history, I have every confidence that when competing on a level playing field, Canadian farmers, anglers, manufacturers, and paper workers will create success and generate tremendous wealth for their respective industries.

I should also mention that this Canada–Panama free trade deal would seek to address non-tariff trade barriers to further help ensure non-discriminatory treatment of imported goods. While each of these things represent positive advantages, I would be remiss if I focused only on trade and not on the labour portions of the agreement which continue to be of enormous concern to me and others. This is especially important given the refurbishing and expansion of the Panama Canal, which is expected to be completed by 2014.

As with some of the other trade deals that Canada has signed, this agreement includes a side agreement on labour co-operation and the environment. The Canada–Panama agreement on labour co-operation recognizes the obligation of both countries under the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which requires that each country ensure that their domestic laws, regulations, and practices protect fundamental labour principles and rights at work.

Specifically, this includes: the right to freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labour, the elimination of forced labour, and the elimination of discrimination. These are extremely important issues when we are talking about free trade. As a former minister of citizenship and immigration, I think these are important elements of any free trade deal.

While free trade agreements are most certainly economic devices, the Liberals have long viewed trade and engagement as important instruments of social advancement and human rights promotion. When a nation exists in isolation, there is little regard for these fundamental freedoms and rights. However, once a country becomes part of the greater community of nations, there is an imposition of a greater social responsibility.

Sometimes I wonder which comes first. Clearly, this is the avenue we are pursuing, but monitoring these issues must be of high importance to Canada.

Canada has been a trading nation since it was opened by the coureurs de bois in the 17th century. Our native people traded for all items they could not produce themselves. Generations of Canadians have exported our products and ideas to the entire world. Canadian expertise has been responsible for countless global advances, but it has also helped this nation in ways those first coureurs de bois could never have imagined.

Today, Canada is the 11th largest trader on the planet, ranking well ahead of countries such as Spain, Russia, Mexico, India, and Australia. Our international commerce amounts to more than \$600 billion annually, and more than 80% of our economy is directly dependent upon trade and commerce with others. Indeed, to say that Canada is a trading nation would be a tremendous understatement, and it is for this reason that I am pleased to support Bill C-46.

● (1300)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the position of the Liberal Party on this trade agreement is that as long as we sign the trade agreement, everything else will magically improve. We will just keep our fingers crossed, and do it on a wing and a prayer. I wonder if the member could comment.

This free trade agreement between Canada and Panama was signed in May 2010, but here is what happened in the summer of 2010. The president announced unilateral changes to labour law. The law ended environmental impact studies on projects deemed to be of social interest. It banned mandatory dues collections from workers. It allowed employers to fire striking workers and replace them with strike-breakers. It criminalized street blockades and protected police from prosecution.

The severity of this attack on labour rights was met with strikes and demonstrations. The police were exceedingly harsh in their response and this was just this past summer. At least six people were killed, protesters were seriously injured, and many were blinded by tear gas and police violence. Three hundred trade union leaders were detained. That was the summer and it was in May 2010 that this agreement was signed.

Does the member really believe that engaging in these kinds of trade agreements will help either labour standards, environmental standards, or human rights generally?

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for that very important question. It is one of the issues that I, and I suspect many of my colleagues in the House, continue to try to find a balance.

Which comes first? Is there an improvement to the human rights record, labour, and so on, and then we will have a trade agreement? A good part of me would prefer it to go that way, but history has shown that it usually works the other way.

We need to be monitoring these things very carefully. It gives me a degree of confidence that they will be monitored. I would not hesitate to cancel the agreement and use that threat constantly if labour laws are not respected.

This is about providing more opportunities, not only for our Canadian farmers and manufacturers but also for theirs. It is a two-way street. If Panama cannot treat its citizens with respect and decency, then I would be the first one to stand up and say, "Cancel the agreement", whether it is this one or any other trade agreement that we would have.

● (1305)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder how much confidence the member has in this government to ensure that the trade agreement stands up for Canadian free trade given its dismal record in relation to the United States.

Government Orders

Time and time again, border crossings have put roadblocks in front of Canadian products going to the United States. There are the labelling and non-tariff barriers. The industry complained of huge lineups in the last few years. This has nothing to do with security. It has to do with standing up for Canadian trade. I wonder if the member would comment on that.

Hon. Judy Sgro: Mr. Speaker, those are the kinds of issues that are not only for the government side but it is part of our responsibilities in the opposition to stay very much attuned, monitor and raise those issues. We must ensure that the government monitors them as well. Part of our job is to make sure that the government does its job.

Clearly, we want to see opportunities for our farmers and manufacturers in Canada. My desire is to see the tariffs removed and assistance going to our farmers and manufacturers.

I am prepared to support this very cautiously. However, I will also monitor what is going on and keep my ear to the ground when it comes to labour law and any kind of outbreak happening in those countries when it comes to the abuse of their citizens.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise in the House again today to speak to Bill C-46, which seeks to implement the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

I say “again” because I have previously had the opportunity to speak at length on this bill at second reading. At that time, I focused my comments predominantly on three areas: labour issues; the fair trade movement as opposed to the free trade movement; and, of course, the serious implications of signing a free trade agreement with a tax haven, a free port or free zone, such as Panama, which is a country of convenience.

While I may get back to some of those seminal issues later if time permits, I want to focus today on environmental concerns and the very serious cautions we received in committee about signing a trade agreement with a country that many suggest is a safe haven for international crime.

Let me begin with the latter first.

Alain Deneault, who is a sociologist at the Université du Québec à Montréal, gave a succinct presentation at the Standing Committee on International Trade that summarized much of the prevailing thought and evidence about criminal activities in Panama and how those activities threaten to permeate Canadian jurisdictions if the implementation of this free trade agreement proceeds as planned.

Let me remind members of some of the most salient points.

A number of criminologists consider Panama to be a hub for money laundering, with a link to international drug trafficking, because of the Colon Free Zone. Patrice Meyzonnier, the chief commissioner at the headquarters of France's judicial police, talks in his book about a state involved in drug trafficking and the laundering of a good chunk of the world's dirty money. He says that Panama plays a bridging role between the south and north, from Colombia to the United States.

The criminal activity in the Colon Free Zone takes place mainly in the hotel industry, and via fictitious commercial spaces and fictitious rents.

It is actually a whole economy of money laundering that is corroborated in another book by Marie-Christine Dupuis-Danon of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. She states:

Drug traffickers capitalize on the benefits associated with free zones like the one near Colon in Panama. This zone actually fosters the movement of goods and cash, with little surveillance from the authorities. There are no fewer than 1,890 companies generating a total of \$5 billion annually in re-export activities. By definition, there are no customs duties on the operations carried out in the Colon Free Zone. As a result, the authorities are not able to enforce the regulations that are in effect in the rest of the country, including the declaration of sums over \$10,000. Drug traffickers buy goods and resell them for cash with a 20 to 30% discount to the dealers in the free port. So they deposit their pesos in banks in the free zone and transfer their funds to their regular accounts in Colombia.

Dupuis-Danon's findings are corroborated by Alain Delpirou and Eduardo MacKenzie in their book, *The Criminal Cartels*. They stress that cocaine and heroine trafficking is a major industry in the region and that it becomes an even greater problem because the free port of Colon has direct access to an uncontrolled zone in Colombia.

Finally, Mr. Deneault reminded us that Thierry Cretin, a former French judge who worked for the European Anti-Fraud Office, has published accounts that clearly demonstrate that the Colombian and Mexican mafias are very active in Canada while also very present in Panama. It seems hard to believe that we as legislators would vote in favour of anything that would make our country an even more porous jurisdiction for organized crime.

At a minimum, I would have thought that such mounting evidence from impeccable sources would have given the government pause for thought. I would have hoped that it would have caused the government to exercise extreme caution and that it would have reconsidered entering into a free trade agreement with this particular jurisdiction.

In passing, does it not strike others in this chamber as more than passing strange that this deal is being made by a Conservative government that is desperately trying to sell itself as being tough on crime? Does it even understand what it really takes to fight crime? Let me tell the members that it takes a lot more than a catchy slogan to get the job done.

If we want to get at organized crime, then we have to get at the money. By allowing Panama to continue to be a tax haven it is easy for corporations to register there and it makes it easy to launder money via Panama. In essence, Panama is being allowed to facilitate the operations of organized crime syndicates, along with the drug trafficking and human trafficking that go along with them. The Canadian government is essentially condoning those activities when it enters into a bilateral trade agreement with no strings attached.

Clearly, that should never happen. My NDP colleagues and I are doing everything in our power to ensure that it does not happen. That is why we are here today debating the four amendments that we have introduced to Bill C-46.

Government Orders

●(1310)

The four motions are as follows. The first motion is to eliminate clause 7 that outlines the purpose of the bill. The second motion is to eliminate the clause designating that the minister is the representative of Canada. The third motion is to eliminate clause 12 that lays out the minister's authorized activities in his role. The last one is to eliminate the final clause, the coming into force clause stating when the bill would become law.

Together these four motions essentially gut the bill, giving the government an opportunity to rethink its approach to international trade. We certainly would not be the only jurisdiction to take that opportunity. When the debate began in this House on the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, we were told over and over again that it must be okay to proceed because the Americans were forging ahead with a similar agreement.

Well, the air has certainly gone out of that balloon, because not only have the Americans not passed that agreement, but no fewer than 54 United States congressmen have now demanded that President Obama forgo the agreement until Panama has signed the tax information exchange treaties.

Those treaties are the first step to putting an end to the tax havens that facilitate money laundering, and the Americans got it right: sign the treaties first and then negotiate.

In Canada, the Conservatives and Liberals are operating on a wing and a prayer. They would implement the free trade agreement and then use moral suasion to get the Panamanians to do the right thing. It is not going to work; others have tried and failed, and we should have learned our lesson.

I see that I only have a couple of minutes left to conclude my comments here today, and I really did want to focus on the environment as well, since I did not have an opportunity to do that in my last intervention. I will try to be brief.

First, let me acknowledge that MiningWatch Canada was absolutely right when it pointed out in its submission to the committee that the environmental impact of this FTA is impossible to gauge because it has not been made public, as it was supposed to be after the signing of the trade agreement.

The report that is publicly available on the initial environmental assessment is almost completely devoid of meaningful content. The one thing it does acknowledge, however, is that:

The main effect is likely to be greater protection for existing Canadian investment in Panama.

There it is in a nutshell. This agreement is all about protecting investments while ignoring the environmental implications of that protection. There is absolutely no attempt to frame any aspect of this agreement in terms of sustainable development.

This will be of huge concern to both environmentalists and to all of those Canadians who were actively engaged in the campaign on corporate social responsibility. As the bill on CSR was recently defeated in this House by Conservatives and Liberals, I guess I should not be surprised that this free trade agreement will be passed by the same coalition.

Nonetheless, let us be clear about what is happening in Panama. Examples of Canadian mining projects in Panama include the proposed Cobre Panama open pit copper project by Inmet Mining on the Petaquilla concession, west of Panama City, which is forecast to deforest 5,900 hectares of what is mostly primary rainforest in the middle of the Mesoamerican biological corridor; the controversial Molejón gold mine project of Petaquilla Minerals, which is repeatedly accused by nearby communities of deforestation and contaminating local rivers, and was fined almost \$2 million for environmental violations; and Corriente Resources' illegal activity in the Ngöbe-Buglé indigenous territory, trying to overcome community opposition to a huge open pit copper mine project so the company can first obtain and then sell the property to a larger mining company for development.

This free trade agreement will only increase such Canadian investments, yet we know that environmental protection and legal enforcement and compliance in general in Panama are notoriously weak, even within the framework of existing laws and regulations. Why would we enter into a trade agreement that will end up protecting mining investments that are taking advantage of lax governance and the resulting low cost operating environment, and allow Canadian corporations to undertake projects that would never be approved in Canada, or any other country for that matter, without more stringent controls?

In a global economy, we must take global responsibility. That means that we must vote against the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

●(1315)

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Hamilton Mountain for very ably outlining some of the other concerns that New Democrats have with this latest round of free trade agreements that the Conservatives are proposing.

I wanted to touch on two points. In her speech the member raised these issues around mining and sustainability. When this bill was being studied at committee, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster actually brought forward two proposed amendments that were defeated by the Liberals the Conservatives.

One was with regard to sustainable development. That amendment defined sustainable development as:

development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, as set out in the Brundtland Report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development.

The second amendment that the member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed was with regard to sustainable investment. That amendment defined sustainable investment as:

investment that seeks to maximize social good as well as financial return, specifically in the areas of the environment, social justice, and corporate governance, in accordance with the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment.

The member ably outlined some of the concerns with the mining companies in Panama. I wonder if she could comment on how these two proposed amendments would at least have improved that particular situation.

Government Orders

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, I know that the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan shares my profound concerns about this free trade agreement. In fact, it is one of the reasons that so many of my colleagues in the NDP caucus have taken the time to put our position on the record today and in days past.

The member raises an important question. Sustainable investments and sustainable development are really at the core of what is at issue in this trade agreement. They are the reasons why organizations like the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace are so engaged in free trade issues, particularly in the global south. We should not be engaging in trade if we are not able to respect human rights, environmental laws and labour laws.

We have seen a whole slew of bilateral free trade agreements brought to the House by the Conservative government, be they with Panama, the trade agreement we are talking about today, or Colombia, which is clearly also the case. The amendments that were moved by our colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster are absolutely crucial to restoring some integrity, and they really do go to the heart of corporate social responsibility.

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I applaud the many members who have spoken on this issue. I think a good debate adds to the availability of trade for our country.

I would like to ask my colleague from the NDP for her viewpoint on this particular fact: About 45% of our gross domestic product comes from exports. That staggering number only goes to show how important these trade agreements with other countries are, and how important it is to reach out. It was the very foundation of trade that helped develop our country.

I would like to ask my colleague why she would be opposed to having an improved trade environment between countries that would allow, for example, Canada to have some impact upon the labour situations in other countries and allow Canadian companies to expand and grow and continue to contribute to the gross domestic product of our country?

● (1320)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, the member's question allows me to say quite clearly that New Democrats are not against trade. What we do stand for is fair trade and not free trade at all costs. That is really the issue here.

The member perhaps exaggerates the importance of Panama to us even as a trading nation. The trade that we have with Panama is slightly in excess of \$100 million, which is simply a drop in the bucket in terms of our overall Canadian trade.

Panama is a country that is in complete defiance of the notion of sustainable investment or sustainable development. We have an obligation as global citizens to ensure that we protect the same rights in countries abroad, where we want to do business, as we would do here at home.

Why is it okay for the member to suggest that it is all right for us to ignore labour laws, environmental laws and human rights in other parts of the world, when I know for a fact that she would never condone corporations taking those kinds of actions here?

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand today to speak on behalf of my party to Bill C-46.

I commend the member for Hamilton Mountain on her intervention. It struck me, as she was answering questions, that the Liberal member stood in the House and basically said that it was trade at all costs. The reality for our country is that human rights and labour laws are the defining set of principles. To hear that kind of intervention from a party that proclaims human rights struck me as strange. It is not trade at all costs. As the member just indicated, our trade with Panama is around \$100 million. That is an awfully cheap price to give up on the rights that Canadians believe so much in.

I want to go through a bit of the chronology on this bill. The Conservative government concluded the negotiations in August 2009. This agreement, by the way, as has been indicated by previous speakers, is very similar to the one with Colombia. We, of course, opposed the Colombia free trade agreement for weeks on end in the House because we felt that it was beneath Canada's dignity to be signing a free trade agreement with such a reprehensible government.

This agreement was signed May 14, 2010. On the same day, the government tabled side agreements in the House on Bill C-46. The NDP is opposing this bill for a number of reasons. In committee, compelling testimony was heard from witnesses regarding the tax haven situation in the Republic of Panama, as well as the poor record of labour relations in the country.

The previous speaker from the NDP, our labour critic, talked about the lack of labour rights in Panama. The member for Burnaby—New Westminster moved motions and amendments in committee that would have addressed some of the glaring failures in this agreement. Sadly, the record will show that they were opposed by the Conservatives and supported by the Liberals.

We do have issues with the free trade agreement. For example, despite requests from the Canadian government, Panama has refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement. This is very troubling considering the large amount of money that is being laundered in Panama, including money from drug trafficking, similar to Colombia. Panama's complete lack of taxation transparency has led the OECD to label the nation as a tax haven.

Just before the clause by clause review of Bill C-46, the member for Burnaby—Douglas proposed a motion to the committee that would have stopped the implementation of the Canada-Panama agreement until Panama agreed to sign a tax information exchange agreement. Again, his motion was defeated by the Conservatives and the Liberals who argued that the double taxation agreement Panama had agreed to was satisfactory. We do not agree. Unfortunately, the double taxation agreement only tracks legal income, while tax information exchange agreements will track all income, including money made through illegal means. That was as proposed by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Government Orders

Considering Panama's history and reputation on such matters, it should be clear as to why such an agreement is necessary before signing the deal. Again, we hit a roadblock with both the Liberals and Conservatives on that point.

Subsequently, during the clause by clause review, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed nothing less than 11 amendments that would have made progressive changes to the bill. These amendments included the addition of the crucial concepts of sustainable development and investment, a requirement for taxation transparency and provisions, and to incorporate in the bill the protection of labour rights, including the right to free collective bargaining.

Other amendments would have required the Minister of International Trade to consult with labour and trade unions, as well as work with human rights experts and organizations in order to create impact assessments for the trade agreement. It is one thing to sign these agreements but it is quite another thing to follow up and see what the impacts have been on both the country we sign with and in our own industries and businesses that are part of the agreement.

A final amendment would have required Parliament to vote to extend the provisions of the act beyond the first year. All of these amendments, once again, hit that same wall and were voted down by the Conservatives with the help of the Liberals.

● (1325)

The committee heard testimony from Todd Tucker of the Public Citizens Global Trade Watch. Mr. Tucker made a very compelling case when he said that Panama was one of the world's worst tax havens and that the Panamanian government had intentionally allowed the nation to become that tax haven. Obviously there are benefits for a government seen in such a thing.

To summarize Mr. Tucker's testimony, he said that the tax haven situation in Panama was not improving under the current government nor under the conditions today in Panama. In addition, a trade agreement with Canada, in his opinion, would worsen the problem and could cause harm to both Panama and Canada.

Another major issue for myself as a former labour leader is the status of labour rights in Panama and the complete failure of this trade agreement because these are pending agreements. They are like letters of intent in a collective agreement that have no legal weight. These side agreements on labour rights fall far short of what is needed.

Two of the amendments put forth in committee by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster would have protected trade union workers in Panama. The member for Hamilton Mountain made a point a few minutes ago regarding Bill C-300, as well as labour rights. Why would we sign an agreement with a country and not demand, as part of that agreement, equal rights in that country to the rights we have here in Canada. As the principal representative of Canada on the joint Canada-Panama commission, the minister should have consulted on a regular basis with representatives of Canadian labour and from trade unions both here and in Panama.

Like all other amendments, those amendments were also defeated by the Conservatives with their friends the Liberals. Unfortunately,

this creates a free trade zone that belittles the rights of labour, a serious problem that is already prevalent in Panama.

Teresa Healy of the Canadian Labour Congress spoke to the committee studying the bill regarding the agreement. She testified that while the ILO's, the International Labour Organization, core labour standards had been invoked in the agreement, the agreement was still weaker than it should be. As well, the current Panamanian government has been increasingly harsh on labour unions and workers in recent years.

In addition, two amendments regarding definitions were proposed by the member for Burnaby—New Westminster. By the end of the day, people will know the member for Burnaby—New Westminster who sits on this committee for our party.

The first amendment was with regard to sustainable development. The member for Nanaimo—Cowichan spoke a few moments ago in debate on this. The amendment would define sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, as set out in the Brundtland report, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development.

The second amendment was with regard to the definition of sustainable investment. The amendment would have defined sustainable investment as investment that seeks to maximize social good as well as financial return. Again, that is a principle in this country of Canada that we should be sharing with any other countries with which we have agreements, specifically in areas of environment, social justice and corporate governance, in accordance with the United Nations principles for responsible investment.

In addition to those issues with the Canada Panama free trade agreement specifically, there is also the fact that this agreement is just another step in the massively flawed Canada-U.S. strategy of pushing serial bilateralism in the form of NAFTA-style free trade agreements.

The NDP prefers a multilateral approach based on a fair and sustainable trade model. Bilateral trade deals amount to protectionist trade deals since they give preferential treatment to few partners and exclude the rest. This puts weaker countries in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis larger partners. A multilateral trade model avoids these issues while protecting human rights and the environment.

● (1330)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the question as much for my curiosity as for some of the members in the chamber who are newer members and might not know this either.

Could the hon. member list one after another which trade deals his party did support?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that prior to being a member here in 1988 I fought against the Canada free trade agreement. I am very proud to have done so because that free trade agreement ultimately failed Canadian workers. That trade agreement cost Canadians.

Government Orders

I see the Liberal member sitting there laughing at the fact that 504,000 Ontario workers lost their jobs because of the Canada free trade agreement. I do not think they are laughing.

As we look at the subsequent agreements, yes, the investment community may have done well in these but family after family across this country were practically destroyed by those agreements.

I am proud to say that I fought the trade agreement in 1988 and that I fought it again in 1993 when the Liberals said that they would not support NAFTA and turned around and sold out Canadian workers.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I commend the member for speaking so clearly about why we are opposed to certain agreements in this House.

I only need to turn to the softwood lumber agreement to talk about a rotten agreement. On Vancouver Island, our mills are still closed, by and large. Some of them are only gradually reopening after years of a softwood lumber policy that has devastated the forestry sector throughout this country.

I think it is incumbent upon us to stand up and defend Canadian workers and Canadian jobs. I certainly agree with the member opposite that I will not apologize for doing that.

I want to touch on fair trade just for a moment. The member ably outlined the fact that New Democrats do support agreements where fair trade is involved. There are a couple of elements in fair trade that are really important: that forced labour and exploited child labour is not allowed; that producers receive a fair price, a living wage; for commodities, farmers receive a stable minimum price; that buyers and producers trade under direct long-term relationships; that producers have access to financial and technical assistance; that sustainable protection techniques are encouraged; that working conditions are healthy and safe; that equal employment opportunities are provided; and that all aspects of trade and production are open to public accountability.

I wonder if the member would comment on what he sees is important in a fair trade agreement, not a free trade agreement?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, one of the things I said in my remarks is that the NDP supports multilateral agreements, but we also support sectoral trade agreements. An example of that would have been Auto Pact, which served Canada well for years and, to a great extent, the surrounding industries. The parts industries were all sustained by that particular agreement that was allowed to lapse in recent years. That was an example of sectoral trade. We do not need to put all our eggs in the one basket of the free trade agreement, particularly in a relationship such as we have with the United States. In those famous words that a free trade agreement is great, like an elephant with a mouse, until the elephant decides to roll over.

We saw that in the capitulation of the present government in that softwood trade deal to which the member referred. We were winning time and again at the World Trade Organization. We were up for what would have been the next win. Everybody was sure that would happen so they signed the deal.

I toured B.C. with my pensions tour and in community after community workers from those mills came forward telling us how

they had lost their pensions because of that particular side agreement. In the famous words of the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, “the softwood sellout”.

In many instances, the trade agreements that we have been signing as a country have sold out human rights and have sold out the workers in the countries with which we are partnering. We should not be standing, as a country for anything less than equal human rights for all workers in both countries.

● (1335)

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of Bill C-46, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama.

Canada and Panama signed this agreement on May 14, 2010, and the bill has made quick progress through all stages to get to the third reading, since it was only introduced on September 23 of last year.

The international trade committee concluded its study on the bill in late December before the House recessed. After careful consultation with stakeholders, the committee concluded that the agreements were satisfactory, and now Bill C-46 has come back to the House.

Freer, more open trade with our neighbours benefits everyone. Through trade agreements, we strengthen our economy, increase wealth, protect labour and human rights and help ensure environmental protection.

Our country relies on trade. In fact, 80% of our economy depends on trading with our neighbours. That is why I support any initiative that improves market access for our Canadian businesses. Canada is a trading nation. Our trade roots date back to the 1600s. Indeed, our country is founded on trade.

This is why Liberals are concerned that for the first time in 30 years, Canada now has a trade deficit. Export amounts to 45% of our gross domestic product, so we definitely need to have a good trade relationship. We need successful trade policies that build and sustain relationships with our existing partners, while also securing opportunities for other nations.

Government Orders

However, it seems our country takes one step forward and two steps back. Consider the United Arab Emirates, for example. We are all familiar with the diplomatic negotiations with the United Arab Emirates over airline landing rights. The U.A.E. is an important trading partner for us, with \$2 billion every year in trade. This dispute was about six extra flights every week. However, because it was so poorly handled, we were told to leave Camp Mirage, a military base in Dubai that has been our forward operating base for our mission in Afghanistan. It will cost taxpayers at least \$300 million just to close it and who knows how much to set up a new base somewhere else. That is how important trade relationships are.

In emerging markets, for example like China and India, we have delayed or missed opportunities. In the coming years, China and India will generate some 900 million new consumers and spend some \$4 trillion on new infrastructure. Yet in 2006 and 2007 our exports to China barely kept pace with the growth of the Chinese economy. In the same period, the U.S. increased its trade by some 60%. We are not only falling behind the Americans. Thailand, the Philippines, Germany, and Australia are all getting a bigger piece of the Chinese import market than we are.

As I stated earlier, the Liberals are very supportive of fair open trade and Bill C-46 does make progress in that direction. However, we are falling behind in securing the biggest emerging markets in the world. If we are to compete tomorrow, we must open up opportunities not only in Panama, but in China, Russia, India, Brazil, and other emerging markets.

Even though Panama is a relatively small economy, there is much potential. In 2009 Canada exported around \$90 million in goods to a small country of just under 3.5 million people. The country is relatively stable. It has made important strides in recent years with its development of democratic institutions. Through the global economic downturn, Panama's GDP still managed to grow at 10.7% in 2008, making it one of the hottest economies in the Americas. It is forecast to grow 5.6% for 2010.

Most of our exports to Panama include machinery, vehicles, electronic equipment and pharmaceutical equipment. Our service industries provide financial services and engineering, as well as information technology support. The Canada-Panama free trade agreement would include open market access for goods, cross-border trade and services, telecommunications, investment, financial services and government procurement.

● (1340)

At the moment, Panamanian tariffs on agricultural products are around 13.4%, but in some cases they can reach as high as 260%. Removing these tariffs would generate many opportunities for the Canadian agricultural sector.

Atlantic Canada also stands to benefit very much from this free trade agreement. It accounts for 10.9% of Canadian exports to Panama.

In late January, early February of this year, 12 Atlantic Canadian companies participated in a trade mission to Panama, building on past trade missions to that country. From Newfoundland and Labrador, four companies participated in the trade mission: Blue Oceans Satellite Systems of St. John's, Cartwright Drilling of Goose

Bay, Labrador, Compusult Limited of Mount Pearl and Marine Industrial Lighting Systems of Mount Pearl.

Compusult is a global leader in geospatial interoperability. Its scientific applications support environmental data gathering and management. Marine Industrial Lighting Systems was formed in 1999 and one of its Panamanian projects includes explosion proof submersible floodlights for the Panama Canal.

Panama will be expanding its strategic canal route which connects the Atlantic and the Pacific. This project is valued at over \$5 billion and will provide Canadian companies significant opportunities in a wide spectrum of goods and services. The expansion of the canal will allow for increased container traffic, some of which will access ports in Atlantic Canada.

As with Canada's other free trade agreements, Chile, Costa Rica, NAFTA and Jordan, there are side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment.

The Canada-Panama agreement on labour co-operation recognizes the obligations of both countries under the International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. It requires that each country ensure its domestic laws, regulations and practices protect fundamental labour principles and rights at work.

The Canada-Panama environment agreement would allow any person who resides in either country to request an investigation of alleged violations of that country's environmental laws.

This free trade agreement contains sufficient protections for labour and the environment, ensuring that they are not compromised for the sake of trade.

As for the future, Canada needs to focus on emerging markets, Panama and the Americas, as well as India, China, Russia and Brazil. We must do so with haste and ensure more available markets for Canada's goods and services.

I hope my colleagues in the House will join me in supporting Bill C-46 so Canadian business and the people of Canada and Panama can benefit from freer, more open trade.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member and I are not on the same side of this issue in terms of how we are finally going to vote when the amendments come before the House. I presume we are not going to be on the same side either when the bill comes before us at third reading. However, we can agree on one thing, and that is this is another trade agreement the Conservatives have really rushed to the House.

Government Orders

As a result of that, would the member comment on this? Is she aware of any labour organizations, any environmental organizations, any civil society groups or any individual citizens for that matter being consulted before the Canada-Panama free trade agreement was signed by the government? Does she not believe it is equally important to hear from such labour, environmental, civil society groups and individual Canadians as it is to simply just consult with the business community?

• (1345)

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's concern with this agreement. As I said in my speech, there are a number of side agreements such as the Canada-Panama agreement on labour co-operation as well as the Canada-Panama environment agreement. I am sure my colleague is familiar with this as she sits on the committee.

I assume there was an opportunity to call witnesses before committee. The bill has now come from committee and we are debating it in the House.

Like my hon. colleague earlier this morning, I also indicated that we would ensure that the side agreements on labour and the environment worked properly and effectively. The House will hold the government accountable for those agreements. The fundamental principles and rights at work will be upheld. The declaration will be upheld. Issues around the environment will be considered as well.

It is important that free trade occur in our world and that we can have access to other markets. It is important that Canada reach out and ensure that the fundamental principles around labour organization and the environment that we hold dear are also held dear in other locations.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her support of the Canada-Panama free trade agreement and the side agreements that go with it.

In listening to the criticism coming from members of the NDP Party, I am a bit perplexed. They have never supported a free trade agreement in any way, shape, or form. I do not know what they do support in the House because they seem to be against everything they talk about.

What are the advantages to the hon. member's home province of Newfoundland and Labrador in having more extensive trading relationships within the Americas?

Ms. Siobhan Coady: Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador has only been in Confederation for 60-some years. However, the province dates over 500 years and we have had trading relations around the world.

More recently, we have had a lot more trading relationships with South America and Central America. One can look at some of the relationships we have had with Brazil around the oil and gas industry. There are a lot of Newfoundland and Labrador companies spending time in Brazil. I have named a couple of companies that are already doing business in Panama, reaching out to take advantage of some of the work that is being done on the Panama Canal. We have relationships, for example, with Chile in regard to aquaculture and the imports and exports of that trade.

From my home province's perspective, we have long since known the benefit of trade. We have long since reached out to the world. We have long since recognized that exports drive the development of our economy, businesses and employment in our community. We are certainly supportive of continuing to do that.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise in the House to take part in such a critical debate, not just about the Canada-Panama free trade agreement but about how we move forward as a country, our relationships at the international level and how we see our role as promoters of trade and growing relationships within the Americas.

However, as I stand here, I am also very proud to be a member of a party that has stood for the kind of trade that prioritizes the concept of fairness, fair trade, a party that reaffirms its vision for a fair trade policy that puts the pursuit of social justice, strong public sector social programs and the elimination of poverty at the heart of an effective trade strategy.

In fact, when we hear Canada speak out at the international level, we hear of the concepts of mutual growth and improvement of living conditions. However, when we look at the specifics of the kinds of trade agreements that the government is promoting, we see an approach that strays from those kinds of ideas, certainly from the values that we in the NDP hold dear and go against the idea of wanting to contribute to the benefit of people in these countries, not just corporations or certain people, but people in general. That is the question in the House when it comes to Bill C-46, the Canada-Panama free trade agreement.

As my colleagues have expressed in the House, we have grave concerns that this bill has come forward in a hurried fashion, with a real desire by the government to pass it without the in-depth examination of what might be challenging pieces. Certainly there has been critical debate at committee, but there are some key points that I am sure many Canadians would be shocked to find out the government is trying to push through. They require more debate. Members deserve a chance to sit down and ask whether this really is what Canada wants to be promoting on the international stage.

We have heard much talk about the idea that this trade agreement would exacerbate the inequalities in Panama, that it would allow Canadian companies and Canada to be part of scenarios where labour rights are disrespected and abused or environmental rights are disregarded. We have heard that the fact that there are side agreements on labour co-operation and the environment is supposed to deal with these concerns and dynamics that we in the NDP think such a trade agreement would foster in a country like Panama.

The existence of such side agreements is simply not what is going to prevent such abuses from taking place or what is going to prevent such trade agreements from truly looking at how trade could make Panamanians and Canadians better off. There are a couple of reasons why NDP members feel the side agreements and Bill C-46 are inadequate in trying to reach the point of truly contributing to the well-being of Panama and Canadians.

Government Orders

At committee, compelling testimony was heard from witnesses regarding, for example, the tax haven situation in the Republic of Panama as well as its poor record of labour rights. It was noted that Panama has refused to sign a tax information exchange agreement, something that is troubling considering the large amount of money laundering in Panama, including money from drug trafficking.

Panama's complete lack of taxation transparency has led to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development to label the nation a tax haven. It has been referenced that a double taxation agreement would somehow resolve such a concern, but the double taxation agreement only tracks legal income while a tax information exchange agreement would track all income, including that made through illegal means.

The tax haven situation in Panama, as witnesses expressed in committee, is not improving conditions under the current government in Panama. A trade agreement with Canada would only worsen the problem and could cause harm to both Panama and Canada.

• (1350)

Another critical area a side agreement would not deal with and the source of such concern would be in the area of labour and the respect of labour rights. It is a tenet of who we are as a democracy and as a country that has believed that people's well-being depends on their freedom to organize, on their ability to be part of unions and on their ability as working people to fight for a decent wage, to fight for proper health and safety and to fight for that dignity that we would all hope for in any country around the world.

However, we recognize that these rights are not respected in Panama the way we respect them in Canada.

Another major issue is the status of labour rights in Panama and the complete failure of this trade agreement to ensure that these rights are not denied to Panamanian workers as they have been in the past.

When Teresa Healy of the Canadian Labour Congress spoke to the parliamentary committee regarding the agreement on labour co-operation, she testified that while the International Labour Organization's core labour standards are invoked, Bill C-46 is still weaker than it should be. As well, she pointed out the current Panamanian government has increasingly been harsh on labour unions and workers, especially in recent years.

It was noted, for example, that over the last few years a number of measures have come into play that have exacerbated the wealth inequalities in a country like Panama. While recording relatively high growth rates, it is the second most unequal society in the region. Forty per cent of the population is poor; 27% is extremely poor; and the rate of extreme poverty is particularly acute in indigenous populations. The country has endured extensive structural adjustment, liberalization and privatization which has not translated into economic benefits for the population.

In response to the international perception that Panamanian labour laws were rigid and a disincentive to foreign investment, President Martinelli announced unilateral changes to the labour law in the summer of 2010. The law ended environmental impact studies on projects deemed to be of social interest. It banned mandatory dues collections from workers. It allowed employers to fire striking

workers and replace them with strikebreakers. It criminalized street blockades and it protected police from prosecution.

These are the kinds of measures that we are in fact not just approving of by continuing to approach this trade agreement as a positive sign and looking to side agreements as though they were going to put a stop to such an agenda put forward in Panama. Canadians would not want to think, would not want to know that we are complicit in encouraging what is fundamentally an attack on people's right to organize and people's right to speak out and fight for a decent living.

The severity of this attack on labour rights seen in Panama has been met with strikes and demonstrations. The police have been exceedingly harsh in their response and that was just this past summer. At least six people were killed; protestors were seriously injured and many were blinded by tear gas and police violence. Some 300 trade union leaders were detained before the president withdrew the labour provisions and called for a national dialogue of moderate trade union leaders and business leaders.

We are pointing out that a side agreement on labour co-operation, as it is termed, is in no way sufficient and certainly does not make a strong statement by Canada that such action is unconscionable.

The NDP is saying trade agreements must respect the tenets of fairness, but also must respect the values that we hold dear as Canadians, whether it be in terms of labour rights, transparency or on the environment. Canadians would demand nothing less.

• (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the province of Manitoba alone employs over 1,000 people in the potato industry and processing.

Given that the Manitoba NDP government's website makes reference to Panama as consumers of our processed potatoes which provides thousands of jobs, would the member agree it would be in Manitoba's best interest to see freer trade?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from my province and I welcome him into the House.

My role as a member of Parliament in the federal scene is recognizing and speaking to the values that many Manitobans hold dear, which is of free but also fair trade, something that we are not seeing as a result of this agreement. We know that Canada engages in trade with many countries around the world, including Panama. However, what we are talking about here is a deeper, certainly more developed agreement. It is an agreement that goes against the basic rights that we as Canadians would demand not just in our country, but would like to see respected in any country around the world.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Churchill ably pointed out that members of the Canadian Labour Congress appeared before committee and talked about the fact that this agreement simply did not cut it.

The member for Burnaby—New Westminster proposed some amendments and one of them would have been to protect trade union workers in Panama by offering the right to collective bargaining, as well as requiring the Minister of International Trade to consult on a regular basis with representatives of the congress.

Statements by Members

I wonder if the member could comment on why that amendment was defeated at committee.

• (1400)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know the right to collective bargaining has existed for many years. That we would deny that right to other countries we are hoping to enter into a relationship with is not the way to move forward. It is not the way Canadians would like to see us play a leadership role. Free trade must be fair trade and these rights must be respected.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt at this time. The hon. member for Churchill will have two minutes remaining in questions and comments when the House returns to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

INTERNET

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Internet is integral to the daily lives of all Canadians. We rely on the Internet in ways we could not have imagined even 10 years ago.

In my riding of Kitchener—Waterloo, the Internet is the lifeblood of creativity and innovation that puts us on the cutting edge of the knowledge economy. Our research institutions are world leaders in discovery. Our entrepreneurs are breaking new ground in high tech industries and using the Internet to increase productivity and fuel growth.

That is why I am pleased that our government has rejected the usage-based billing decision that would limit consumer choice and stifle competition. Our government is committed to forward-looking policies that recognize the critical importance of the Internet, and anticipate new developments and applications.

An open Internet, like an open mind, will broaden our horizons and create opportunities for all Canadians now and into the future.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 26, David Kato, a gay human rights activist, was brutally murdered in Uganda.

At his funeral, a statement from U.S. President Barack Obama was read in which he described Mr. Kato as “a powerful advocate for fairness and freedom”.

The police in Uganda have tried to say that Mr. Kato's murder was a botched robbery even before an investigation has been completed. It is a final insult to the memory of David Kato and thousands like him.

From newspapers publishing the names of gay Ugandans on their front pages to institutionalized discrimination by the Ugandan government, the lives of gays and lesbians in that country are at risk every day. It is inconceivable that in this day and age gays and

lesbians must endure daily threats of violence, discrimination, and suffer the loss of their lives simply because of who they are.

All of us must stand up and ensure that our voices are heard as we demand that the government of Uganda and institutions within that country cease their vicious and intolerable assaults upon gay and lesbian citizens who deserve to live their lives in freedom and safety.

* * *

[Translation]

STÉFANE BOUGIE

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, I am pleased to congratulate Stéfane Bougie, an animal carver from Salaberry-de-Valleyfield known locally and internationally.

He won the 2010 Reynald Piché award, which recognizes the outstanding work of artists in the region in their respective fields of expression.

Since he completed his first works, Mr. Bougie has won prestigious awards at major international competitions and has been recognized three times by the best in his discipline.

His works are held in various public and private collections in eight different countries. His art can also be seen closer to home at the Musée régional de Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

I am extremely proud to acknowledge Stéfane Bougie's extraordinarily creative work. I encourage him to continue pursuing his artistic expression and I especially want to thank him for his contribution to promoting the cultural wealth of our region.

Congratulations, Mr. Bougie.

* * *

[English]

VOLUNTEER SERVICE MEDAL

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Lance Corporal Joyce Robertson.

This coming Friday, February 11, Mrs. Robertson will be presented with the Canadian volunteer service medal. As we know, the Canadian volunteer service medal was created to honour those citizens who gave of their time and in many cases their lives for Canada during World War II.

Mrs. Robertson was one of the original individuals who, many years ago in 1943, posed for the Canadian volunteer medal. To this day her image still appears on the far right of the medal. Now, at 85 years of age, Joyce Robertson herself will receive the volunteer service medal in a ceremony at the Stoney Creek Legion which is located in my riding of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek.

I take great personal pride in being able to stand in this House to offer, on behalf of the constituents of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and all Canadians, our thanks to Mrs. Robertson for her service to Canada.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, forecasters predict Canada's economy will continue to grow in 2011. Our government's focus on a low tax plan is creating jobs and providing a stable investment climate. According to Statistics Canada, over 460,000 jobs have been created since July 2009, the strongest job growth in the G7.

In our recovery, we continue to play a key role in international trade and are opening new markets for agricultural products such as cattle and grain. Canadians continue to benefit from low interest rates and low taxes, while the government remains on track to balancing its budget by 2015.

However, opposition coalition members, given the opportunity, would implement a high tax agenda that would jeopardize the financial security of hard-working Canadian families.

While our economy remains fragile, I stand proudly among the hard-working members of this side of the House, knowing that the responsible measures taken by our government has Canadians looking toward a brighter future.

* * *

SALVATION ARMY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the appointment of a Canadian woman to the head of a renowned international organization.

Linda Bond, who is from my constituency of Cape Breton—Canso, was named the new world leader of the Salvation Army. She is the fourth Canadian and only the third woman to hold this top post in the charitable and religious organization.

Ms. Bond is a coal miner's daughter from Glace Bay. She is the last of 13 children born to Charlie and Winnie Bond. She followed an older sister into the Salvation Army and has never looked back.

Ms. Bond has served in many capacities throughout her career all around the globe. For the past two and a half years, she has led the church's work in the eastern Australian territory. When she assumes leadership in April, Ms. Bond will become the head of one million Salvation Army members from 123 countries along with 100,000 employees.

On behalf of the constituents of Cape Breton—Canso and all Canadians I offer congratulations and best wishes to Linda Bond as she embarks on this very important journey.

* * *

VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour a great Canadian, Douglas A. Lock. He is a man with 37 years of reserve and active duty with the Canadian army, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2000.

Furthermore, Douglas has volunteered his time with the Canadian Fallen Firefighters Foundation. This registered charity honours firefighters who have died in the line of duty and supports their

families. Douglas has been a volunteer treasurer for this charity and has dedicated the past five years of his life to achieving its goals.

I find it inspiring to meet with people like Douglas Lock, who embody the spirit of dedication and service. We thank him for all he has done for his community and his country.

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[*Translation*]**FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION**

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, February 6 is the International Day Against Female Genital Mutilation. Every year, more than 3 million young girls are at risk of being subjected to genital mutilation, and some 500,000 of those girls live in Europe.

Women are being repressed and discriminated against in this way on the grounds of tradition and cultural symbolism. Mutilations are done in great secrecy in the worst sanitary conditions and are completely illegal. Knives, razor blades and even scissors are used for the various barbaric operations. No anesthetic is used. It is a highly traumatic experience for these young girls and unfortunately, many of them do not survive.

Let us not consider this day to be just a reminder of the fact that these inhumane practices exist; let us eradicate these practices for good. It is unacceptable in 2011 for such indignities to the female body to continue to occur.

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[*English*]**CURLING**

Ms. Candice Hooppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on January 26, Altona, Manitoba played host to the 2011 Manitoba Scotties Tournament of Hearts. The event was held at the Millennium Centre, Altona's state-of-the-art recreational facility.

All week curling fans were treated to top-notch play by the 64 athletes as the crowds filled the stands to cheer on and support their teams. The well-attended tournament surpassed the expectations of organizers, but was easily managed thanks to the overwhelming support of 300 volunteers and the tireless work of co-chairs Wendy Friesen and Al Friesen.

The tournament was lauded a massive success by athletes and patrons alike who noted the first-class facilities and the warm hospitality of Altona's 3,700 local residents.

Over 1,000 people attended Sunday's finale, which saw Team Cathy Overton-Clapham emerge as tournament champions.

Congratulations and best of luck to the ladies as they represent Manitoba at the 2011 National Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

[Translation]

ERNIE REGEHR

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on January 21, I had the honour and privilege of attending the ceremony in which His Excellency the Governor General of Canada presented the Pearson Peace Medal to Ernie Regehr.

Originally from Waterloo, Ontario, Mr. Regehr is a prominent figure and respected the world over for his voice on disarmament and arms control in general, human security and peace.

Canadian and foreign governments as well as the United Nations regularly rely upon his expertise, judgment and balanced views on these issues.

On behalf of all members of this House, I wish to offer our warmest congratulations on receiving this medal and our sincere thanks to an exceptional man who has dedicated his career to the national and international dialogue on disarmament and peace.

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[English]

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation. Canada condemns this horrendous practice which violates the fundamental rights of women and girls, endangering their health and lives.

Status of Women Canada funds projects that support communities working to end culturally based violence against women and girls. In Canada's citizenship guide our message is clear: Canada's openness and generosity as a country does not extend to barbaric cultural practices such as female genital mutilation or other gender-based violence. Anyone who performs or participates in an act of genital mutilation may be charged with aggravated assault.

Let us all commit today to eradicating female genital mutilation in Canada and throughout the world.

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DERELICT VESSELS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, derelict vessels are a danger to our coastal communities whether they provide a safety hazard or the risk of environmental contamination.

Derelict vessels range from small pedal boats that slip free and become a hazard to navigation to large ships that may pose a risk to the environment from stored fuel on board.

Our current laws are a mish-mash of responsibility and do not obligate the ministers of transport and the environment, or DFO, to take action unless there is an imminent danger. That means it can take years to have a vessel removed.

The Islands Trust is campaigning to strengthen the laws on abandoned and derelict vessels. It worked with the Union of B.C. Municipalities to get a resolution passed at the UBCM September convention that read in part:

—petition the provincial and federal governments to develop a coordinated approach to the timely and adequate removal of all types of derelict and abandoned vessels, barges and docks in all situations—

I applaud the Islands Trust for its work on this issue and commit to working with it to finding a solution.

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[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priorities consist of the economy and job creation for Canadians.

According to Statistics Canada, Canada has created more than 460,000 jobs since July 2009—the strongest job growth in the G7—and the economy has grown for five straight quarters.

The continued growth of employment in Canada once again shows that our economic action plan and tax reduction program are yielding positive results for Canadian families.

These are positive signs, but too many Canadians are still looking for employment and the global economic recovery remains very fragile.

An increasing number of Canadians are now realizing how dangerous the Liberal Party leader's economic agenda is. According to *Times & Transcript*, the Liberal Party is still stuck in its 1960s management mode. The Liberal Party leader and the welfare state approach—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour.

* * *

●(1415)

MEMBER FOR BEAUCE AND BILL 101

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Beauce will stop at nothing to draw attention and score political points. On Friday he said that Quebecers “don't need Bill 101 to protect the French language.” He was back at it again yesterday, saying that the legislation restricts “people's rights and freedom of choice”.

One would have to be completely out of touch with the reality of thousands of Quebecers, not to mention the history of Quebec, to say such things. We are still seeing more and more attacks on the prominence of French. If the Lévesque government, with Camille Laurin leading the charge, had not had the courage to protect our linguistic heritage, the use, teaching and influence of our language would have suffered even greater degradation than it has. And the fight is not over.

Whether the member for Beauce likes it or not, there is a consensus in Quebec that Bill 101 must be maintained.

*Oral Questions***THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT**

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during all of the tours we have made throughout Quebec over the past year, we have heard the same message over and over: Quebeckers are fed up—or as we say in Quebec, “pucapab”—with the Conservatives' incompetence and closed-mindedness.

We have had enough of their intimidation of women, public servants, journalists and artists. Enough of the waste of public funds on megaprisons and fake lakes. Enough of a Prime Minister who will not listen to anyone, anytime, anywhere. Enough of a Prime Minister who tramples on the values and priorities of Quebeckers. Enough of a backwards ideology that will set us back 50 years.

The Conservatives have put a big x on Quebec, and Quebeckers are fed up.

I invite all members and individuals, regardless of their party colours, to join the heartfelt cry of Quebeckers on the “pucapab” Facebook page.

What are we? We are “pucapab”!

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[English]

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF IMMIGRATION

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today our government, represented by the hon. Minister of National Defence, was proud to officially open Canada's new museum of immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax.

Until now, Canada has not had a national museum dedicated to recognizing the women, men and children from all over the world who chose Canada as their home.

The new museum is located at the historic Pier 21 site on the Halifax waterfront where today one in five Canadians can trace their lineage. Pier 21 is the second national museum outside our nation's capital.

No country in the world has benefited more than Canada from free and open immigration. As the Prime Minister said in Halifax at Pier 21 last June:

In every region...new Canadians make major contributions to our culture, economy and way of life....Anybody who makes the decision to live, work and build a life in our country represents the very best...

This museum is for them. Congratulations.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's negotiations with the United States will have a direct bearing on Canadian sovereignty and the privacy of Canadian citizens. That is obvious already. He talks to Americans, but so far not Canadians.

Therefore, we need to ask this. What is the Prime Minister prepared to bargain away? For example, with respect to the admissibility of visitors, immigrants and refugees, will Canada apply its own standards, which many Canadians believe are better than American standards, or will a Republican/Tea Party Congress make the rules?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was an excellent Friday. The Prime Minister and the President were able to sign a joint declaration in which we both acknowledged our countries' sovereignty. We engaged to be able to work together for both our economic prosperity, job creation and at the same time ensure that we would be capable of putting in place the tools that would thwart any challenges from terrorism.

Quite honestly, I know it hurts the Liberal opposition when there is agreement between—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wascana.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, still no answer. If we have a common entry and common exit system, does it not follow that Canada no longer has sovereign Canadian control over immigration and refugees? Canadians need to know what is at risk.

On the question of privacy, what additional personal information will Canadians be required to disclose and what are the guarantees against cases of abuse like Maher Arar?

Before surrendering Canadian borders, sovereignty and privacy, will the government bring full details of any proposed agreement before Parliament for debate and approval?

● (1420)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have indicated that the declaration signed by both the Prime Minister and the President is an excellent starting point for co-operation between both our governments.

We are looking forward, in the weeks and months ahead, to be able to turn the corner and go forward and to ensure that we protect the jobs we have, that we continue to increase our trade, our growth and, indeed, as I mentioned before, protect our borders.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, still no answer. The government's lack of candour breeds suspicion.

Could the Prime Minister at least guarantee minimum gains for Canada? For example, will he get rid of U.S. country of origin labelling? Will there be no more buy American policies? Will we get hassle free access for durum, beef, pork and softwood? Will passport requirements be removed? Will Canada be exempt from the patriot act? What are the guarantees?

Again I ask, will Parliament have the final say before any perimeter deal gets locked in?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are all reminded of the very poor record the previous government had in terms of its relations with the American government.

Oral Questions

I understand it hurts that the Prime Minister and the President of the United States get along and want to work together.

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[Translation]

QUEBEC LANGUAGE POLICY

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the passage of time and enactment of laws, Quebec has struck a balance between individual rights and the duty to preserve its linguistic and cultural identity. Over the years, it has found a way to achieve linguistic peace, as well as to protect and promote the French language. Today, the member for Beauce is attacking all of this. As usual, the Prime Minister is letting him.

Basically, the Prime Minister is attacking our language laws for the obvious purpose of dividing Canadians, because he is unable to stop himself.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false. Language issues are a provincial jurisdiction. If there is one government that respects provincial jurisdictions, it is the Conservative government.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is worse is that he is saying it with a straight face.

In 1996, the Prime Minister told us that Quebec's language policy violated human rights. In 2002, he called it into question again and told us that Quebec's language policy prevented francophones from being bilingual. Today, his heir apparent, the member for Beauce, is completely out of line and the Prime Minister refuses to rein him in.

Is it because the Prime Minister did not understand what the member said, or because he is really in complete agreement with him?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of keeping a straight face, it the hon. member's statements that are laughable. The member was speaking about constitutional peace. We have that peace thanks to the leadership of the Prime Minister and this Conservative government.

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HARMONIZATION OF SALES TAXES

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a letter about the harmonization of the GST that was published in the newspapers, the Quebec finance minister, Raymond Bachand, said that the difference between the GST and the QST amounts to less than 1% of the GST tax base, which is well below the 5% authorized by the federal government. So, clearly, this is not the reason for the breakdown in negotiations.

Can the minister therefore explain why the Conservative government is stubbornly refusing to give Quebec \$2.2 billion in compensation?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been clear from the start: Quebec will be treated the same as the other provinces. We began negotiations in good faith. These negotiations are well under way. The ball is now in Quebec's court. We would like to repeat once again that we are negotiating with the Government of Quebec, not the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the finance minister now has had to write to the newspapers because they cannot be spoken to.

Minister Bachand's letter goes on to say, "Work is sufficiently advanced to reach an agreement now in this regard." In short, according to the Quebec finance minister, the federal government could compensate Quebec in the next budget.

What is the Conservative government waiting for? Why does it not settle this long-standing dispute?

• (1425)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear. It is not complicated. If the same agreement is reached with Quebec as was reached with the other provinces, the issue will be resolved right away. The ball is now in Quebec's court.

We have always said that we are negotiating in good faith within the existing parameters, which have always been clearly set out. Once again, negotiations are well under way. We are negotiating with the Government of Quebec, not the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's finance minister deplores the injustice committed by the Conservative government against Quebecers. I will cite another excerpt: "Quebec has set a good example. And what does it get in return? The same treatment from your government as those provinces that, 20 years later, have done nothing to harmonize their sales tax." Quebec harmonized its sales tax before Ontario, before British Columbia, before New Brunswick, before Newfoundland and Labrador, before Nova Scotia; all these provinces have been compensated, but not Quebec.

What does the government want to do? Why is it picking on Quebec in this way? When will the Conservatives settle this matter?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, negotiations between the governments of Quebec and Canada are going well. Over two months ago, the Government of Quebec promised to provide us with a technical document on sales tax harmonization, but it has not yet done so. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec; however, at this point, the puck is in Quebec's zone.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister is throwing more pucks on the ice every week. The reality is that Quebec and Ottawa are not that far apart. The political will must be found to resolve this matter in time for the March budget. By refusing to give to Quebec what it has given Ontario and the other provinces, this Minister of Finance has lost all credibility.

Will the Prime Minister intervene, as he is being asked to do by Quebec's finance minister? Quebec is waiting for what it is owed. It is now Quebec's turn. Will the Conservatives understand that?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the negotiations are between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec. As I said, we wish to continue the discussions between the two parties. I have had some good discussions with the Quebec finance minister directly. However, the Quebec government must provide the technical document.

Oral Questions

[English]

GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at the qualifications required to be appointed vice-chair of the CRTC: extensive knowledge of the legislative framework and mandate of CRTC; an understanding of the relevant global, societal, economic trends, stakeholder concerns, the government's policy agenda and how it relates to the CRTC; knowledge of the regulatory environment for broadcasting and telecommunications industries; knowledge of broad issues related to media convergence.

How does Mr. Pentefountas fit any of these criteria?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Pentefountas will bring a credible, outside, qualified, bilingual voice to the CRTC.

I hear NDP members laughing. It is funny. NDP members go out to the public and say that we need to raise the calibre and quality of debate in the House of Commons and what do they do? They name people in the House of Commons, smear their reputations and attack them personally. They have never met him.

The member for Vancouver East has never met Tom Pentefountas. She does not know him. She does not know anything about him. She gets up in the House of Commons and tries to attack him personally. He is a qualified person who will do a great job at the CRTC. We are proud to make this appointment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there was a very clear vetting process for choosing the vice-chair of broadcast for the CRTC and Mr. Pentefountas failed on every count. If we look at the standards, he does not meet the qualifications. He does not have the quasi-judicial experience. He does not have the senior level management background with experience in broadcast and cultural policy. What he does have is a calling card that he is a good friend of the director of communications for the Prime Minister, Dimitri Soudas. This appointment stinks.

Would the minister explain why the government has broken the rules and politically tainted the quasi-judicial standing of the CRTC with this partisan appointment?

• (1430)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP members smear Gwyn Morgan, attack Nigel Wright and attack Tom Pentefountas. These are outstanding people who will do a great job in the civil service. We need to draw good people into public life.

The member says that Tom Pentefountas does not have experience. Another way of saying that is that he has no conflicts of interest and is not wedded to any of the stakeholders who come before the CRTC who are dealing with important issues of convergence and copyright, and issues of digital transition. He does not have any of those conflicts of interest. He is a qualified, effective, bilingual, thoughtful person who will do a great job at the CRTC.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the contempt for due process is so obvious it is wafting off the benches.

The government has intervened and undermined again and again in the CRTC, but in the case of Pentefountas, it not only broke the vetting process, it did it with the direct intervention of the PMO. Now we have the political strings of the Prime Minister directly at the senior level of the CRTC.

Tom Pentefountas is not qualified for this post. He has no independent credible standing to oversee a body that deals with a \$60 billion industry.

Why has the government undermined the CRTC and not followed the fair process in place to ensure an adequate candidate with a regulatory background?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay talks about undermining the CRTC. Last week, the member asked this government to interfere in two different CRTC decisions. He talks about the importance of the independence of the CRTC but he is asking this government to get more involved in the CRTC's daily affairs than ever before.

Tom Pentefountas will do an outstanding job.

When the member talks about credibility and representation, that is the member of Parliament who, in 2004, 2006 and 2008, ran telling his constituents that he would vote to abolish the long gun registry. He turned his back on his constituents and he dares get up in the House and actually attack other people's credibility? He has no legs to stand on. He has no credibility.

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HUMAN RESOURCES

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the human resources minister has told millions of working mothers like me that using child care services is a mistake and that daycare is an abdication of parenting. The minister lives in an era of *Father Knows Best*. The reality is that Canadian mothers know they must balance work and home life, not choose one over the other.

Why do the Conservatives not stop insulting mothers and give families a real choice: a child care policy that actually works for working mothers?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have done exactly that. We are the party that has offered choice to parents in terms of child care. We are the ones who say that if mothers want their children to go into institutional day care, that is great. If mom and dad want to stay home and raise their children, that is great, too. If granny or grandpa is available to help out, or a neighbour, that is great. However, that choice is a personal choice that should be made by the parents, not by the government. We believe the parents are the best ones to make the choice for their children.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just because the government's child care payment has not solved the child care crisis does not mean it should attack working mothers. Over 70% of mothers with a child under two work full time. It is their choice to use child care or not, but the minister and the government are saying that the only choice is to stay home, that if parents choose child care they are somehow bad parents.

When will the Conservatives realize that it is 2011, not 1911, and give Canadian mothers a real choice and a real plan for early learning and child care?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I just mentioned, we brought in the universal child care benefit of \$100 a month for each child under the age of six so that parents could choose what best met their needs to raise their children. We will support whatever choice they make, unlike the Liberals who propose a universal day care system that will help only some.

Let us hear what some Liberals have said about it:

The last (Liberal) agreement saw some provinces rake in millions without creating one day-care space.... The Liberal plan is a cash cow for government while families are cash poor.

Who said that? It was said by the former deputy prime minister, Sheila Copps.

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[*Translation*]

CAREGIVERS

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the past year, one out of four Canadians has had to step into the role of caregiver for a loved one.

Nightmares like cancer, Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis can affect anyone, at any age. The Health Charities Coalition of Canada is calling on the Conservatives to improve support for caregivers.

Did the Conservatives get the message?

• (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do want to help families that are dealing with chronic and challenging illnesses that take a lot of support and attention. That is exactly why we expanded and made it easier for people to take compassionate care leave, to help their families and help friends cope with these difficult challenges.

Our party made it possible for the first time for those who are self-employed to access EI benefits for sickness and compassionate care.

We are the ones who are trying to help Canadians.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the minister who suggested that Canadians use their vacation leave to care for loved ones at home.

Cancer, diabetes, ALS, MS, Parkinson's disease, all Canadians are vulnerable to these terrible illnesses and their loved ones caring for them deserve our support.

What do the Conservatives have to say to the two million Canadian families caring for loved ones who are terribly ill? Are they going to say that the \$6 billion corporate tax cut for the richest corporations each and every year is more important? Is that what they are telling those Canadians?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has taken action to help families who are taking care of loved ones who are going through very challenging diseases and very challenging times.

We brought in and expanded the eligibility for compassionate care leave. As well, we have made it possible for the first time in Canadian history for those who are self-employed to take advantage of those EI benefits when they need to look after a loved one, whether that be a family member or someone close to them who wants that individual to look after him or her.

When it comes to the cost, it is a shame that the member opposite cannot remember that she actually voted for those funds she is talking about.

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[*Translation*]

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois believes that a security perimeter would be desirable to facilitate the movement of goods and people. However, we need to find a balance between security, trade and fundamental freedoms. These issues are much too important to be talked about behind closed doors.

Will the Conservative government show some transparency, reveal the mandate of the Canadian negotiators and commit to holding a debate and a vote on this issue in the House?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, the Prime Minister and the President of the United States made a joint statement.

First and foremost, I want to assure the Bloc that this side of the House defends the interests of Canada and Canadians, even though the Bloc has no interest in that.

We must protect the sovereignty of our country and also move forward by developing new ways to increase trade, create jobs and protect our borders.

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the Conservative government is negotiating a secret security perimeter with our American neighbours that would facilitate the movement of goods and people, it is cutting services at border crossings in the Eastern Townships and the Montérégie area. Some border crossings have even been closed down. That makes no sense.

When will this government listen to reason and abandon its plan that jeopardizes public safety and the economic development of our regions?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question. We are obviously concerned about border crossings. We have listened to the agency that has provided us with various recommendations in terms of not only how to properly use taxpayer money but also to keep goods and services flowing efficiently across the border.

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*[Translation]***NUCLEAR SAFETY**

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois has indicated its opposition to shipping radioactive waste on the St. Lawrence River. Completely ignoring the environmental risks, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission has given Ontario's Bruce Power the go ahead to ship radioactive waste on the St. Lawrence. The government has shown that it can reverse the commission's decisions when it wants to, as we saw with Chalk River.

So, will the government use its discretion this time to cancel the permit that was given to Bruce Power?

• (1440)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission is an independent body that is responsible for ensuring safety in the nuclear sector. I have no doubt that the commission carefully considered and assessed Bruce Power's ability to carry out the shipment of generators while taking measures to protect the environment, the health and safety of Canadians, as well as our international obligations as a country.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the shipment of radioactive waste on the St. Lawrence will endanger one of the world's largest freshwater resources as well as millions of shoreline residents.

Does the government not believe that the provinces that have opted for nuclear energy should also manage the waste and keep it in their own province?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that the Bloc Québécois would resort to scare tactics. This is not about nuclear waste, but rather nuclear generators. I have no doubt that the commission's decision was based on protecting the health and safety of Canadians at all times, as well as protecting the environment.

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*[English]***INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION**

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the churches and now Canadian teachers have lost their seed of funding. We have also learned that Barrick Gold, Canada's largest and wealthiest gold corporation with a market capitalization of \$47 billion, will be the happy beneficiary of a half-million dollar CIDA corporate social responsibility program in Peru.

Why are Canadian taxpayers paying for Barrick's corporate, social and environmental responsibilities while Canadian teachers helping kids are abandoned?

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we understand that agency officials expressed concern with CTF regarding a lack of focus, lack of sustainability and lack of budgetary information. CTF is more than welcome to address these issues and to apply for funding under the new call for proposals.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after 50 years, what are they going to do, correct spelling mistakes?

The Conservatives are taking foreign aid away from the poorest of the poor and giving it to the wealthiest of the wealthy. However, it only gets worse. CIDA is not only funding a corporate social responsibility for Canadian companies but also healthy foreign companies such as Rio Tinto in Ghana.

Why does the government not let corporations clean up their own social and environmental messes, give the money back to the teachers and the churches, and start funding programs that actually help the poorest of the poor?

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are two sides to every story.

Our government is bringing real accountability to development funding in order to ensure that taxpayer dollars bring real results. CIDA staff have been working with the Canadian Teachers' Federation for the last six months to help it adapt its program to the funding criteria. We do not write blank cheques.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for decades, the world has looked to Canada for moral leadership on issues of munitions control and disarmament. While other countries stockpile weapons of mass destruction, Canadian leaders, like Prime Minister Trudeau, Prime Minister Chrétien and Prime Minister Pearson, led the charge against them.

Today, however, we learn that the government has reversed this trend and fired Earl Turcotte, one of Canada's leading arms experts, simply because Washington did not like him defending Canadian interests so vigorously.

How can the government justify firing a renowned Canadian official who was simply trying to defend Canada's long-standing human rights interests and reputation?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely ludicrous. It is not true.

*Oral Questions***AFGHANISTAN**

We believe on this side of the House that cluster munitions pose a grave threat to humanity and to civilians, which indeed is a serious obstacle, obviously, to sustainable development.

On this side of the House, I will state very clearly that, no, we are not throwing anybody out of government. The ambassador to Geneva will be the person who will indeed represent Canada's interest at these negotiations and discussions.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if it is not true, then why is Mr. Turcotte no longer leading the negotiations?

In 1971 Prime Minister Trudeau spoke out against nuclear weapons at the height of the Cold War. That was leadership. In 1997, Prime Minister Chrétien led the charge to ratify the Ottawa treaty to ban dangerous landmines. That was leadership.

In 2011, the Conservative government fired Mr. Turcotte for working to ban cluster munitions after the Americans complained he was doing too good a job.

Is this leadership? It is laughable.

Why are the Conservatives always prepared to sacrifice our national interests in favour of U.S. interests?

• (1445)

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government was very active in the negotiations on the Convention of Cluster Munitions, and was pleased to be among the first countries in the world to sign the convention in the month of December.

I want to reassure the member that it is our ambassador in Geneva who will indeed be leading these discussions.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government introduced legislation to amend the Aeronautics Act to ensure that Canadians can continue to travel over U.S. airspace.

Similar amendments were brought in under the previous Liberal government. Yet now the Liberals and their coalition partners are threatening to kill Bill C-42.

Could the minister remind the House why this straightforward technical amendment is needed?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that hon. members, like me, have many constituents whose travel plans could be negatively impacted without this bill.

Bill C-42 introduces a straightforward technical amendment, without which flights leaving Canada would no longer be able to travel over American airspace.

For our part, we have worked closely with the Americans to ensure this is implemented in a way that recognizes our security interests and the privacy concerns of Canadians.

Now it is up to the Liberal-led coalition to stop playing politics and support this needed bill.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, documents obtained by New Democrats reveal that the Conservative government has spent more than \$41 million hiring private security firms in Afghanistan. We have learned that some of these contractors are connected to notorious Afghan warlords.

These warlords have engaged in murder, kidnapping and bribery. They even run their own militia. So much for promoting democracy and the rule of law.

My question is, when will the government finally get these warlords off Canada's payroll?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada employs security firms to protect Canadian staff as well as our facilities in Afghanistan.

Canada adheres to the Montreux Document, and the document clearly establishes the standards through which private security is used.

We signed this International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers and this declaration in the month of November last year.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has no guidelines for hiring private security firms. Even NATO has complained that some of our contracts are enriching power brokers, undercutting counter-insurgency efforts and delegitimizing the Afghan government.

Our troops have put their lives on the line to fight lawlessness, yet the government promotes lawlessness by paying money into this corrupt system.

How can the government justify paying racketeers who are undermining the very security of Afghanistan?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, we employ these companies to protect our personnel as well as our facilities. I will remind my hon. colleague that all firms contracted by the government are subject to Afghan law. As I mentioned a couple of moments ago—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Lawrence Cannon: I know they are laughing, Mr. Speaker. They always do that when we deal with Afghanistan. They always do that when we talk about protecting Canadian assets abroad: people, assets, and the projects we are doing. That is their way. That is not our way.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Friday evening, surreptitiously and practically shamefully, the government announced that another friend of Dimitri Soudas has been appointed to the CRTC, even though this criminal lawyer has no experience in regulations or broadcasting. This appointment is especially worrisome considering that this weekend, the Conservative member for Beauce announced that the government will soon be bringing forward a bill to deregulate telecommunications.

Will the minister acknowledge that, with Tom Pentefountas's appointment, the government is trying to take control of the CRTC in order to impose its deregulation ideology?

● (1450)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that accusation is completely false and as I just said in response to the NDP member's question, Mr. Pentefountas is qualified. As vice-president of the CRTC, he will do a very good job for Quebec and for Canada.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, his greatest asset in telecommunications is knowing the Conservative Party's telephone number by heart.

Now that the government's strong-arm tactics in favour of Globalive have failed, the Conservatives are trying to take control of the CRTC in order to impose their deregulation ideology and give foreign businesses a stranglehold on our telecommunications industry.

Will the government admit that appointing the friends of the Conservative regime is its new strategy to take control of the CRTC?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false.

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[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, settlement agencies help newcomers prepare for jobs, care for their families and integrate into Canadian society.

Agencies from across the country are having their budgets slashed by \$53 million. While immigration levels remain high, federal funding is being drastically cut.

Why can the government find \$50 million for self-promoting billboards but will not promote the wellbeing of newcomers, helping them learn the languages, earn a living, pay taxes and build this country?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member asked the question because it gives me an opportunity to underscore the fact that our government has more than tripled support for settlement and integration services over the levels supported by the Liberal government.

This year we will be investing some \$600 million in settlement support for newcomers. When the member for Wascana was the finance minister, it was \$109 million.

Shame on the Liberals for their longstanding neglect of newcomers to Canada.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, shame on the minister for taking credit for work that the Liberal government did.

This minister takes credit for funding that was the result of agreements established by the Liberal government. The truth is that the minute this minister got a chance to cut settlement funding, he cut the most vulnerable, those who want language training and a greater understanding of Canadian values.

This is not a reallocation. It is not a celebration. It is an abdication. Why is the minister turning his back on newcomers to Canada?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it goes from the sublime to the ridiculous over there.

That member chose, bizarrely, to run for a political party that, when in government, imposed a \$1,000 head tax on all new permanent residents to Canada. The previous Liberal government froze settlement funding for 13 years. It drove up the backlog on immigration from a couple hundred thousand files to nearly a million. It did nothing on foreign credential recognition, a record of shame and neglect.

The government cut the right of landing fee in half, tripled settlement funding, has massively reduced the backlog and is taking real action on credential recognition. When it comes to newcomers, this government is taking action.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the price of prescription drugs is increasing by an average of 10% a year.

The free trade agreement with the European Union would increase the cost of prescriptions by several billion dollars. In Quebec, the price would increase by over \$700 million. In Ontario, it would be over \$1 billion. Yet one out of four Canadians does not have a drug insurance plan.

Why do the Conservatives want to sign an agreement that will increase these prices?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member does not have her facts straight.

In fact, the Canada-European Union free trade agreement stands to be of great benefit to Canadian consumers, with growth in our economy of some \$12 billion a year. In terms of the issue in question, the pharmaceutical issue, this is actually one of many issues still to be negotiated. There is no agreement on it yet.

We can say with sound assurance that this government will only enter an agreement that is in Canada's best interest.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can hardly expect that, considering the Conservative government could not be more out of touch with the needs of Canadians. The Conservative-European free trade deal could cause drug prices to rise by more than \$2.5 billion a year. It is a clear failure of leadership on the part of the Conservatives.

New Democrats have repeatedly proposed a realistic pharmacare strategy that would actually save Canadians billions of dollars a year.

When will the current government stop protecting the interests of big pharma and start working with first nations, provinces and territories to come up with an affordable drug strategy?

• (1455)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this member could not be much more out of touch, because the fact is that what she is laying on the table is not agreed to. Those are not the terms. They may have been what she read in the headlines somewhere, but if she were to get on top of the facts, she would learn there is no such agreement.

What we are working on with the European Union is an agreement that would result in jobs and economic prosperity for Canadians from coast to coast. We will deal with all of the issues that come to the table, many of which remain to be negotiated, but we will deal with them firmly and in Canada's best interests to deliver the best possible returns for the Canadian economy and Canadian jobs.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has been delivering for the forestry sector in the province of B.C., with recent support for Cariboo Pulp and Paper in Quesnel, Northwood Pulp Mill in Prince George and Domtar's pulp mill in Kamloops.

We are ensuring that the Canadian economy and resource jobs are there for our resource communities. We are here for B.C. and we are here for Canada.

Would the Minister of Natural Resources tell the House what the government is doing for resource communities in the rest of Canada?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's priority is the economy, and we provide support to Quebeckers in all regions of Quebec. That is why, since 2008, we have provided assistance to over 652 forestry companies in Quebec. Take, for example, Domtar and Tembec, in Windsor and Matane, respectively, where over 500 jobs were consolidated. The Conservative government is always working to

provide assistance to all sectors of the economy and to people in all regions of Quebec.

* * *

KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the previous Liberal government, the knowledge economy was the pride of Quebec. The downhill slide that began under the Conservative government is becoming more pronounced and cuts to research and development are becoming increasingly severe. Last week, Pfizer announced the closure of its research and development centre in Saint-Laurent. That means 150 very real, high-calibre jobs are going to be eliminated. The Conservatives are getting worked up about non-existent jobs related to the F-35s but they are letting real jobs be eliminated.

Is this further proof that Quebec's future does not matter to them?

[*English*]

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our sympathies are with those who are affected by Pfizer's decision. Of course, it was a worldwide decision, affecting many different plants and companies.

I can assure the hon. member that we are still focused on jobs and job creation. We have seen that in the province of Quebec. My colleague, the House leader, informs me that 46% of Quebec companies are intending to hire in the next three months. That is good news for Quebeckers and, of course, good news for Canadians as well.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Department of National Defence chose to establish its new Joint Meteorological Centre in Gagetown. This is the second significant investment for which Bagotville has been overlooked in the past 14 months. These two missed opportunities are even more painful because the Conservatives have still not kept their promise to station 650 new members of the expeditionary squadron in Bagotville.

Can the two Conservative ministers from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean explain why they are unable to stick up for their region?

Oral Questions

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Joint Meteorological Centre at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown will have no impact, none, on CFB Bagotville. In fact the weather service being produced at this particular base involves no personnel.

With modern technology, it has now been determined that we will have centralized Canadian Forces weather services at the Joint Meteorological Centre at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown. And with respect to Bagotville, we have 400 new Canadian Forces and personnel.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite an ongoing 40-year partnership between the Canadian Teachers' Federation and CIDA, the minister rejected CTF's recent application to help train teachers and develop curriculum abroad because of "an unspecified technicality". This, after 18 months of working with CIDA on the proposal.

Why will the current government not support Canadian teachers who want to share their skills and help countries in the developing world?

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ultimately, we all want the same thing. I know the opposition is attempting to turn this into a purely partisan attack but I certainly give Canadians much more credit than that.

We want to ensure that our aid is efficient, effective and accountable. We want to ensure that the money we put into programs is getting to those who need it the most. We want to ensure that our aid is going to real people on the ground where it can truly make a difference.

* * *

• (1500)

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the principle of free speech is one of the cornerstones of our democracy. As we know, last month there were attempts to prevent the movie *Iranium*, which is critical of Iran's human rights record, from being shown here in Canada. Our government made it clear that we will not bend to threats of violence, especially when they come from the Iranian embassy.

I had the privilege of being present last night when the film played to a sold out crowd at Library and Archives Canada.

Would the Minister of Canadian Heritage please tell the House why he ordered Library and Archives Canada to screen the film?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the showing and the screening of the documentary *Iranium* was an important statement by this House of Commons.

I believe Library and Archives Canada made a horrible mistake in cancelling the original screening of that film under threats of violence and under threats and protests from the Iranian embassy.

Our government made a clear statement and a clear decision that the Iranian embassy will not dictate to Canadians anywhere in this country what film they will or will not see. Canadians have a right to watch any movie and to take in any kind of cultural event they want without fear, without any threat of violence and without any intimidation from the Iranian embassy.

* * *

PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, original research and development in the pharmaceutical sector can be worth its weight in gold when our sharpest minds break new ground, as they have done time and time again.

This reality seems to be lost on the Conservatives and they continue to implement drastic cuts to R and D subsidies. As a result, Pfizer announced that it was shutting down its R and D facilities in Saint-Laurent. That is 150 high end real jobs lost, not fabricated ones around jet fighters.

When will the Conservatives stop the bleeding of our top end Quebec pharmaceutical sector?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is not quite accurate in her assessment of things.

It is this government, under the economic action plan, that added an extra \$10 billion to the R and D budget of the Government of Canada, working with the private sector, the public universities and the pharmaceutical companies engaged in R and D.

That is our record and we are proud of it. We believe it creates jobs and opportunities for Canada and Canadians, including those residing in Quebec.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Jean Dorion (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently, the European Union and Switzerland have frozen Ben Ali's assets. Yet, the federal government has still not frozen the assets of Ben Ali's family members. Let us not forget that Canada signed the United Nations convention against corruption and must act accordingly.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us whether he plans to follow the example of the European Union and Switzerland and freeze the Ben Ali family's assets, which were stolen from the people of Tunisia?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned last week, we are working closely with Tunisian authorities to determine the most appropriate way to achieve the intended objective. I would like to say, once again, that it is reasonable to believe that we will be able to find a solution rather quickly.

Routine Proceedings

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Mary Polak, Minister of Children and Family Development and Minister Responsible for Child Care of British Columbia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1505)

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security in relation to Bill C-5, An Act to amend the International Transfer of Offenders Act.

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

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in relation to requesting an extension of 30 sitting days to consider Bill C-467, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (children born abroad).

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 97.1(3)(a), a motion to concur in the report is deemed moved, the question deemed put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Wednesday, February 9, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

FINANCE

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled "Question of Privilege - Production of Documents".

* * *

BILL C-474

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I believe if you sought it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practices of the House, during the debate tomorrow on Bill C-474, An Act respecting the Seeds Regulations (analysis of potential harm), no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair and that, at the conclusion of the debate or when no further member rises to speak, all questions necessary to dispose of the report stage of the bill be deemed put and recorded divisions be deemed requested.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Vancouver East have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. member: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions.

The first petition is from Canadians in my riding of Davenport and around Toronto who are concerned about Canadians who have multiple sclerosis who are being denied the right to be tested and treated for CCSVI.

The petitions are calling upon the Minister of Health for Canada and for the province to evaluate the treatment proposed in persons diagnosed with MS.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I also have a petition from people across the country pertaining to the regulations around the health, welfare, and humane treatment of animals.

The petitioners are calling for the Government of Canada to sign and support a universal declaration on animal welfare. We should all be doing everything within our powers to prevent animal cruelty and reduce animal suffering.

CANADA POST

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, finally, I have a petition from Canadians who are concerned about the closure of the Canada Post offices in rural communities.

The petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada and Canada Post to consult with elected representatives, postal unions and other major stakeholders, including provincial rural communities that are affected by these closures.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to submit two petitions signed by members of my constituency of Leeds—Grenville and from surrounding ridings.

The petitioners request that federal and provincial health ministers meet to discuss allowing testing and treatment for CCSVI in all Canadians who desire testing and treatment, and to plan and implement a nationwide clinical trial.

I would also like to commend Amy Preston, a constituent of mine, who has worked so hard to bring attention to this important issue.

● (1510)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House today.

Routine Proceedings

The first petition has been signed by a number of Canadians of all ages and walks of life who genuinely support and value the contributions of our veterans. They regard a veteran as a veteran regardless of where or in which deployment he or she may have served.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to extend the mandate of veterans hospitals to include veterans who have served in conflicts and peacekeeping operations since 1953, end the clawback of veterans' pensions; eliminate the reduction of veterans' pensions at age 65, change the widow's benefit to a non-taxable benefit, create a veterans advisory panel to provide input on the selection of future veterans' ombudspersons, and ensure that Veterans Affairs Canada remains as a stand-alone department.

STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from a group of Canadians concerned that Status of Women Canada is not enshrined in Canadian law and could be disbanded at any time and that the mandate of Status of Women Canada has been significantly altered in the past five years and is no longer addressing systemic women's equality issues.

The petitioners call upon the Parliament of Canada to support Bill C-581 because it would enshrine Status of Women Canada in law and ensure that its mandate would advance women's equality in Canada in the spirit of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill-Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to table petitions seeking justice and closure for the Henderson family. The petition was spearheaded by Bonnie Clark-Douglas and signed by Canadians from New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec.

In November 1981, a 17-year-old boy named Paul "Poncho" Henderson was found dead in Miramichi, New Brunswick. The petitioners call upon the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada for an independent, far-reaching and transparent judicial public inquiry into the murder of Paul "Poncho" Henderson and the actions of all law enforcement personnel involved in the initial investigation of Paul's death with, among other things, a mandate to begin the process of having the murderer of Paul "Poncho" Henderson reclassified as an open and active murder investigation, and ultimately bring the individuals responsible for his murder to justice.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my petition has been signed by dozens of Canadians who are calling for an end to Canada's military involvement in Afghanistan.

In May 2008, Parliament passed a resolution to withdraw the Canadian Forces by July 2011. The Prime Minister, with agreement from the Liberal Party, broke his oft-repeated promise to honour the parliamentary motion and, furthermore, refuses to put it to a parliamentary vote in the House.

Committing 1,000 soldiers to a training mission still presents a danger to our troops and an unnecessary expense when our country

is faced with a \$56 billion deficit. The military mission has cost Canadians more than \$18 billion so far, money that could have been used to improve health care and seniors' pensions right here in Canada.

Polls show that a clear majority of Canadians do not want Canada's military presence to continue after the scheduled removal date of July 2011. Therefore, the petitioners call upon the Prime Minister to honour the will of Parliament and bring the troops home now.

[*Translation*]

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I wish to present a petition signed by 237 people in my riding. They are asking the Government of Canada to provide the public funds needed by the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its low-income housing renovation plan and to cover the accumulated maintenance deficit.

The federal government obviously has an important responsibility to fulfill in maintaining and making major renovations to these buildings. These people want to make this clear to the government. I am therefore presenting this petition.

[*English*]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present yet another petition regarding chronic cerebral spinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI, multiple sclerosis.

I have presented the latest statistics: 12,500 liberation procedures worldwide in 50 countries; 80% to 97% of MS patients showing one or more venous problems; and one-third of patients showing significant short-term improvement and one-third showing some improvement with liberation.

We absolutely need evidence-based medicine in Canada. That means we must collect the evidence through clinical trials and/or a registry. The petitioners are therefore requesting clinical trials here in Canada with diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.

● (1515)

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by many Canadians. This petition requests that the House inform the Canadian public of the number of civilian casualties inflicted by Canadian troops in Afghanistan, that the House report the number of the military casualties of the Canadian public and that the House keep the Canadian public informed of the cost of the war to Canadian taxpayers.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition in the House once again that deals with EI pilot projects and the impending doom of them.

In June of this year, 2011, these pilot projects are set to expire. They were extended from last September and October. I would like to bring to the attention of the House just how important these projects are, one being the best 14 weeks option, which allows people to use their best 14 weeks instead of their last 14 weeks to qualify for their claims. This is very good for the employers as much as it is for the employees.

I present this petition on behalf of many constituents, as well as people outside of my riding in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, those affected by higher rates of unemployment.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Speaker: The Chair has received notice of a question of privilege from the hon. member for Kings—Hants. I will hear the hon. member now.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege in relation to the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

In our system of responsible government, the government must seek Parliament's authority to spend public funds. Parliament, in turn, has an obligation, a responsibility to hold the government to account and to scrutinize the government's books.

[*Translation*]

Recently, this government impeded the work of the Standing Committee on Finance by hindering its attempts to better understand the federal government's budget projections.

[*English*]

As you know, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 108 empowers committees to send for persons, papers and records. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, describes Parliament's right to order the production of documents as a right that is "as old as Parliament itself".

On November 17, 2010, the Standing Committee on Finance passed a motion ordering the Government of Canada to provide the commitment with five-year projections of total corporate profits before taxes and effective corporate tax rates from the 2010-11 fiscal year until the 2014-15 fiscal year, inclusive.

The November 17 motion also ordered the government to provide the committee with certain financial information pertaining to justice Bills C-4, C-5, C-16, C-17, C-21, C-22, C-23A, C-23B, C-39, C-48, C-50, C-51, C-52, S-2, S-6, S-7, S-9 and S-10.

Among other things, the motion specifically requested:

Privilege

detailed cost accounting, analysis and projections, including assumptions, for each of the bills and Acts, conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board Guide to Costing.

The motion established a deadline of seven calendar days, which ended on November 24, 2010.

On November 24, the Department of Finance replied to the committee with the following. I will read the department's response in its entirety. It stated:

Projections of corporate profits before taxes and effective corporate income tax rates are a Cabinet confidence. As such, we are not in a position to provide these series to the Committee.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

The government provided no further information to the committee before the deadline.

[*English*]

On December 1, 2010, one full week after the deadline, the committee received a letter from the Department of Justice regarding projected costs of the justice bills. Again, I will read the department's response in its entirety. It stated:

The issue of whether there are any costs associated with the implementation of any of the Government's Justice bills is a matter of Cabinet confidence and, as such, the Government is not in a position to provide such information or documents.

On December 7, 2010, after the government had refused to provide the information ordered by the committee by the established deadline, I provided the committee with written notice for a motion by which, if passed, the committee would draw the attention of the House to what appeared to be a breach of its privileges.

On December 10, 2010, perhaps in response to the written notice I had written on December 7, the committee received an additional response from the Department of Finance.

In its response, the department stated:

To the best of its knowledge, the Department of Finance has determined that "series" or projections of corporate profits before taxes or the effective corporate income tax rates have never been previously disclosed. These projections are from a comprehensive economic and fiscal projection that constitutes a Cabinet confidence. As a result, the Department of Finance has not been in a position to provide these "series" to the Committee.

This response appeared somewhat dubious. For, if any member of the House or if any Canadian wishes to Google the phrase "corporate profits before taxes" and restrict their search to the domain of the Department of Finance's website, he or she would get exactly two results: the HTML and PDF versions of "The Economic and Fiscal Update" from November 2005, in which they would find, on page 83, that the previous Liberal government had actually published projections of corporate profits before taxes from 2005 until 2010.

At this time, I would like to seek unanimous consent to table page 83 of "The Economic and Fiscal Update" from November 2005.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Kings—Hants have the unanimous consent of the House to table this document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Privilege

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I believe Canadians will have to rely on technology to find that information by Googling corporate profits before taxes and simply restricting that search to Finance Canada.

Not only have these projections been previously disclosed, they were disclosed by the Department of Finance itself under the previous Liberal government in November 2005.

The Standing Committee on Finance has an unambiguous and unlimited right to access the information it has ordered from the government.

As pointed out in the Speaker's ruling of April 27, 2010:

—procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents, even those related to national security.

In that ruling it was also noted that at page 281 of Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, fourth edition, it states:

But it must be remembered that under all circumstances it is for the house to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient. The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent, when it cannot be at once laid before the houses.

O'Brien and Bosc, at page 83, refers to a list of types of contempt of Parliament. Included in that list is:

without reasonable excuse, refusing to answer a question or provide information or produce papers formally required by the House or a committee;

In its replies to the committee, the government has said that it cannot provide the information the committee has ordered because of cabinet confidence. On what grounds is this information covered by cabinet confidence? On this matter, the government has been completely silent. No cogent reason or reasonable excuse has been provided. Instead, the committee has been left guessing.

What we do know is that in 2005, the previous Liberal government recognized that the projections of corporate profits before taxes were not covered by cabinet confidence. Such projections are not considered a cabinet confidence when, as is the case with Finance Canada's revenue model, these projections are used by the department in a manner that is not exclusively related to cabinet operations.

Therefore, what has changed between 2005 and today? On what grounds is the government claiming that these projections are now a cabinet confidence where before they were not?

With respect to the costs of the justice bills, we know that due diligence would have required that cabinet consider the cost implications of each of these bills before making a decision to proceed with each bill. Particularly today with a record \$56 billion deficit, we would hope the government would carry on this type of due diligence.

We know that under normal practice, an analysis of the cost implications of each justice bill would have been included with a memorandum to cabinet prepared for each bill.

Section 69 of the Access to Information Act tells us that such analysis and background information is not a cabinet confidence if

the cabinet decision to which the analysis relates has been made public.

Furthermore, in the Ethyl case, the Federal Court has been clear. This analysis and background information can be severed from a protected document and disclosed.

Legislation goes to cabinet for a decision before it is introduced to Parliament. The very act of introducing government legislation in Parliament is a public declaration of cabinet's decision to support that legislation. Therefore, the cost estimates for the justice legislation are no longer a matter of cabinet confidence.

Page 137 of O'Brien and Bosc states from a report of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections in 1991:

It is well-established that Parliament has the right to order any and all documents to be laid before it which it believes are necessary for its information.

...The power to call for persons, papers and records is absolute, but it is seldom exercised without consideration of the public interest.

● (1525)

The previous government recognized that it was in the public interest to publish projections of corporate profits before taxes. How would bringing these projections under cabinet confidence serve the public interest? The fact is that the public interest is not served by this change in the government's application of cabinet confidence.

In his testimony before the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates on February 1, 2011, the Parliamentary Budget Officer offered recent examples of where the public interest was served by the government's publishing details on additional planned resources for government programs and spending restraints before Parliament was asked to provide the financial authorities.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer went on to note:

This raises the question as to why the application of cabinet confidence with respect to restraint measures appears to have changed in a relatively short period of time.

Withholding the requested information from the committee clearly does not serve the public interest. In fact, withholding this information impedes Parliament's ability to fulfill its duty, responsibility to scrutinize the estimates, and to hold the government to account.

With that in mind, the government's claim that the requested information cannot be provided to the committee is without merit. Furthermore, the government's refusal to provide the information constitutes a breach of the House's privilege.

The government's refusal to provide a reasonable excuse as to why this information should be withheld also constitutes a contempt of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to close by quoting from your April 27, 2010 ruling on the question of privilege surrounding the provision of information to the Special Committee on the Canadian Mission in Afghanistan. You said:

In a system of responsible government, the fundamental right of the House of Commons to hold the government to account for its actions is an indisputable privilege and in fact an obligation.

In this case the House of Commons' efforts to hold the government to account have been unduly frustrated by the government itself.

I am therefore prepared to move an appropriate motion if, Mr. Speaker, you find a *prima facie* question of contempt.

• (1530)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would merely point out that the question of privilege that the member brings forward is with respect to the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Finance which was tabled in this House less than 30 minutes ago.

Therefore, our government has not had a chance to examine that report. Neither have you, Mr. Speaker, had a chance to examine that report.

I would humbly and respectfully submit that we should have that opportunity before making a more comprehensive response to the member's intervention of just a few moments ago.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask, with your permission, that you grant us some time. I would submit that we will get back as quickly as possible, to this House and to you, with a very comprehensive response to this intervention in order for you to have an opportunity to examine all the comments and make a subsequent ruling.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his intervention and the hon. member for Kings—Hants for his considered question of privilege.

I certainly will give the hon. parliamentary secretary some time to prepare. I, myself, have not seen the report, as he mentioned, so I am not in a position to comment on that matter at this stage. So, yes, there will be some time for further interventions from other members who wish to do so on this question.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA-PANAMA FREE TRADE ACT

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of Bill C-46, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, as reported without amendments from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-46, which would implement the free trade agreement negotiated between Canada and the Republic of Panama. First of all, I want to say that even though the Bloc Québécois is generally in favour of free trade, it will oppose Bill C-46 and, more specifically, the agreement with Panama.

I will start by providing a brief history of free trade and explain why a number of countries have signed agreements to freely

exchange goods, without there being any customs duties or excessive restrictions on these goods.

The oldest major free trade agreement is the GATT, which was signed in 1947. If I recall correctly, that stands for the Global Agreement—

Mr. Daniel Paillé: The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: That is it. I had forgotten what the letter *g* stood for.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: That *g* is spot-on.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: I thank the member for Hochelaga for that very important clarification.

This agreement allowed access to the markets and resources of various countries, which constituted a major step in terms of both human and economic progress.

In the past, many countries waged wars because they wanted to access a resource found in a neighbouring country or because one country was looking for new markets to sell goods. Every empire was built on this desire to have as many places as possible to sell their goods and to accumulate wealth. By opening up trade and accessing our neighbours' resources, without having to invade them or declare war, we probably avoided wars and improved international relations. Over time, these agreements became increasingly important economically.

For an exporting country like Quebec, which essentially produces manufactured goods for export, free trade is attractive because it facilitates access to markets and helps make us more competitive. These agreements enable us to sell our companies' goods, our own creations, to foreign countries, to create jobs in Quebec and to bring in good revenue.

What is more, consumers gain access to these products. In the case of Quebec, imported products often, but not always, have less value added and cost less than usual.

Every country has its strengths and weaknesses. In theory, the underlying principle of free trade is to draw on the strengths of each country to benefit all the partners.

If everything is done properly and Quebec definitely benefits, then the Bloc Québécois will support an agreement. However, let us not get carried away by ideology and say we are for or against free trade no matter what they are trying to sell us. The situation needs to be analyzed and assessed. Obviously, that did not happen in the case of the Panama agreement. In fact, officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and from the Department of Industry admitted when they appeared before committee that they did not conduct any studies to determine whether these agreements would be beneficial to our economy. The government is blindly entering this agreement with the attitude that, because we are all in favour of free trade, we will always support agreements of this kind. The Bloc is not prepared to go down that road.

Government Orders

● (1535)

They want so badly to sign a host of bilateral free trade agreements at any cost that they are prepared to consider any and all markets. The government is considering concluding an agreement with China, when we have a \$26 billion trade deficit with that country. The Chinese sell us goods worth \$26 billion more than what we sell to them. Before considering freer trade with countries like China, we should start by looking at how we could restore trade balance with them.

The Bloc Québécois proposes taking a multilateral approach, in other words, negotiating trade agreements at the international level, or at least with larger blocks of countries. That would help establish a better balance between the economic advantages that each country hopes to draw from the agreement and all the social, human and environmental considerations, which often are not included in these very specific bilateral agreements.

With regard to Panama in particular, we are concerned about the issue of workers' rights. The government of Panama has moved even farther to the right and has passed legislation that many consider to be extremely anti-union, since it will make it illegal for workers to demonstrate, protest or lobby to improve their salary conditions.

Another concern we have about this free trade agreement is the issue of tax havens. Panama is on France's blacklist and the OECD's grey list of tax havens. At least in theory, we do not want companies to be able to do business in Panama, not because of economic opportunities but because of laughably low taxes and the banking system's lack of transparency. We are worried that companies will take advantage of this to avoid paying taxes that they should legitimately be paying to Canada. In addition, if we sign a free trade agreement, we will make it even easier for people who want to use these tax havens. That is a big concern for us.

The Bloc Québécois has long been fighting to put an end to tax havens like Bermuda, Barbados, Panama and many others.

I kept a close eye on the whole saga of Barbados and the shipping company former Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin operated there. He even voted for retroactive legislation that allowed him to repatriate profits to Canada tax-free. This was money he had laundered through Barbados. We criticized it then and we have ever since. And apparently it still does not bother the Liberal Party very much to sign a free trade agreement with a tax haven.

There is another reason to fight against tax havens. Yes, we need to recover the billions of dollars theoretically owed to our governments, but we also need to keep criminals from hiding their money in these tax havens. Even if they are caught, once they get out of prison, they can recover the money because we have no way of intervening and checking what money is flowing in and out of these countries.

For all these reasons, the Bloc Québécois cannot support the bill that is before us today. We invite the Liberals, in particular, to rethink the advisability of supporting the government and instead vote against this bill in order to send the government back to the drawing board and have it negotiate multilateral agreements that are good for Quebec, Canada and all working people.

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. According to American statistics, Panama has 350,000 foreign companies registered. They are registered in large part because of the tax haven status. That is one of the reasons why a good number of American Congress members refuse to ratify a similar agreement with the United States and Panama.

Until the American government gets tough with Panama and forces it to start co-operating and shuts down the money laundering facilities and the tax haven activities of Panama, this is going to continue.

We are rewarding bad behaviour by simply promoting and passing this legislation. The Americans are holding it up. They are refusing to act.

Last year France was tough and put heavy taxes on companies doing business with Panama. Panama came to the table immediately and signed a double taxation agreement with France as a result of that pressure. It is about time the Canadian government gets tough and quits rolling over to countries like Panama.

● (1545)

[Translation]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, indeed, the Canadian government's attitude is especially appalling considering that many other countries are concerned and are trying to take action to put some pressure on Panama. Yet this government not only still wants to sign the agreement, but wants to move even faster. It appears to be proud of the fact that it is moving faster than the Americans and other countries, saying that we are going to sign and ratify this deal with Panama before anyone else. However, all of the signs and signals from other countries should instead be emphasizing the need for caution. The government should instead be thinking that, if all the other countries that are negotiating with Panama are concerned about the human rights situation, and more importantly, about tax havens, perhaps we should also join in and demand greater transparency from a tax haven like Panama.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague on his excellent speech, which was an excellent summary of the Bloc Québécois's position regarding this free trade agreement with Panama, which, as he was saying, is a tax haven.

In response to questions at the Standing Committee on International Trade, government officials clearly stated that companies that do business in Panama will be able to bring profits back to Canada tax-free. We could not even get an answer from the Canada Revenue Agency regarding the amount or the value of the tax evasion this will bring about. I find that absolutely appalling.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague if he thinks it is right that such an agreement, even with the supposed fiscal arrangements, should exist and that the middle class will ultimately pay for the tax leakage that Canada will suffer.

Government Orders

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr: Mr. Speaker, this clearly shows what happens when parliamentarians or parties adopt an ideological approach, as we have seen on both sides of the House. There are those who always support free trade and are willing to sign anything, and there are those who basically are always opposed.

With free trade or any other issue, the Bloc Québécois does not take this ideological approach. We are rigorous. We look at what is before us. Clearly, this agreement is not in Quebec's interests. I doubt that it is even in the interests of the workers in Panama. Therefore, we will not be supporting it.

I believe this is the right approach. The people watching at home today elected us to make these decisions and to take the time to study the issues. If we do not, we are not doing our job and carrying out the mandate entrusted to us by the people. The Bloc Québécois intends to continue carrying out a thorough study of every bill brought forward and will not just blindly follow and trust ideology. [English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are opposing the Canada-Panama free trade agreement, Bill C-46.

I am going to address a couple of issues. I want to talk about the labour aspect of this legislation and, if I get to it, fair trade and the tax haven.

Earlier, we heard one of the Liberal members talk about the fact that the Conservative government would have consulted and yet, I find that a surprising statement given the fact when Dr. Teresa Healy, the senior researcher for the Canadian Labour Congress, came before the committee, she clearly outlined some concerns around the labour aspects of the bill.

I will not read her testimony into the record, but she did say the Canada-Panama agreement does not include specific protection for the right to organize and right to strike. On labour issues, fines are small, there are no countervailing duties. There is no provision for abrogation or any other such remedy. Yet, again, labour provisions remain in a side agreement rather than in the body of the text.

She indicated a bit of the socio-economic status in Panama. She said 40% of the population is poor, 27% is extremely poor, and the rate of extreme poverty is particularly acute in indigenous populations.

She also pointed out the track record of the Panamanian government.

The president announced unilateral changes to labour law in the summer of 2010. The law ended environmental impact studies on projects deemed to be of social interest. It banned mandatory dues collections from workers. It allowed employers to fire striking workers and replace them with strikebreakers. It criminalized street blockades and protected police from prosecution.

This is hardly a country's labour record that we would want Canada to enter into an agreement with.

The member for Burnaby—New Westminster has been taking the lead on this particular piece of legislation for New Democrats and

has proposed amendments to attempt to change some of the more egregious aspects of this agreement.

One of the amendments he put forward was that the trade union workers in Panama be offered the right to collective bargaining as well as requiring the Minister of International Trade, as a principal representative of Canada on the joint Panama-Canada commission, consult on a regular basis with representatives of Canadian labour and trade unions. Sadly, that amendment was defeated at the committee.

I want to put this into context. In an article from October 2010 called "Back to the 'Good' Old Days", although it is talking about Asia, there makes some good points. It states:

"Child labour rampant in Asia, serfdom on the rise here".

I am going to quote extensively from the article because it is important when we see the erosion of labour rights in other countries it cannot help but raise concerns at home.

The article starts with a quote from John D. Rockefeller, from 1894. It states:

The disparity in income between the rich and the poor is merely the survival of the fittest. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.

Many of us do not believe that. We believe there are roles for government in terms of redistribution of income.

Quoting again from the article, it states:

During the first 70 years that followed this pronouncement by one of the 19th-century's leading robber barons, the worst excesses of unfettered free enterprise were curbed by government regulations, minimum wage increases, and the growth of the labour movement. Strong unions and relatively progressive governments combined to have wealth distributed less inequitably. Social safety nets were woven to help those in need.

Corporate owners, executives, and major shareholders resisted all these moderate reforms. Their operations had to be forcibly humanized. They always resented having even a small part of their profits diverted into wages and taxes, but until the mid-1970s and '80s they couldn't prevent it. Now they can.

Thanks to the international trade agreements and the global mobility of capital, they can overcome all political and labour constraints. They are free once more, as they were in the 1800s, to maximize profits and exploit workers, to control or coerce national governments, to re-establish the survival of the fittest as the social norm.

This global resurgence of corporate power threatens to wipe out a century of social progress. We are in danger of reverting to the kind of mass poverty and deprivation that marked the Victorian era. Indeed, this kind of corporate-imposed barbarism and inequality is already rampant in many developing countries.

From the statistics that that Dr. Healy quoted, when we have 27% of a country extremely poor and 40% of the population poor, we have to wonder why we would be entering into that kind of trade agreement.

● (1550)

The article went on to talk about how, unfortunately, most Canadians do not seem to know how badly their forebears were mistreated in the workplace of the 1800s. These are labour conditions in Canada, but Canadians often do not realize that in Canada we had some of the worst labour laws going. It talks about a number of things. It says:

Conditions in the mines were especially bad, with most of the miners dying from accidents or "black-lung" disease before they reached the age of 35.

Government Orders

Hundreds of thousands of children, some as young as six, were forced to work 12 hours a day, often being whipped or beaten. A Canadian Royal Commission on Child Labour in the late 1800s reported that “the employment of children is extensive and on the increase. Boys under 12 work all night in glass-works in Montreal. In the coal mines of Nova Scotia, it is common for 10-year-old boys to work a 60-hour week down in the pits”.

This Royal Commission found that not only were children fined for tardiness and breakages, but also that in many factories they were beaten with birch rods. Many thousands of them lost fingers, hands, even entire limbs, when caught in unguarded gears or pulleys. Many hundreds were killed. Their average life expectancy was 33.

As late as 1910 in Canada, more than 300,000 children under 12 were still being subjected to these brutal working conditions. It wasn't until the 1920s, in fact, that child labour in this country was completely stamped out.

In the 1920s in Canada we agreed that child labour was not a norm, finally, that we would agree to. Yet we are saying it is okay to sign trade agreements with other countries where child labour is in fact part of what happens in those countries.

The article went on:

In the United States, another robber baron, Frederick Townsend Martin, was even more candid. In an interview he gave to a visiting British journalist, he boasted: “We are the rich. We own this country. And we intend to keep it by throwing all the tremendous weight of our support, our influence, our money, our purchased politicians, our public-speaking demagogues, into the fight against any legislation, any political party or platform or campaign that threatens our vested interests.”

It is nice to hear that someone was on the record in an honest way about what that particular corporate agenda was.

A modern descendant of John D. Rockefeller, his great-grandson banker David Rockefeller, put it plainly in a speech he gave back in the 1990s: “We who run the transnational corporations are now in the driver's seat of the global economic engine. We are setting government policies instead of watching from the sidelines”.

The article also states:

Already, in most of the developing nations, they have brought back child labour. Conditions in most factories operated by or for the transnational corporations in Asia and parts of Latin America are not much better today than they were in North America and Europe in the 1800s. Thousands of boys and girls are being compelled to work 12 hours a day in dirty, unsafe workshops for 40 or 50 cents an hour.

The article gives a number of examples in some Latin American countries.

When we talk about entering free trade agreements I hear Liberal and Conservative members ask when would the New Democrats ever support a free trade agreement. We would support a free trade agreement when it is a fair trade agreement, when it looks at the working conditions, when it looks at who is being exploited in those countries, when it looks at the corporate agenda in terms of driving the wages down in those unsafe working conditions.

A very good reason for us to question whether or not we should be entering a free trade agreement is when we have a side agreement, as in this particular case, about labour. It is not even integrated into the agreement.

I now have only a brief moment to talk about fair trade.

My colleague from Hamilton East—Stoney Creek earlier talked about multilateral trade. Many of us believe that multilateral trade is a very important way to look at it. Also, when we talk about trade, it should include fair trade.

When we talk about fair trade it is about the fact that workers in the countries of origin have fair access to the profits of their labour. There are a number of principles around fair trade.

To wrap up, I would encourage all members in this House to vote down this agreement. There are better ways that Canada can gauge and demonstrate leadership with countries around trade.

● (1555)

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member certainly summed up the situation rather well.

The fact of the matter is that last year Canada's merchandise exports to Panama totalled only \$91 million. We can see there is trade going on between the countries right now. We do not need a free trade agreement to trade with countries, including Panama. In fact, it is happening.

It is interesting that 54 United States congresspersons have demanded that President Obama hold back on this agreement until Panama does something about its status as a tax haven, a major conduit for Mexican and Colombian drug traffickers and the money laundering activities that are going on there. There are 350,000 foreign corporations that are doing business in that country.

The question is, why are we pursuing this issue when the Americans are holding off?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member for Elmwood—Transcona raises a very good point. I did not touch on the tax haven aspect, which is one of the more outrageous aspects of this agreement. In fact, there was testimony before the committee by someone whose name I have forgotten, but he came before the committee and said this agreement is actually worse than what is already in place and what it will potentially do because of particular articles in the agreement which would not allow Canada to defend some of its interests. He stated:

But article 9.10 of the Canada-Panama trade act says that “[e]ach Party shall permit transfers relating to a covered investment to be made freely and without delay, into and out of its territory”. Moreover, both chapters 9 and 12 of the FTA have nondiscrimination clauses that protect Panama-registered investors. Article 12.06 states that Canada will always allow Canadians to purchase financial services from banks operating in Panama.

It is a money laundering operation. It is well-known that some of the drug cartels are dealing with Panama and yet we are going to sign an agreement that allows this money laundering operation. I am sure Canadians will not appreciate that.

● (1600)

Mr. Jim Maloway: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that France knew how to deal with Panama. Only 12 months ago Panama managed to get itself off of France's blacklist when France simply started levying a 50% tax on dividends, interest, royalties and service fees based in France paid to a beneficiary in any of several countries, including Panama. Guess what? Panama signed agreements with France.

Government Orders

I talked about the 54 United States congresspersons who are refusing to let President Obama sign the agreement. The powerful American government is still not able to get the kinds of results out of Panama that France did because France took direct action. By putting pressure on corporations, the corporations went to the French government and demanded that something be done to straighten out Panama's practices. Guess what? Something happened within three months.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the man I was quoting was Mr. Todd Tucker, a research director with Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch.

The member for Elmwood—Transcona again raises a number of good points. I want to read into the record how bad it actually is in Panama. Mr. Tucker stated:

Not only are these businesses not taxed, but they're subject to little to no reporting requirements or regulations.

According to the OECD, the Panamanian government has little to no legal authority to ascertain key information about these offshore corporations, such as their ownership. Panama's financial secrecy practices also make it a major site for money laundering from places throughout the world.

He went on to say in his testimony before the committee:

The Canada-Panama trade deal would worsen the tax haven problem. As the OECD has noted, having a trade agreement without first tackling Panama's financial secrecy practices could incentivize even more offshore tax dodging. But there's a reason to believe that the trade deal will not only increase tax haven abuses but will also make fighting them that much harder.

From around the world we are hearing about how bad this is and yet Canada is signing on to the deal. It makes no sense.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again speak about Bill C-46 because a government cannot possibly be unaware that it is impossible to serve such different interests at the same time; it does not make sense.

It is true that Panama has a developed economy. In fact, it has the most highly developed economy in Central America. One of the reasons why Panama's economy is so highly developed and open to the world is that, at a some point, a canal was built that serves as a route between the Americas. As a result, Panama is already accustomed to trade, travel and transit, and has been for a long time.

As a matter of fact, it is this familiarity with transit and trade, as well as the fact that many people pass back and forth through Panama but do not live there, that have made it into a tax haven. Such has been the case for a long time. We are becoming more and more aware of it; however, the members on the other side of the House do not seem to be responding to this situation.

It is said that Panama has moved from the blacklist to the grey list. Panama has signed agreements. In fact, it has signed several and has said that it would like to sign a tax treaty. We are saying that, if an international trade agreement is to be signed, a tax treaty, at minimum, should also be signed. This should not all be incorporated into the same agreement. There should be two separate agreements. But, there is always the power to negotiate.

If Panama receives \$91 million worth of Canadian products per year and sells \$41 million worth of its products to Canada per year, we find ourselves in a situation that, although may be marginal from

an economic perspective, is still significant. The Government of Canada therefore has the power to negotiate. It can say to the Panamanian government that it agrees and that it is prepared to facilitate trade; however, from a tax perspective, there are a certain number of irritants. I will come back to this.

We should also remind Panama that it wants to sign a trade agreement with us, that there is a tax agreement to sign, but that the International Labour Organization finds that Panama's treatment of its labour force is inappropriate. In other words, the Panamanian government is recognized by the International Labour Organization as a government that breaches even minimal labour standards. Here again, we have leverage and can say that before we sign a trade agreement, Panama will have to make significant progress in terms of its tax policy and its labour relations. And why not add the environment to boot? It seems, according to our information, that Panama is not necessarily the best country in the world when it comes to respecting environmental rights.

Even though we are in favour of opening up markets, let us not forget that Canada is part of NAFTA because of Quebec's massive support for the Progressive Conservative government that concluded this international trade agreement with the Americas. We agree with having open markets, but their strategy is all wrong. They should be taking advantage of this opportunity.

What is a tax haven? I said a couple of minutes ago that I would come back to taxation.

●(1605)

There are some terms that are used that people do not understand. A tax haven is four things.

First, a tax haven is a place that has no or nominal taxation. To have a tax rate of 15%, 18% or a little more than 20% on business profits, as we have in Canada, or 11% on SMEs, is perfectly fine. However, 0.5% or nothing at all is considered a nominal tax rate. There is a gap between the tax rates.

Second, a tax haven lacks transparency. When it comes to ethics, transparency and disclosure, if Canada wants to sign a tax agreement with Panama, then there at least needs to be transparency in the information we receive.

Third, there are laws or administrative practices that prevent the exchange of information. Getting any information, let alone transparent information, is quite something. Sometimes the government considers itself to be a tax haven when we ask it for some information, as we did in the Standing Committee on Finance to no avail. Our colleague from the Liberal Party was talking about this earlier. However, sometimes we receive piles of documents that are absolutely not transparent.

Fourth, there are indications that the country attracts investors solely for tax reasons and not for their economic activities. Earlier, our NDP colleagues told us just how many businesses just have a post office box in Panama.

The characteristics of a tax haven are a post office box, difficulty obtaining information, unclear information and non-existent taxation. Those are four relatively simple elements that define a tax haven.

Government Orders

We should be taking this opportunity to state that we want a tax treaty. But if we had a tax treaty with a country that has zero taxes, people would wonder what business we had forcing Panama into levying more than a 1% tax on business income. On the other hand, it would make no sense for Canada, by signing a tax treaty with Panama, to exempt Canadian companies doing business in Panama from paying taxes because they pay them in Panama. That is why we need to discuss tax treaties between Canada and Panama. That is why we are delving into this issue and saying that these agreements need to be reviewed.

What are the elements of Quebec sovereignty and independence? The first is the ability to have our own taxation. During question period, we prove that Quebec is not independent when the federal government gets involved in Quebec taxation. The second is the ability to make all of our own laws. During question period, we also prove that Quebec is being invaded by federal laws. The third element of sovereignty is the ability to sign our own treaties. If Quebec were sovereign, it would not sign this kind of agreement with Panama unless there were worthwhile taxation, labour rights and environmental agreements.

•(1610)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the member would like to comment on the curious position of the Liberal Party on this free trade debate.

We saw what those members did on Colombia when they changed leaders and changed critics. They changed their position. Now they seem to agree with the Panama agreement even though they have been told by the Americans that the American Congress refuses to pass a similar type of agreement with Panama because it is a country that launders drug money and, as the member pointed out, is a tax haven.

In his opinion, why would the Liberal caucus support this agreement when its friends, American Democrats, are opposed to a similar agreement?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, the NDP member has given me the opportunity to speak again about the inconsistencies of our Liberal Party colleagues. These members try to say that they can no longer stand the Conservative government, just like Quebeckers and Canadians. We think that Quebeckers can no longer put up with the Liberal Party's flip-flopping. Last year, they said that they were against the budget and that they would do everything they could to oppose it, but then suddenly, they changed their minds.

I have much more respect for the member for Pontiac, for example. He sat in the Quebec National Assembly as a minister in the government that brought in tax harmonization—that is a little friendly reminder—but at least he stands tall. As the NDP member said, we do not know where the Liberals stand. Unfortunately, they will pay the price come election time, because people will wonder which side they are on. When they keep jumping from right to left, no one knows where they are anymore.

•(1615)

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate the member for Hochelaga for so eloquently expressing our party's opinion.

He did not have time to address one issue, which is the Conservative government's apparent desire to associate with countries whose actions do not respect the values that have been adopted here, or at least in Quebec. I am thinking, for example, about the concerns we have regarding respect for workers' rights.

Last May, the Republic of Panama passed Law 30, which had a provision that would incriminate workers who dared to defend their rights. This was very similar to the position the Conservatives took regarding equality in the workplace for women when they prohibited unions from going to court to defend them, unless the unions want to risk being fined.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about whether the Canadian government has lost its way by wanting to associate with governments that would do such things.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is so competent and eloquent on this subject—as he has been throughout his career—that I almost feel like asking him to speak in my stead.

Law 30 no doubt makes such agreements unacceptable. What we fear with this kind of government is that it is rushing to get ahead of the Americans, the British and basically everyone else. It is thus sending a message to the entire world that Canada could become a haven for anyone who uses tax havens. This would be very harmful. It would be very bad for Canada's reputation, and perhaps that is why we lost our seat at the UN.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The next question is on Motion No. 2. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

[English]

The next question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

• (1620)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on Motion No. 4. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

[English]

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at the report stage of the bill.

Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The votes stand deferred until the end of government orders today.

[Translation]

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway, The G8 and G20 Summits; the hon. member for Richmond Hill, National Defence; the hon. member for Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Terra Nova National Park.

* * *

ENHANCED NEW VETERANS CHARTER ACT

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC) moved that Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this House on behalf of our veterans. They have defended our values throughout the world and deserve the support of the government to ensure that, when they face difficult times upon their return—I am thinking of our veterans in the modern era—they are given the appropriate assistance, especially if they are injured.

Today, we will continue studying the important Bill C-55, which is at second reading. Passage of this bill means a great deal to our veterans. The government has agreed to provide \$2 billion to come to the assistance of our veterans. I am thinking, among others, of the veterans in the modern era, those returning from Afghanistan with injuries. It is our responsibility to ensure that, should they have this misfortune, they at least do not have financial difficulties in future.

What are the statistics? We provide services to approximately 140,000 veterans. Of this number, 65,000 are veterans of World War II or the Korean War. The average age of the veterans of these wars is 87. We also provide services to approximately 67,000 veterans who served after the Korean War and whose average age is 57. These include modern-day veterans who are around 20, 25 or 30 years old and who are returning from Afghanistan.

Government Orders

As you may expect, these modern-day veterans have different needs than those who served in World War II or the Korean War, whose average age is 87, as I just mentioned. Why do they have different needs? They are young and, when they return wounded, their objective is to return to civilian life and to find a new job that fits their new reality—I am referring to any physical or psychological injuries they may have. The services we provide to them must therefore take into account this new reality that did not exist before.

What were our veterans receiving before? In the past, veterans received a disability pension, medical benefits, of course, to ensure that they could live independently, and long-term care, depending on their needs in this regard.

Today, our “new” veterans, our modern-day veterans, have completely different needs. In 2005, Parliament, in its wisdom, passed a new veterans charter. The vote was unanimous given the new needs. The reality of these individuals is different; they want to be rehabilitated, return to civilian life and continue to live a full life, and we provided a range of new services related to this new reality.

Despite the fact that this new charter was passed unanimously, we told our veterans and the associations representing them that the charter would be an evolving one. In fact, we have been listening and have now determined, based on the experiences of those who have come home wounded, that there are problems with the new charter that must be fixed.

Who did we listen to? We listened to the seven associations that represent them. I am referring to the Royal Canadian Legion, the Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association and other veterans' groups. We also listened to our veterans themselves and the ombudsman, who shared certain points of view with us. We also listened to parliamentarians who made comments on the changes that are needed. We also listened to our troops in Afghanistan. What is more, I went to Afghanistan where I had the opportunity to listen to what our soldiers had to say about the lump sum payment. I will elaborate on that in a few minutes.

• (1625)

We also listened to suggestions from representatives from standing committees and from the new veterans charter advisory group on changes to be made.

We said it was a living document. The government listened to what it was told and decided to make changes to this charter in order to meet the needs of today's soldiers and veterans.

What changes are we going to make to this new veterans charter? There are three changes, but they will bring in four other changes.

The first change involves income allocation. The basic purpose is to ensure that the veteran participates in a rehabilitation program in order to be able to return to civilian life, hold a new job taking any handicap into account, and continue to live a full life. A modern-day veteran returning from Afghanistan injured and participating in the rehabilitation program, will receive an allowance equivalent to 75% of his or her salary. However, a low-income earner receives roughly \$26,000, which is not enough. Adjustments had to be made because some of these veterans have families and young children.

This is what Bill C-55 would do. A corporal's salary will now serve as the base for the 75%, meaning that a veteran returning injured from Afghanistan will receive at least \$40,000 annually while participating in a rehabilitation program.

The second change concerns the permanent monthly allowance. We found that those coming home seriously injured and unable to return to work were not receiving enough financial help. Currently, soldiers returning home receive between \$536 and \$1,639 per month, based on the severity of their injuries. Those who cannot return to work because their injuries are too severe will receive an additional \$1,000 per month for the rest of their lives.

Soldiers who have been seriously injured and cannot return to work due to the severity of their injuries will receive a minimum of \$58,000 per year until the age of 65.

When the legislation was unanimously passed in 2005, the new veterans charter did not take veterans' previous injuries into account. That will be fixed: we will also take those injuries into consideration, which means that 3,500 people will now be receiving between \$536 and \$1,609 per month, and those amounts have now been indexed. Those 3,500 people will now benefit from this new measure.

I would now like to talk about the lump sum payment. For months a rumour was spreading that the government was giving nothing but a lump sum payment of \$276 to injured veterans coming home from Afghanistan. It was also said that they were not being taken care of afterwards. But that is not true. Our veterans receive the first two benefits I spoke about, in addition to a third, the lump sum payment.

According to critics, people were often not able to properly manage the \$276 that they received as compensation for their injuries. We checked, and 69% of veterans were satisfied, but 31% were not and would prefer to receive a different form of compensation.

We examined the 31% closely and found that they were often cases of people with mental health issues or people suffering from post-traumatic operational stress.

• (1630)

When I went to Afghanistan, I told our soldiers that I was prepared to change to be more flexible. One of our soldiers asked me to give them as much flexibility as possible. On the plane on the way home, I told myself that I would go further than I had planned to ensure that the needs of our modern-day veterans, who may come back from Afghanistan wounded, are met.

Government Orders

Under our bill, people will now have options with regard to the lump sum payment. If they prefer to receive the amount in cash, they can do so. If another veteran prefers to have the money as an allowance over a certain number of years, we can do that. If he or she wants to have it allocated over 5, 10, 20 or 25 years, it is possible. The veteran will receive an annual payment allocated over the desired number of years. The veteran can also choose to receive a combination of the two types of payments, receiving part of the amount in cash and part allocated over the desired number of years. These three changes in Bill C-55 will serve to better meet the needs of our modern-day veterans.

However, that is not all we did this year. As I mentioned, we have been listening to what our veterans have to say. We have made improvements to the system for those suffering from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. In the past, each case was examined individually and not everyone had the right to all services. We decided to change that, and now, anyone who is diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis will receive all the services that the department provides to veterans.

Another issue is agent orange. People wanted the eligibility period for the *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000 to be extended by a year. Just before Christmas, I went to Fredericton to confirm that our government is extending the period by one more year. In addition, widows, who were not previously eligible, are now completely eligible for this *ex gratia* payment of \$20,000. I cannot begin to express how happy these people were with our government's decision.

Another priority is to improve the quality and efficiency of the services we provide to our veterans. Among other things, we plan to reduce processing wait times by one-third by the end of March so that we provide services more effectively to our veterans.

We have also developed a new telephone system. Now, 80% of the veterans who call us receive an answer within two minutes.

We will also increase the number of case managers. Veterans returning from Afghanistan want to receive quick responses. We have added 20 case managers in the field, and in less than two weeks, our modern-day veterans can get answers about their rehabilitation plan.

We will also give departmental employees working on the front line more decision-making power, so that they can make quick decisions in providing services to our veterans. And this is just the beginning, since I am committed to paying close attention to the needs of our soldiers and our veterans, and to remaining in close contact with the associations that represent them.

This is a first step, here. My department is the only one to have received an additional \$2 billion that was not originally included in the budget so that we can meet the needs of our modern-day veterans and ensure that our programs are tailored to their reality.

We will continue to work with organizations and advisory groups. I also want to thank the parliamentarians in this House. Since there are talks of a possible election in the very near future, we must ensure that our veterans, including our modern-day veterans, do not end up paying the price. This bill must be passed before the budget is passed, so that any injured soldiers and all soldiers becoming

veterans have access to the services of the Department of Veterans Affairs and this government.

I thank hon. members for their support.

● (1635)

[English]

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member because I believe he has improved the picture a lot compared to the way it was before. Our caucus member, the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, has done a lot in lobbying for veterans with the minister, the government and just in general over the years.

I do have a concern. I liked pretty much everything I heard from the minister except for the fact that I am concerned about the lump sum issues. We have to be very careful. We are dealing with generally younger people who are under a lot of stress with a disability. I am uncertain that there is a role really for lump sum payments. I like the idea of increasing the payments for the lifetime of the individual. It really comes down to that.

However, I think the government will find itself in more trouble taking the route of lump sum payments. At the end of the day, when the resources and the money are gone, the problem will be revisiting the government. People will be saying that their needs are still there.

A predictable long-term series of payments is the way to proceed.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's comments.

It is important to look at the realities of life and why we took this decision. We have listened to the veterans. We have to realize that some of those modern veterans would prefer to have this lump sum payment in cash and others would prefer to spread it over a number of years. That would be possible now. If they want it spread over 20 years or 30 years, we can do what they would like.

What will that imply? It implies that those people, in discussions with their loved ones, their families, will need to determine what is in their best interests. This is what we will do by introducing choices. If we do not do that, then we are forgetting a number of veterans who would prefer to receive it in cash.

We are really headed in the right direction by offering them different avenues. It does not mean they will make the best decision. However, I do feel that, by discussing it with their loved ones, those veterans will decide what is best when it comes to taking care of their lives and their families.

● (1640)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think there is a general sense that the minister has listened to the concerns of veterans.

I want to bring up the issue of the lump sum payment. I think the member knows that The Royal Canadian Legion has a concern. It would like to see a larger disability award in line with what Australian vets receive and what disabled civilian workers receive.

Government Orders

I am grateful for the action taken on ALS. I want to point out that the U.S. took action in 2008 and in the spring of this year there was still a refusal to take action for this disease. However, Brian Dyck had the courage to come forward and be a hero. As a result of his actions, the government made this right and for that we are thankful.

I would like to bring forward another issue that he might not be aware of that deals with another neurological disease, namely multiple sclerosis. It is a devastating disease that affects between 55,000 and 75,000 Canadians. People living with MS are being treated differently in Canada than in the United States. In the U.S. it is perceived as a presumptive illness. Will the minister be taking action on this in the future?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's comments to the effect that different countries provide different amounts.

I would like to share some statistics about the United Kingdom. The most common lump sum payment in the United Kingdom is \$8,927, compared with \$28,532 in Canada. As well, in Canada, all veterans are eligible for the earnings loss benefit, whereas in the U.K., only the most severely disabled are eligible. Our system has some strengths in comparison to theirs. Of course, our system may also have some weaknesses, but even still, our system is good. It is well organized.

Again, it is important to remember that the lump sum payment is not the only benefit. There are three elements, including the earnings loss benefit. I will say it again: a person who participates in a rehabilitation program will receive at least \$40,000 a year. There is also an amount based on injuries. Like the former pension, this amount can vary from \$536 to \$1,609 per month. That is in addition to what I just spoke about. Then there is another \$1,000 per month for someone who cannot return to work.

Simply put, we have a rehabilitation program that pays a \$40,000 annual salary. A person who cannot return to work because his injuries are too severe will receive \$58,000, plus \$276,000 if the injury is very serious. Those three things go together. You cannot have one without the other two. They are all interrelated.

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I have to acknowledge that the minister has made a remarkable effort to try to correct a terrible situation for our soldiers.

It is not a situation anybody wanted. Under the circumstances we can say that one element of compensation for soldiers is missing, and that is a lump sum payment.

I would like the minister to elaborate on two things: the amount of the lump sum payment and medical support. With regard to the lump sum payment, the minister just mentioned that this applies specifically to people who have a serious injury who would also normally be eligible for an income of roughly \$58,000 a year. It is easy to see that the lump sum payment pales in comparison to the constant income these people could have, especially since most of them are young.

We would also like to hear these soldiers in parliamentary committee. I do not think the minister would have any objections to that at all.

The other element concerns medical support for people who have the illnesses described by the minister.

I would like the minister to elaborate on these two matters.

• (1645)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn: Mr. Speaker, I will say again a few words about the lump sum payment and I will remind the House that it is not the only thing we provide. We are providing three things at the same time.

Imagine being the young soldier returning from Afghanistan, who was proud to serve our country, who defended our values, who feels that what he did over there was useful and who, by misfortune, returns injured. He does not want to go home, do nothing and wait. He wants to return to civilian life and find something else to do that will accommodate his handicap. That is why we are making changes. We realized there were shortcomings, that we were not giving enough, that we were not doing enough. The reality of life lead us to that conclusion.

A person who is very seriously injured and can no longer return to work gets \$58,000 a year, and that covers both physical and physiological injuries—both. The same goes for the lump sum payment of \$276,000 that covers physiological and psychological injuries. People often talk about PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder. It is a reality.

The rehabilitation plan will ensure that a veteran who returns with these injuries will participate in this program in order to return to civilian life as soon as possible, with a new job. Our department itself will increase efforts to hire veterans so that our staff includes young people who understand this new reality, because it is their own. We are moving in that direction to better support our veterans.

[*English*]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act.

Before I begin, I must honour all our veterans, their families, the fallen, and those still serving. There is no commemoration, praise or tribute that can truly match the enormity of their service and sacrifice. I want them to know that serving them has been one of the greatest privileges of my life and that their stories of sacrifice, service and strength are being heard.

For example, I will not forget the words of a few gentlemen in Halifax who survived the fire on HMCS *Kootenay*, the worst peacetime accident in Canadian naval history. Survivors then had to fight to prove they were on the destroyer in order to get any help from Veterans Affairs Canada.

Government Orders

Their life experiences affect me and all Canadians deeply, and remind us that we owe them a debt of gratitude we can never repay. Instead of trying to repay our obligation, we let them down on so many issues. For example, too many injured veterans go without the care they need. Too many veterans do not receive the support they have earned. Too many veterans have nowhere safe to sleep at night. It is truly shameful that a 92-year-old veteran in Edmonton ever had to say to me, "There is a long road to go to make this right and you must not give up because we never did".

I, therefore, want to apologize for the fact that this year veterans across Canada yet again had to be the heroes. They had to lead us to see the injustices and push us to begin to right the wrongs. They felt compelled to organize a national day of protest to beg for the privacy, care and help they were owed and needed. We broke our sacred trust with them and for this I am profoundly sorry.

We have a moral obligation to our veterans and their families, an obligation to listen to their concerns, understand them and, most importantly, address them. Specifically, we owe them the care they were promised and the benefits they have earned.

Days before Parliament resumed this past September, the government issued a first veterans announcement. Clearly, the government did not want to return to face questions on why nothing had changed since the implementation of the new veterans charter in 2006. A series of announcements continued to trickle out throughout the fall of 2010. The Minister of Veterans Affairs tabled Bill C-55, the enhanced new veterans charter act, on November 17.

The proposed legislation brought together several of the fall announcements and would make changes to the new veterans charter, as called for by several veterans organizations, including the Royal Canadian Legion, and would introduce changes to the administration of the lump sum disability award. Specifically, Bill C-55 would amend parts 1 to 3 of the new veterans charter, as well as part IV of the Pension Act.

On behalf of veterans, I must ask why the government waited four years to propose any change to the new veterans charter, which had been hailed as a living document, a work in progress that would be continually adapted to meet the changing needs of veterans? I must also ask why Veterans Affairs Canada did not live up to its 2006 commitment to review lump sum awards versus disability pension within two years?

Former veteran ombudsman Pat Stogran explained to the Senate Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs that such examples of lack of timely action undermine the sincerity of the chorus of loyalty to our veterans. Liberals have no intention of holding up this bill and will work in the best interests of veterans and Canadian Forces members and, most importantly, work to ensure that this bill rightfully addresses their needs.

• (1650)

With the rumour of an election in the future, we want to ensure the passage of Bill C-55 and its extra support for veterans.

On behalf of veterans, I must also ask why the government did not fully respond to veterans concerns about the lump sum payment. A study by the minister's own department found that 31% of veterans were unhappy with what they received.

While the minister promised new improvements to the lump sum payment, the government merely divided up the payment differently, for example, as a partial lump sum and partial annual payments over any number of years the recipient chooses, or as a single lump sum payment.

In November I met with second world war veterans, Korean war veterans, Canadian Forces veterans, reservists, RCMP and commissionaires at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 362 in Saskatoon. Every one I met believed that the government must make immediate changes to the problematic lump sum payment system. I was deeply saddened to learn that everyone knew of a veteran who had little to live on and that many veterans are working into their seventies and eighties because they need the money.

The Royal Canadian Legion would still like the department to address the amount of the lump sum payment which currently stands at a maximum of \$276,000. In Canada, disabled workers receive on average \$329,000. Australian service members receive about \$325,000, and British service members receive almost \$1 million. The Legion feels that those injured while serving their country should expect to receive at least the same amount awarded to civilian workers whose lives have been drastically changed by circumstances beyond their control.

Having pointed out this concern, there are important changes in the proposed legislation: at least \$58,000 per year for seriously wounded or ill veterans, those too injured to return to the workforce; a minimum of \$40,000 per year no matter what the salary when serving in the Canadian Forces for those receiving the monthly earnings loss benefit; an additional monthly payment of \$1,000 for life to help our most seriously wounded veterans who are no longer able to work; improved access to the permanent impairment allowance and the exceptional incapacity allowance, which will include 3,500 more veterans.

Government Orders

It is also important to point out what, according to the Legion, has not been addressed: a larger disability award in line with what is provided to Australian veterans and to disabled civilian workers who receive general damages awards in law court; improved funeral and burial benefits; improved earnings loss benefits to provide 100% of pre-release income and, if permanently incapacitated, provide ELB for life; projected career earnings of a Canadian Forces member should determine minimum ELB payment; and promotion of academic research to support integrated approach to establish VAC entitlement eligibility guidelines.

According to the Minister of Veterans Affairs Bill C-55 is only the first step to addressing veterans concerns, but it is a good place to start. We agree. The proposed legislation is a small step forward, and we are prepared to support this bill because our veterans need urgent help now and because the minister assures us that further changes are coming. We hope this first step represents a real shift in thinking, in acting, that will address other gaps.

What really matters is how veterans and veterans organizations feel about the proposed legislation. Dominion president Pat Varga said:

This bill, as a first step, makes great strides in improving the New Veterans Charter and encompasses many of the recommendations made by the New Veterans Charter Advisory Group and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. The Legion considers that further improvements are needed to the charter on which we look forward to continuing the ongoing dialogue with [the minister].

● (1655)

Pierre C. Allard, service bureau director, Dominion Command, reports, "We are ready to appear at ACVA and present our views on the way ahead....but the bottom line is that we suggest strongly that Bill C-55 should be enacted as soon as possible so that veterans and their families can benefit from proposed improvements".

The second communication reads, "with the proviso that Bill C-55 is but chapter 2 of future chapters, it should be passed as is ASAP".

The Gulf War Veterans Association states:

"We actively seek your co-operation and your support for the expeditious passage of Bill C-55 through the House Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and during the subsequent parliamentary steps.

Although collectively we feel the bill falls somewhat short in addressing all the problems of the New Veterans Charter, it is nonetheless an important step in implementing corrections with the problems in the charter. With an upcoming election possible, the future of Bill C-55 looks uncertain and it could well die on the order paper. We humbly request that you support a one-day debate of the bill, followed by approval, which in turn would provide adequate time for members of all groups to express their concerns.

In closing I ask again, on behalf of all veterans, for your co-operation to help our veterans receive their much-needed and markedly improved benefits as soon as possible. This cannot happen if the passage of Bill C-55 is not handled expeditiously. Please help our veterans".

The Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping states, "request the quick passage of Bill C-55. We

appreciate there are changes to be made to the New Veterans Charter and I respectfully suggest (hope) that changes will occur one step at a time. I fully support the idea that the New Veterans Charter is a living document".

The Canadian Peacekeeping Veterans Association states, "it seeks your cooperation to support the passage of Bill C-55. Although the bill falls far short of addressing all of the problems of the New Veterans Charter, it is a first important step forward in the process of finishing and correcting problems in the charter. With election talk increasingly in the air, the future of Bill C-55 looks very bleak and it could well die on the Order Paper if there is an election call".

In summary, the minister, veterans' organizations, veterans and we are in agreement that Bill C-55 does not cover all the requirements that we would like to see, but we do agree that it is a small step and one that should be taken before a possible election.

As was relayed to me, "Time is of the essence. After the bill is passed then we can start discussing more improvements to veterans' benefits. If we start asking for changes now, you know as well as we, that the bill will be stalled and there will be more meetings. Please, one step at a time and then we can move on. We agree, it is a small step, and more is needed".

While there is clearly very strong support for the legislation, some veterans say that the changes do not go far enough, for example, to help our veterans facing poverty and homelessness.

This past Thanksgiving, more 800 food hampers were to be delivered to the needy veterans and their families in Calgary alone. We absolutely need more facilities, like Cockrell House, believed to be the nation's first homeless shelter for veterans because there are still many veterans living up in the bush and on the streets.

● (1700)

The veterans I met during my visit to Cockrell House wanted us to understand that they loved serving their country, that they would still be on the streets if it were not for Dave Munro and Russ Ridley, who helped launch this important facility. Dave explained that when he enlisted, new recruits signed an unlimited liability clause, which meant they were obligated to do whatever was requested, no matter what the hazard. Dave feels that because of the enormity of the sacrifice they were asked to make, Canada owes them and should help them get back on their feet.

Government Orders

Luke Carmichael was one of the homeless. The Halifax native arrived in Victoria a decade ago with no money and no place to stay after serving 19 years in the armed forces, including a stint in Cyprus. He spent seven years living in a tent and three years in a trailer. Luke said that he found much needed support at Cockrell House. He now has a beautiful apartment, kept tidy with military-like precision, and is reunited with his sweetheart of 40 years ago.

Cockrell House exists because of volunteers like Angus, Terri and Karl, all of whom help run this facility at considerable personal expense. Cockrell House will need to obtain permanent funding next year to continue its important work, despite the generous support from people like Russ Ridley.

Veterans across this country want real change. One veteran told me that because VAC initially withheld a compensatory award, he ended up homeless. Another veteran was sent a cheque for \$40,000, only to have \$28,000 reclaimed, causing him to lose his house.

Let us commit today to addressing all challenges faced by our veterans. As one veteran in Halifax said to me, “There are a lot of suffering veterans out there who VAC knows about, and even more out there who no one knows about. They are not followed”. He told us of three young veterans who died alone suffering from PTSD and who had lost their spouses. “Let’s keep them alive”, he said.

Our veterans deserve more than one day, one week of remembrance. They have earned care when they need it and throughout their lives, lifelong respect and the necessary economic, familial and social supports to transition back to civilian life, to adjust to a new life or to age with dignity and grace. They do not want empty, hollow words with no action. They deserve leadership with real change and they deserve what they did so extraordinarily well, namely action.

• (1705)

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the fact that the hon. member for Etobicoke North and her party will support Bill C-55.

Regarding the question of homeless people, the member heard that we had three pilot projects to try to support those people and to try to find them. That is the most important part of the problem. Where are they in the field? Some of our civil servants who work for Veterans Affairs Canada work closely with those organizations particularly in Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto and, as I said, we try to find the veterans. When we find them, our department is very interested in looking at whether they should obtain support from us. All of them, may have services from our department. When we find them, that is what we do.

I saw some veterans a few days ago. They are not going anywhere in their lives. They have huge problems. When we find them, we deliver services to them. I saw some of them expanding in society. They are very pleased with what we do for them. Again, it is finding them. That is the most important thing.

I appreciate the support of the member of Parliament.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the three programs on homelessness in our three largest cities. However, this

is a problem throughout Canada. We need more help for homeless veterans.

New research has come out of the University of Western Ontario. I would like us to look at prevention as opposed to responding. The new research shows that the average age of homeless veterans is 52 years of age. These are people who have left the service 20 years ago and their first bout of homelessness occurred 10 years afterward. This research is different from what the United States shows. There is a population that is affected by PTSD. However, in Canada this research showed that these veterans needed transitional housing and help with alcohol abuse.

Will the minister be taking action on this new research?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on her presentation. We are both members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and I have come to realize that she is very sensitive to what veterans go through.

On the one hand, this bill represents a step forward. In my speech, however, I will be presenting the Bloc’s position on this bill. Although it is a step forward, there remains a great deal of work to be done, as the member said.

On the other hand, I would like to hear what the hon. member has to say, as she spoke about people affected by post-traumatic stress disorder. A number of witnesses told us that with their first request for services, that is, when they apply the first time to Veterans Affairs for a disability pension, they are almost automatically refused. We spoke about statistics. Veterans Affairs refused 50%, 70% and up to 90% of first applications. The applicants were often desperate because they were very vulnerable and in distress. They asked people in the department to explain what they were experiencing and their initial applications were refused 70% to 90% of the time.

We wondered whether those assessing the applications were incompetent or whether the policy at Veterans Affairs was to refuse initial applications. We discovered that 40% to 50% of second applications were approved. Therefore, to obtain services, veterans always have to appeal.

I would like the hon. member to briefly explain how the Department of Veterans Affairs could be more open to providing services to those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Government Orders

• (1710)

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I very much enjoy serving with the member on committee.

I am glad he has brought up the issue of PTSD. Going forward, we must ensure veterans have the health care they need and the social supports necessary. A key area for action is operational stress injuries, particularly PTSD. We also need to be looking at suicide. No one should have to suffer with the hopelessness, the nightmares that keep coming back and the rage that strikes suddenly. Too many of our veterans are taking their own lives.

A psychiatrist in British Columbia told me that he had not met one veteran who did not want to be a contributing member to society. He explained that he had two veterans who sat in the dark for 17 years.

We are talking about potential years of life lost while still alive.

We need investments in awareness, outreach and suicide prevention programs. We need to hire more mental health professionals and improve care and treatment. Once veterans have a diagnosis, we need to make it easier to get the support. That is a real issue.

I receive emails from across the country. One email I received caused me enough concern that I called the VAC suicide hotline on Sunday afternoon. The veteran had been waiting for three months for help to see a psychiatrist. I said to the person, "You have to promise me that this man can get help today".

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, in clause 49 of Bill C-55, which I hope the minister has a chance to look at, there is a slight problem. It basically says that the amount the veteran's family would receive from the disability would be payable out in whole to the estate if, and only if, the death occurred 30 days after the aggrieved injury was noticed. The problem with that of course is that PTSD can strike a person at any time. We have heard it can strike right away after a traumatic event or 20 years later.

The problem is that if the person, 20 years after the event, commits suicide because of his or her post-traumatic stress disorder, what happens to the payment? Would the person or the estate be entitled to anything at all?

This particular limit needs to be vetted at committee. I wonder if the member has any comments on clause 49 of Bill C-55.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague who, as we all know, works tirelessly for our veterans. I think he raises an important point on PTSD in that it can strike at any time afterward.

I will bring this back to suicide as I think this is an issue that requires immediate attention.

Do we have a good understanding of the causes of suicide in the Canadian military and veterans population? Are the causes financial problems, relationship breakdowns, substance abuse, tensions with other members of the unit or traumatic events? How are we tracking suicide in the Canadian Forces, regular forces, reservists and

veterans, including RCMP veterans and veterans who may not be known to VAC but who may be under other types of care?

On the identified tracking for these groups, do we have a good understanding of those who attempt suicide? What percentage of victims were known to either DND or VAC prior to the suicide or to the medical, social aid or prison system? What percentage had attempted suicide before? What percentage suffered from an identified operational stress injury, including PTSD, anxiety, depression or substance abuse? Has operational tempo and number of tours impacted OSIs, particularly PTSD?

Since the establishment of the 24-hour, 7-day-per-week suicide hotline, how many Canadian Forces members, reservists and veterans have been counselled and how many suicides are estimated to have been prevented through the hotline?

What else do we need to be doing?

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act, introduced by the government to help veterans.

The Bloc Québécois supports this bill, as we have said repeatedly here today. I heard our Liberal colleague say that it is a step forward and will help improve things for our veterans. We are talking about people who sacrifice their lives or who live the rest of their lives with injuries suffered during a combat mission.

The Bloc Québécois has always been very concerned about the well-being of veterans. We parliamentarians can sometimes have serious disagreements about the validity of a mission, as was demonstrated by the debate we had on the mission in Afghanistan. But when it comes to supporting veterans, the Bloc Québécois is always there, and we firmly believe that veterans should not have to pay the political price of this debate. They have sacrificed much of their safety, their well-being and their health. Therefore, when it comes to veterans who are injured or have a disability, we cannot be tight-fisted or frugal; rather, we must be generous in compensating these individuals. We must express our gratitude and recognition by providing them with all the help and support they need, and whatever their families and children need.

The bill contains measures that we hope will help veterans considerably. We are disappointed, however, as I have repeatedly told the Minister of Veterans Affairs, that the Conservative government decided not to include a lifetime monthly pension, as many veterans in Quebec called for in petitions presented here in the House. That measure, which veterans were entitled to under the old veterans charter, should have been restored.

Government Orders

The minister said many times that there were not necessarily any changes and that the primary goal was to reintegrate veterans into the workforce. But that was always the goal; that is nothing new. We strongly believe that having a lump sum payment instead of a lifetime monthly pension, as we had before, is a considerable loss for our veterans.

Bill C-55 proposes legislative amendments to the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act. As I already said, this bill would amend the eligibility criteria for the long term disability plan and would provide an extra \$1,000 per month to veterans who are receiving these disability benefits and who are unable to return to the workforce. This affects many people who, after participating in a military mission in a theatre of war, return nearly 100% disabled and unable to actively return to work.

This bill also offers veterans the choice between a single lump sum payment and the same amount spread out over a set period of time. A combination of these two options is also available.

Here is an example of the losses experienced by veterans. From our discussions with people working with veterans, we know that, in general, based on the cases handled, veterans are more likely to be 20% or 25% disabled than 100% disabled.

• (1720)

According to the previous veterans' charter, compensation was provided to a veteran at a rate of 20%, so he could receive \$600, \$700 or \$800 per month for the rest of his life. When a young person received compensation for an accident in the theatre of war, he generally received compensation at a rate of 20% or 25%. If we are talking about \$280,000, that means the person would receive approximately \$50,000 from then on, at the age of 22 or 23. Before, that person could receive \$600 to \$800 a month for life, for physical or mental loss. As we mentioned earlier, post-traumatic stress disorder affects many military personnel.

The Bloc Québécois has the utmost respect for military personnel who carry out highly dangerous missions and risk their lives to express the will of the people. This profound respect justly implies that, since their lives are in danger, we have the responsibility not to expose them to further risk. Once their mission is complete, we have the collective responsibility to offer them all the necessary support when they return home.

Of course, this support must be given to veterans, but it must also be given to their spouses, families, loved ones and children. There is still a lot of work to do on that front.

And in terms of post-traumatic stress disorder, we heard many testimonies to the effect that the spouse of the person afflicted had not necessarily been informed about possible behaviours, or their reactions, or the potential help available to them.

I would ask the minister, who is present here, to listen to what I am about to say. A number of witnesses told us in committee that when they needed a psychologist or psychiatrist to get help for post-traumatic stress disorder and they contacted Veterans Affairs, it was often difficult to access those services. We heard it over and over again in committee: people told us that they did not feel that it was an easy task. There are members here from all parties who sit on the committee and can attest to that.

We have an idea of the dynamic of all those wanting psychological therapy, and often they are men. I worked in a CLSC network and men often have more difficulty than women recognizing their psychological weaknesses. It is difficult enough to ask for help, but when a person asks officials at Veterans Affairs and the request for help is not necessarily well received and it is difficult to receive compensation for the services the person needs, then there is a problem. I invite the minister to take a closer look at this as well. It is important.

The Bloc Québécois will always support any measure to help veterans. The Bloc Québécois has always defended the principle that we must not abandon our veterans when they return from difficult missions or when they end a career spent defending their fellow citizens.

For example, in budget 2009, the Conservatives announced various measures, as hon. members will recall. Budget 2009 maintains the \$30 million annual investment included in budget 2007, for the period from 2007 to 2012. Budget 2009 also maintains the \$302 million investment over five years announced in budget 2008. That amount will go to Veterans Affairs Canada in order to increase support for war veterans.

However, out of the \$3.4 billion estimates, budget 2009 announced that \$24 million would be saved by streamlining internal and administrative resources without affecting services.

• (1725)

We wondered about that and we met with certain stakeholders, because those savings worried us. I do not know how it is being carried out on the ground. The cuts are determined by executives or administrators and, often, they target the lower levels. It is important to be vigilant about service delivery. I do not want to go too far on this issue, but I am concerned about the cuts.

The Bloc Québécois will support maintaining past investments to help veterans. However, given the scope of the mission in Afghanistan and the number of Canadians wounded in this theatre of operations, the federal government could have increased its investment.

Bill C-55 is certainly a start and a step in the right direction. It is important to recognize that, although some of the measures improve the assistance provided to veterans with disabilities, there is still work to do. The Bloc Québécois is of the opinion that the government could have done more, namely by returning to a lifetime monthly pension, which is not included in the bill.

Despite all the debate and the demonstrations that took place on November 11 in Quebec, people called for the return of the lifetime monthly pension. The minister seems to want to avoid the issue by saying that, despite everything, veterans receive a lump sum payment and a pension. However, when veterans return to the labour market, they no longer receive that pension. The only amount they receive for a disability resulting from an injury sustained in the theatre of operations is 20 to 25%. Most of these people return to the labour market and are able to return to society.

Government Orders

Bill C-55 is part of a legislative process that dates back to at least 2005. At that time, the new veterans charter was supposed to be a major reform designed to completely overhaul the veterans compensation system.

It was the Liberals who put forward the new veterans charter. In some cases, the compensation provisions for wounded veterans were covered by the Pension Act, the terms of which dated back to World War I. With the new veterans from the campaign in Afghanistan, it became urgent to review the process to adapt to the new reality and to provide help to those who needed it.

In committee, some people told us they had received, among other invoices, an \$8 invoice for the cost of the sheet the soldier had been wrapped in. Fortunately, things have changed. That would have been rather traumatic.

The new veterans charter differentiates between financial benefits intended to compensate for the loss of revenue a veteran experiences when he or she can no longer work because of an injury sustained while serving in the Canadian Forces and the sums paid to compensate for pain and suffering associated with an injury sustained while on duty. That is why the veteran will lose the financial benefits but will continue to receive his or her disability benefits. Under the old system, the pension amount would diminish if the veteran's condition improved, which encouraged people to focus more on the deficiencies rather than on rehabilitation.

I would like to make my point by asking a question. What is the current situation of our veterans? This bill is supposedly going to help them. As we saw in committee, it is becoming increasingly clear that veterans need help.

● (1730)

During our many meetings, we learned that the suicide rate among veterans is higher than in the general population. Statistics show that one out of six people returning from a military theatre of operations will be afflicted with post-traumatic stress. These people, who are often very young, need psychological and social support, which is not always available in isolated, rural regions. Veterans returning home far from large urban centres had a hard time receiving the services they needed. Veterans have often said that in order to support them, people need to understand their reality. In isolated, rural regions, it might be difficult to find experts to help someone who is suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

According to the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Report on Regular Force Veterans, dated January 4, 2011, clients of Veterans Affairs Canada reported complex states of health. The great majority, more than 90%, reported at least one physical health condition diagnosed by a health professional—that is a very high percentage—and about half reported at least one mental health condition. Two-thirds had four to six physical and mental health conditions, and a fifth had even larger numbers of comorbid conditions, that is, the presence of two or more conditions in the same individual.

Overall, 6% of veterans reported having thoughts of suicide in the previous 12 months. Of those covered by the new veterans charter, 57% had trouble reintegrating into society.

Therefore, a great deal of work remains to be done to provide services to those who return from military missions with

psychological trauma. They return to Canada and must return to society. Fifty-seven per cent is more than half; almost 6 in 10 have serious problems with reintegration.

The state of health, the degree of disability and the determinants of health of regular force veterans released from military service between 1998 and 2007 were worse than those of the general Canadian public.

I have some more statistics. Seventy-three per cent of veterans are very satisfied with their financial situation. Once they leave the forces, the satisfaction rate falls to 50% for veterans covered by the new veterans charter. Thus, 57% are dissatisfied with their financial situation once they leave the forces. Veterans covered by the new charter have their average income reduced much more sharply. Their income may be reduced by up to 64%. The income of veterans on a disability pension may drop by 56%.

There is still a lot of work to be done. This bill introduces new measures. The minimum compensation for earnings loss for a veteran in rehabilitation has been increased to \$40,000, and this will affect 2,300 veterans over the next five years. Access to the permanent impairment allowance and the exceptional incapacity allowance has been improved. This means that 3,500 more veterans will be eligible. There is an additional \$1,000 per month being offered to veterans who receive the permanent impairment allowance and who cannot return to work. Five hundred veterans will benefit from this measure over the next five years.

That is a step in the right direction. However, there is the issue of the lump sum payment, which the veterans have requested. Replacing this amount and reinstating the lifetime monthly payment are major advances.

● (1735)

The minister is here, and I would like him to listen to this. We are talking about accessibility to services and services tailored to families, services that are close by, especially in rural areas such as my riding of Berthier—Maskinongé and other regions of Quebec.

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for his support for Bill C-55, which will significantly improve the various services we offer to our veterans, particularly modern-day ones, and notably in terms of finances.

Government Orders

That said, I am hearing some things that surprise me. I told myself that perhaps I was not fully understood, so I would like to take the time to say it again. First of all, when someone suffers from post-traumatic operational stress disorder, or PTSD, the minister does not decide whether the person is afflicted with this disorder or not. Psychologists and psychiatrists meet with the person and determine whether he is suffering from the disorder. When the files were reviewed, it was found that 80% of first-level requests were granted. I just recently got these statistics from the department.

Next, I would like to speak about the permanent monthly allowance. I said earlier that we have three types of services. First, if a veteran participates in a rehabilitation program, he or she will receive a minimum of \$40,000. For example, a soldier who is wounded in Afghanistan and participates in a rehabilitation program upon returning home would receive this amount. Second, there is the permanent monthly allowance, which is somewhat reminiscent of the old pension system. This is an allowance that ranges from a monthly minimum of \$536 up to \$1,609, depending on the extent of the veteran's injuries. An additional \$1,000 per month is added to that amount if the veteran is unable to return to work. So, if we take this monthly amount and add it to the \$40,000, the veteran is receiving a minimum of \$58,000. If the veteran is very severely injured, he or she will receive up to \$71,668. That is what will be granted. However, we look at the two amounts separately, we see a permanent monthly allowance that is equal to the lifetime pension. Under our bill, this amount will increase from \$1,536 to \$2,639 for veterans who cannot return to work. I think it is important to clarify that aspect.

Finally—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, this is a step forward and that is why we will vote in favour of this bill. However, the minister is giving us examples of people who can no longer return to the labour market because of a significant physical disability. I absolutely agree that it is also important to take care of those people. This bill clearly provides more generous support to these individuals. That is why we do not object to it.

However, as I clearly said in my speech, most of the people who are affected by a disability—I am talking about those for whom the extent of their disability has been evaluated at 20% to 25%—return to the labour market and receive lump sum payments of approximately \$40,000 to \$60,000. That is what this bill is proposing they be given.

The bill proposes to divide that amount into 3, 4, 5 or 6 payments. In the end, veterans will be receiving the equivalent of a car payment for two or three years. We are questioning this lump sum payment and we are not the only ones. We met with several witnesses. A number of petitions were sent to the minister's office. This bill does not meet the needs of these veterans. They are calling for a return to the former veterans charter, which included a lifetime monthly pension.

● (1740)

[English]

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the member about the fact that veterans families need support. Individuals within the military and veterans organizations have been asking that medical and psychological treatment be extended to family members in order to increase resiliency and improve their quality of life. There has been some concern that VAC is equipped to deal with some of the easier cases but many of our vets have PTSD and other conditions.

I am wondering what recommendations the member would make to the minister in order to address these issues.

I will raise one other issue again regarding multiple sclerosis. People are being treated differently in Canada and the United States where it is seen as a presumptive issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Etobicoke North for her question.

More and more studies talk about screening. We could look into that more. Some people may be more likely to develop post-traumatic stress than others, and techniques and scientific studies could help better identify these people.

Something I mentioned in my speech is the confidentiality issue. That is something very important that the Department of Veterans Affairs should be looking at in the coming months. There have been some scandals in recent months: the medical records of veterans were consulted over 1,000 times. These records seem to be like library books available to anyone who wants to open one up and look at someone's medical history. So that is something very important that we will be working on in the next few months. I urge the minister to also look into this situation. The media have exposed some rather troubling situations regarding management of the confidentiality of veterans' records.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government is apt to point out the maximum lump sum payment that a person can receive is around \$276,000 but the average payment is about \$40,000. Very few people actually receive \$276,000. The problem is that the maximum lump sum payment in Britain is almost \$1 million, yet British and Canadian soldiers fight side by side in many circumstances.

Would the hon. member agree that the amount of payment, no matter what it is, spread over a period of time should be increased to meet the needs of the veteran to compare with what other countries are paying their severely disabled personnel or families of deceased personnel?

● (1745)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the excellent question. He has also been a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs for several years and does a great job.

Government Orders

The lump sum payment could always be increased. Perhaps a certain sum could be calculated that could serve as a life-long monthly payment. But the lump sum payment poses another problem: even if it were increased to \$1 million—as it is elsewhere, as he said—and it were given in a single payment, a young man of 22 or 23 might have a very hard time dealing with receiving such a large sum, especially when returning from a very difficult combat mission, and not spending ridiculous amounts of money. He could lose that money for the rest of his life. That is the Bloc Québécois's concern.

If the lump sum payment were larger and the percentage, say 20%, became \$200,000, and it could be paid in several payments, I would not allow people to choose. People tend to think one way at 22 or 23, and another way at ages 30, 40 or 50. Furthermore, when a soldier returns from a difficult combat mission, he or she might have a hard time managing that. Then the family is left to deal with it and forced to help the person who spent all that money.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise on behalf of the federal New Democratic Party to indicate its initial support for Bill C-55. As I have already told the minister in private and in public, New Democrats will be supporting the principle of the bill. It has been indicated to the minister privately and publicly that it is a tiny step forward, that the government should have moved one way but went the other way.

We know that any time opposition can get the government to move, that is a good thing. It is nowhere near what New Democrats would like, but in fairness to the minister, I honestly think he is trying to do the very best he can within the constraints of the Conservative government.

Let us go over the merits of Bill C-55. I first want to thank the minister for listening to the debate today and working with members possibly through committee to make slight alterations to the bill to improve it. In all of the bills that come from government, especially the Conservatives, we see the word “may” written often. For those of us who have done collective bargaining, which my colleague from Hamilton would know very well, the word “may” means whatever one wants it to. It means that one may or may not do something.

Subsection 3(2) is where the bill gets a bit redundant. This program is already enshrined in the new veterans charter, but it is repeated in the bill, which states:

The Minister may, on application, provide career transition services to a member's or a veteran's spouse, common-law partner or survivor if the spouse, common-law partner or survivor meets the prescribed eligibility requirements.

That is already in the new veterans charter. One has to ask why it is in this bill.

If we go further down the page, there is a mistake. Section 12 is complete in the French language, but it is not complete in the English language. I would ask the minister to ensure his staff or the legal people get that completed before it goes to committee.

The word “may” is all over the map in the bill. New Democrats have a concern with that. The minister is right that he does not determine who has PTSD or any kind of medical concerns. That is up to the experts. However, when those experts make a decision and

that decision is forwarded to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board or to the Department of Veterans Affairs, then the minister may want to do something. The minister may wish to allocate this or that program. The minister may or may not decide to do something to help veterans or their families. That word in a couple of paragraphs needs to be changed.

The word “shall” in some paragraphs should be changed. When it comes to the payment aspect, New Democrats will agree that the word “may” can stay, but not in any collective bargaining or contractual obligations. We call it a weasel word. We know the minister did not intend to do that in any way, shape or form, but we will have this discussion at an appropriate time.

As well, I have been in contact with all veterans organizations over the past few months about the bill. One of the things they have asked me to do on behalf of New Democrats and the opposition is to ensure that I talk with my Bloc and Liberal counterparts to seek their support to move the bill through the process fairly quickly. I indicated that I would and I am glad to see that Liberal and Bloc members have, although with reservation and they are right to express concern, agreed to move it forward.

I remember the days when the veterans charter was being discussed. Jack Stagg, the former deputy minister, may God rest his soul as he is no longer with us, before the implementation of the bill invited the various veterans groups to the process of the bill making, as well as the critics of the opposition, before the bill was even drafted so the minister could say that this is what he wanted to do and how could he get members' help to move it through even quicker.

The bill could have already been passed by now. If the government really wants to speed this along, I have advice for the minister for next time, and we hope there will be a next time, very soon hopefully, because we know this is one step forward of many steps that have to happen. The next time legislative changes are required that need the opposition's support, he should call us in advance. We would be more than happy to sit down with the department to give our acceptance or not in that regard. That way he would know how quickly something could be passed.

● (1750)

We know when it comes to veterans the last thing we wish to do, in any way, is to hold up something that may be beneficial to veterans and their families.

I talked about the fact that the bill is a small step forward. The new veterans charter divided veterans in this country into three classes. Right now, for example, World War II and Korean veterans who have a disability that is severe enough may be eligible to go to a hospital like the Camp Hill in Halifax, Ste. Anne's Hospital in Quebec, Colonel Belcher in Calgary, or the Perley here in Ottawa. Not every World War II or Korean veteran has access to those beds.

By the time we go to bed tonight this country will lose another 110 to 120 of its World War II and Korean heroes because of the passage of time. It is unfortunate, but time has caught up with them.

Government Orders

What will happen to those hospital beds when the last of the World War II and Korean veterans pass away? Right now, modern-day veterans from post-1953 do not have access to those beds. This is going to be a problem. We hope the government will look at this problem seriously and understand that there are now over 750,000 current veterans, RCMP members and their families.

There are going to be some 600,000-plus Korean and World War II veterans, many of them in their late 60s and early or late 70s, who are going to require long-term care or hospital care as a result of injuries suffered during their time in service. Right now they have to depend on the provinces to get that help. We hope the government will look at this serious problem and work with us to facilitate their having access to facilities.

Over the holidays we heard about SISIP. My friend, Dennis Manuge, a veteran from Porters Lake, challenged the government on the SISIP deductibility from his veterans pension, which is a clawback. Representing over 6,500 veterans in this country, the class action law suit made it all the way to the Supreme Court which ruled unanimously that the class action suit can proceed.

There are 6,500 disabled veterans this class action law suit affects. They have been asking for years that the previous government and the current government fix this problem once and for all. In fact, two DND ombudsmen have said to fix it. The previous veterans affairs ombudsman said it must be fixed. Two votes in the House of Commons said it must be fixed. The veterans affairs committees of the House and the Senate said it must be fixed.

Yet 6,500 veterans and their families have had to seek legal redress to get this fixed. The minister and the government could stand in the House of Commons and say that this court action and this legal action will stop now. Officials would meet with members of the class action law suit, Dennis Manuge and his group, and come to a reasonable compromise that is fair for the veterans and fair for the taxpayer.

I suspect, because I have seen it before, that the government is going to continue to spend millions of dollars of taxpayers' money fighting disabled veterans for what they so rightfully deserve. That is one thing the government could do to fix it right now. We said that the bill is step in the right direction, but it needs to go further.

We have talked about vocational training. I thanked the Minister of National Defence for his comments when he said that the DVA is now starting to look for veterans to be employed within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The problem is that a military person with 23 years of experience may have 5 or 6 weeks of vacation entitlement time. If they become disabled, become a veteran and then go to work for DVA, they go all the way back to the bottom of the vacation entitlement plan. They go down to three weeks. They are not entitled to carry their years of military service over to DVA. Under the law, members of the military are not considered public servants.

● (1755)

The same applied to the RCMP and the RCMP were successful in taking the government to court to change that aspect of it.

We are telling the government that it is one line that it can change that would allow members of the military who are injured and need to leave the service, if they get jobs in DVA or other aspects of the public service, which the new veterans charter allows them priority service hiring, to take the years of service they provided to Canada with them. That is a simple thing that can be done and it would bring smiles to many veterans who find themselves in that case. It is a simple thing to be done and we hope the government will do that.

The government could do another thing to help veterans out. Let us imagine military persons with over 35 years service who have served their country, have travelled the world and have left behind their families many times as they have gone to serve in Bosnia, Afghanistan or wherever. They are 55 years old right now and all of a sudden, unfortunately, their spouse passes away. As sad as that is, it happens all the time.

If they are lucky enough and fortunate enough to remarry another person at 59 years old, great. They live for 20 years, they die and their second spouse would be entitled to their superannuation pension. However, if that individual had the audacity to marry the second person at age 60, lived for 20 years and died, the second spouse would get nothing. That is called the "marriage after 60" clause or, as we call it, "the gold digger clause".

In fact, Werner Schmidt, a former Reform Party member of Parliament, now the Conservatives, and my colleague over there knows him quite well, introduced legislation in the House to ban the marriage after 60 act. If we were to remove one line in the legislation, we would be done, but, no, after all these years we are still fighting that clause. The reality is that when a military person, an RCMP member or whomever remarries, it should not matter to the government when they remarry. We know the law was put in during the Boer War, well over 100 years ago. The British government was worried that young girls would marry older veterans for that pension cheque. I am sure even the minister would know that is rightly unfair.

That is one thing the government could do right now to help many veterans and their spouses. If they are fortunate enough to find the love of their life once, that is great. If they get to do it twice, that is really remarkable. When they remarry should be no concern at all to Government of Canada, whether they remarry at 59 years and 364 days day, but on that 365th day, at age 60, they get nothing later in the future. That needs to change.

Those are just some of the aspects of change that could happen.

Government Orders

Another one is the agent orange aspect. We know that the current government, when it was in opposition, promised so much more on agent orange compensation for those folks who were affected from spraying in Gagetown from 1958 to 1984. In fact, the former minister of veterans affairs and the current Prime Minister, who was then leader of the opposition, said very clearly in Gagetown that they would look after everyone affected by chemical spraying from 1958 to 1984.

However, when the Conservatives became government, they implemented a plan that was even more restricted than what the Liberals were offering. The Liberals were offering that only those people in 1966 and 1967 affected by the spraying of agent orange that could be claimed back to the American aspect of the involvement in Gagetown would be compensated.

However, then we need to go to February 6. I am glad to see that the minister just recently changed that requirement and allowed many more people to make the application for agent orange.

However, the minister and the government knows that will only help about 1,100 more people. There are thousands upon thousands more people who were affected by chemical spraying in Gagetown. The one simple thing that we would ask is exactly what they asked when they were in opposition: a public inquiry into the spraying at Gagetown. If the minister were to stand and say that we will have a public inquiry as to the spraying at Gagetown, that would go a long way toward alleviating a lot of concerns for veterans and civilians. Those are the things that the Conservatives called for when they were in opposition.

• (1800)

Those are just a few of the items that the government can do in order to move the yardstick on veterans' care.

I will give the current minister some high marks. I have travelled with him on a couple of occasions already and I have seen that his interaction with veterans and their families is truly sincere. In fact, all of the ministers with whom I have associated since my time in 1997 have been nothing but sincere and true. Whether they were Conservatives or Liberals, I know that each and everyone of them truly wanted to do the very best they could to help the veterans and their families.

It is time to put those kind thoughts and words into action. Bill C-55 is a small start. There are a couple of small amendments that we may have to look at in committee. However, one of the recommendations I would make for the government for future legislation is that it increase the amount of payment that comes out, which right now is \$276,000. It should easily be double and never in a lump sum payment for younger people. I do admit that if the government is willing to offer quite a large amount of money to people in their late 50s or early 60s, it may be something that they would want to think about. However, for people in their early 20s or 30s, it would be a major mistake to take that kind of money right off the bat.

We have a lot of people in DVA who will make the determination of whether a person is severely injured or not. We know it will not be the minister doing that. We would like to know how that determination is actually done, because we frequently hear that

people who are severely disabled or severely injured or cannot continue in their employment, they can receive these benefits. Who determines that? How is that preordained?

Right now in many of the cases we have, one of the things I despise the most within the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I say it with great respect to people in that area, is the Veterans Review and Appeal Board. That is something I would like to see done away with in a heartbeat. If it cannot be done away with, then we should do what the minister said. He did not say this but I will say it for him. Instead of putting political friends on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, the government should start putting people on that board who have military, policing or medical experience so that when people go before the VRAP, they are adjudicated by their peers, not political hacks and flacks.

That, by the way, is what the Conservatives said in the convention in 2005 or 2006. At the convention, they actually said that the Veterans Review and Appeal Board would be replaced by people of medical, military and policing history. That is what we would like to see on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

Right now we have a bunch of folks there who have never served one day in their lives and they are adjudicating on people who have served valiantly for their country, who have signed the unlimited liability. We have the ultimate responsibility for their and their families' needs.

At the same time, when we talk about veterans and their families, we also need to include members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is why I happen to be wearing the RCMP tie today. I believe the members of the RCMP serve their country just as much as those in the military and they should be treated together. I would hope that some of the benefits that are applied to veterans eventually will apply to members of the RCMP.

Those are some of the issues we have issued to the minister. We want to thank the minister for cracking open the door on the new veterans charter. It is a living document. We do not want it to die on Bill C-55. We want it improved and we want it done quickly. We know the resources are there to help. We in the NDP, and I am sure my Liberal and Bloc colleagues, will do everything we can to assist the Minister of Veterans Affairs who is a really decent guy, to move forward quickly on all the aspects we have talked about in order to make the lives of our true heroes of this country better for the long term.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore for his support and collaboration throughout the development of the new measures in support of our veterans that we are preparing to implement through Bill C-55. I also want to thank him for understanding that we have to move quickly in order to pass this bill before the budget is introduced. Since there are election rumours, we do not know what is going to happen and in that context, our veterans deserve to have this right away.

Government Orders

The hon. member is talking about taking tiny steps, but this is a whole new chapter we are writing for the new veterans charter, new measures that will help protect in a much more tangible and significant way those who, by misfortune, might return injured from Afghanistan. In that context, these measures are a step in the right direction.

I want to come back to the amount that other countries give as a lump sum payment. I want to remind hon. members that in the United Kingdom, the payments are usually around \$8,927, while in Canada it is \$28,532 and on average it is \$40,000. Only a very small number of people have received the maximum amounts in the United Kingdom, while here far more people have.

We could add many things, but at some point we have to set priorities in life and it is exceptional for a minister and a department to get \$2 billion from their government during a recession. That shows how important veterans are to us and that is why the government is moving forward to support our veterans.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, when people put their life on the line and face the bullets for us to have a good night sleep and protect freedom and democracy, the last thing we should be worrying about is how much it will cost to care for them. We cannot start nickel and diming and saying that one veteran fits in a particular box, another veteran who did this fits in another box and the veteran who did not go overseas fits in another box.

A veteran is a veteran is a veteran. We should get DVA to the point where when a veteran calls up to say that he or she needs help, the only question DVA should ask is: "Did you serve?" If the answer is, "yes", then it should be, "How can we help you?"

Veterans are not asking for the Lexus and a trip to Florida. They are asking for coverage for prescription drugs. They want to ensure their families are taken care of. They want to ensure they have enough money on a monthly basis to not only care for their day-to-day needs, but to get rehabilitated and get back into the workforce.

That is the beauty of the new veterans charter. It was not just to give out money and for them to go away. It was actually to give veterans some assistance to help them become productive citizens again and move their life forward. That is an important change.

At the same time, the government should not talk about having certain restraints when it can find \$1 billion for a G20 conference and \$16 billion to \$20 billion for certain fighter jets, which there is no question that we need, but we do not know if we need these ones. If the government can allocate that kind of money without thinking, then surely our veterans should have access to those kinds of funds without thinking as well.

● (1810)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague did raise the issue of long-term care. I wonder what he thinks about the need for a long-term care strategy and the fact that we are missing specialized services, for example, palliative care, rehabilitative services, dementia care, mental health, day programs and outreach.

One of the key concerns I have is timely access to appropriate dementia care options and long-term care facilities throughout many regions of the country, both urban and rural. This is very limited in rural areas, particularly for people with aggressive behaviours.

Many of our veterans have suffered from PTSD. There are people from the Korean War who are still being treated for PTSD and they develop dementia. We have a number of cases here now but we cannot get them the help they need. They are being put in facilities that are not equipped to deal with their special needs.

I wonder what recommendations the member might make to the minister.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Etobicoke North for her kind and thoughtful question. I also congratulate her as the Liberal official critic for veterans affairs. In the short time she has been critic, she has done remarkable outreach with the veterans.

On this particular question, it is not just for military personnel, veterans and their families. We have a problem throughout the entire country with civilians as well, and the hon. member knows that. Even if I were the minister, I could not say that we have all the people and facilities in place to help the veterans. We simply do not.

The government needs to start investing right away to get people up to speed, especially the DND ombudsman, the DVA ombudsman, the departments themselves, and everyone associated with military, RCMP and veterans communities. They need to get up to speed in order to facilitate and on principle understand the concerns, how to deal with the concerns, and how to assist with the concerns. I wish it could be much faster.

I will give the government credit, though. There has been some movement on this front, but it is ever so slow. We need to move much quicker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. We hope that in further discussions in our committee on other subjects we can move these important issues forward as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague on his excellent speech and ask him a question.

In 2005, passage of the new veterans charter was fast-tracked. Today, we realize that the new veterans charter had some shortcomings, including the lump sum payment, which is being challenged by a number of veterans.

Government Orders

I believe it is important to take the time to study this bill and hear what certain witnesses have to say at committee meetings. I am not saying that we should simply mark time, but some target groups have some answers to our questions regarding this bill.

I feel the pressure being exerted by the Conservative government to fast-track passage of this bill. In fact, it is claiming that there will be an election. For its part, the Bloc Québécois believes that if the Conservatives do not want an election, three parties in this House can negotiate. The Bloc Québécois is interested in sales tax harmonization. The government should include sales tax harmonization in its budget, compensate Quebec for harmonizing its taxes, and then there will not be an election and we can take our time to properly study this bill. I believe that we must be vigilant and not adopt the bill too quickly. I am not saying that we should mark time, but the bill must be studied in committee, and certain witnesses must be heard—

•(1815)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. I must give equal time to the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore to reply.

The hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Madam Speaker, the answer is quite simple. If the government wishes to avoid an election, there are several things the government can do. One, it can adopt our new veterans charter, which was voted on twice. It could also look at the NDP's proposal with regard to the Canada pension plan. It could also look at the NDP's proposal regarding old age security. It could put the F-35 contract under a competitive bid. It could reintroduce our Bill C-311 on climate change introduced by my colleague from Ontario.

There are many more things. If the government wishes to avoid an election, it should take those great New Democratic Party ideas, incorporate them in the budget, and then we will have that conversation.

Mr. Greg Kerr (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am certainly pleased to rise in support of Bill C-55. I am just trying to get over the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore's suggestion that he might possibly vote for a budget. It came as quite a shock. I was caught off guard here for a moment.

This is an important step forward in dealing with the very important issues that veterans have raised. As a matter of fact, those who attended the veterans affairs committee today heard the ombudsman encourage us all to move on and get this bill forward. The reason we want to move it forward is, although it does not answer all the questions, it brings these incredibly important issues forward and makes these payments available to those veterans as soon as possible. Therefore, I encourage all members to support the bill and get it through.

This new enhanced veterans charter act only fulfills a promise made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs to improve the financial benefits available to injured Canadian Forces members and veterans. However, it also reflects how this government listens to our veterans.

The measures I speak to today amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act

proposed by the previous government, commonly known as the new veterans charter. The act received royal assent in 2005, passing unanimously through both this House and the other place.

At the time, it was a groundbreaking piece of legislation. It focused on giving our service men and women the tools to live healthy and productive lives once out in the civilian world. We are hearing that more and more, not about the payments on a regular basis but the support mechanisms, the compensation, and the initiatives that help these brave men and women get back into regular life and live a good, normal life for as long as they possibly can.

Experts agree with the approach. Various advisory councils agreed with this approach as well. We knew at the outset that developing new legislation for our new generation of veterans would not be without its challenges. Today we are five years into the new veterans charter and have gained valuable insight and experience.

We rarely acknowledge that there are legitimate concerns with the charter and we are responding to them in real and meaningful ways. Although it will not all be fixed at once, this definitely is a very important step forward. That is why we have introduced these changes that will benefit thousands of veterans over the coming five years. These improvements underscore our government's deep commitment to repay the growing debt we owe Canada's veterans and their families.

Following extensive discussions with veterans right across the country, we have proposed our first step in moving the veterans' concerns forward.

The bill contains three key financial benefits that will improve the life of thousands of new veterans.

First, it improves access to the permanent impairment allowance under the new veterans charter and the exceptional incapacity allowance under the Pension Act.

Second, it introduces a \$1,000-a-month supplement for severely injured veterans who are unable to be gainfully employed and who are already receiving the permanent impairment allowance.

Finally, it gives Canadian Forces members and veterans a choice on payment options for the disability award.

One of the key features of the new veterans charter is the disability award, or lump sum payment as it is better known. Certainly, we have talked about this at length in the past few months.

For the record, I am not sure how much clearer I can be than to say that the disability award is for pain and suffering. I would like to say this in no uncertain terms. The disability award is not a pension. It is not a monetary pension set for that purpose. It is to recognize the pain and suffering these terrific people have gone through.

Government Orders

Each of these improvements is designed to address concerns we have heard from veterans and their families, other stakeholders, as well as through our own evaluations. They spoke and we have listened. Now we are acting, just like we said we would do all along.

Allow me to provide some detail on each of these important initiatives.

The permanent impairment allowance and the exceptional incapacity allowance provide monthly support for veterans whose disabilities result in permanent and severe impairments. They also recognize that serious injuries such as amputation, loss of vision, hearing or speech, or severe and permanent psychiatric conditions are not only physically devastating but can result in diminished employment potential.

It takes very little imagination to see that they can affect a person's ability to earn a living. As we know, that inability to support one's self can be just as devastating to one's health as the physical injury.

● (1820)

These allowances were a progressive move but in retrospect access was too limited. Currently, only a handful of veterans receive it, and clearly it is not providing the support and financial independence it was supposed to provide. By adjusting the eligibility criteria for these allowances, thousands more veterans will be eligible to receive monthly financial support.

The permanent impairment allowance provides \$536 to \$1,609 per month to seriously injured veterans, depending on the extent of their injuries. Our determination to stand by our veterans and men and women in uniform does not end there. These new changes also offer up to \$1,269 per month under the exceptional impairment allowance.

Many individuals with serious disabilities can and do continue to work with the help of rehabilitation and other supports. Some, however, simply cannot. Additional measures in Bill C-55 offer an extra \$1,000 per month to veterans who receive the permanent impairment allowance and who cannot return to work at all at full potential due to the severity of their impairment.

While the new veterans charter in place today is a great foundation, we recognize the need for adjustments in legislation to address the shortcomings we have only come to realize through experience.

Through consultation with veterans and their advocates and with good research and study, we now know what can be adapted and adjusted to better fit the evolving needs of modern day veterans and their families. Veterans themselves have told us what we need to do and we are doing it.

A perfect example of that feedback is how we have made some changes in the regulations for the earnings loss benefit, another financial support under the new veterans charter.

Changes to our regulations will guarantee recipients of the monthly earnings loss benefit a minimum of \$40,000 per year, no matter what their salary was when they were serving in the Canadian Forces. This important change will benefit veterans who were released early in their careers when they held a low rank in the

military or for those veterans who were released years ago when military salaries were much lower.

Finally, this legislation would provide veterans with a choice of how they wish to receive their disability award.

This tax free disability award was established to recognize the pain and suffering caused by a service-related injury. As I mentioned earlier, it does not replace a pension. In fact, it was a completely new benefit in 2006. There was never recognition for the non-economic losses associated with an injury prior to the new veterans charter.

This new legislation would allow veterans to choose whether to receive their disability award as a lump sum, in annual payments, or a combination of each. Furthermore, at any time, veterans who so choose may change their minds and receive the remaining amount as a lump sum payment.

This action was taken because veterans themselves asked for it. The decision demonstrates our government's commitment to amend and improve elements of the new veterans charter. It is not about turning back the clock but instead responding to sound advice and recommendations, so that we have a strong array of programs geared to the needs of our modern day veterans.

This government's priority is to ensure that Canada's veterans and their families have the support they need when they need it. We are committed to extending these supports as soon as possible, and we urge the House to join us in giving veterans what they need to live their lives with honour and respect, comfort and dignity.

The minister has worked hard on bringing forward a lot of changes. We have heard a lot about the many changes over the past year. We heard the many concerns that were expressed and we are responding to those in a timely fashion. As well, changes are taking place within the department to better adapt to and respond to the needs of our veterans on a first case basis.

Along with what else is going on, we believe that this initiative today is not the end of the journey, but is a strong start in response to those important priorities veterans have brought before us over these past few months.

Government Orders

•(1825)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we understand, appreciate and support the bill that is before us today. In listening to the debate, in particular to the New Democratic critic, a couple of thoughts came to mind. It is almost as if NDP members are trying to give the impression that they are encouraging the opposition to support the bill. I can assure everyone that the Liberal Party does not need to be led to do the right thing for veterans.

For many years I have had wonderful relationships with veterans and former ministers of Veterans Affairs. The Liberal Party cares just as much as any other political entity in the country about doing what is right for veterans. If members had listened to our most capable and able Liberal critic with regard to veterans affairs, they would have seen a very passionate, caring attitude to doing what is right for the veterans in our country.

Suffice it to say, Liberals do not need to be told about the importance of it by opposition parties, or even the government for that matter. We are glad to see that the bill is before us and we will give the necessary support to be respectful of both our veterans and the process.

Remember that it is the veterans who protected the integrity of our system and that they would surely want to ensure that there is a process for this to be done in a fair and appropriate fashion, making sure that if amendments can be made to the bill, they will be made in a proper fashion. It is very clear from the comments of the critic that we want this bill to pass, and we are going to go out of our way to make sure that happens.

I do not believe there are members who are greater champions *per se* than others who are passionate on this issue. There are a number of individuals within the chamber who would love to see this bill acted upon, to go through committee and, ultimately, receive royal assent before the budget is put before the chamber. I suspect that will in fact be the case.

I have had the opportunity to see bills pass through the Manitoba legislature and I must say that quite often when ministers want bills passed, they will go out of their way to work with members of the opposition and others to try to accommodate that speedy passage, to share with members what is happening within the department, and to provide briefings and so forth so there are no surprises. I would ask the government, in particular the minister responsible for this bill, to reflect on what types of actions he has taken to reach out to ensure that this bill will pass as quickly as it should. Suffice it to say, I would suggest that the minister could have done more.

Having said that, the Liberal Party sees the benefits and value of having this bill pass. For those on permanent impairment allowance for serious injuries, ensuring there is adequate compensation is something that Liberals are going to continue to fight for through passage of this particular bill. Moreover, as has been pointed out by the critic, this is not the end. This is a stepping stone—

•(1830)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member. He will have about 16 minutes remaining when this debate resumes.

STRENGTHENING AVIATION SECURITY ACT

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of Bill C-42, An Act to amend the Aeronautics Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): It being 6:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at the report stage of Bill C-42.

The question is on Motion No. 1.

Call in the members.

•(1855)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 156*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	André
Andrews	Armstrong
Arthur	Ashfield
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Block
Bouchard	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinoogee	Brunelle
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Coady
Crombie	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Day
DeBellefeuille	Dechert
Del Mastro	Deschamps
Devolin	Dion
Dorion	Dosanjh
Dreeschen	Duceppe
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Gallant	Garneau
Gaudet	Glover
Goldring	Goodale
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Guergis
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoepfner	Holder
Holland	Jean
Jennings	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kania	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kennedy (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laforest	Laframboise

Government Orders

Lake	Lamoureux
Lavallée	Lebel
LeBlanc	Lee
Lessard	Lévesque
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunny
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McCallum	McColeman
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
McLeod	Ménard
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Mourani	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Murray	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oliphant
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Paradis	Patry
Payne	Pearson
Petit	Plamondon
Poillievre	Pomerleau
Preston	Proulx
Raitt	Rajotte
Ratansi	Rathgeber
Regan	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Rota	Russell
Savage	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Sgro	Shea
Shipley	Shory
Silva	Simms
Simson	Sopuck
Sorenson	St-Cyr
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Szabo	Thi Lac
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Vincent
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilfert	Wong
Woodworth	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Young — 214

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Angus
Ashton	Atamanenko
Bevington	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Dewar	Donnelly
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Gravelle
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Leslie	Maloway
Marston	Mathysen
Mulcair	Siksay
Stoffer	Thibeault — 26

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin	Bellavance
Bigras	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Boucher	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Galipeau
Généreux	Guay

Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Hoback	
Lauzon	Lemay
Lemieux	Miller
Oda	Paquette
Scheer	Smith — 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[English]

CANADA-PANAMA FREE TRADE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-46, An Act to implement the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the Republic of Panama, the Agreement on the Environment between Canada and the Republic of Panama and the Agreement on Labour Cooperation between Canada and the Republic of Panama, as reported (without amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded divisions at report stage of Bill C-46.

The question is on Motion No. 1.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, if you seek it I believe you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with the Conservatives voting no.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Does the hon. government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to proceed this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, the Liberals will be voting no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote yes.

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, New Democrats are voting yes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, I vote no.

[Translation]

Mr. André Arthur: Madam Speaker, I vote no.

● (1900)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 157)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bevington	Bouchard
Brunelle	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson

Government Orders

Comartin
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
DeBellefeuille
Dewar
Dorion
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Gagnon
Gravelle
Côte-Nord)
Harris (St. John's East)
Laforest
Lavallée
Lessard
Maloway
Mathysen
Mourani
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Plamondon
Siksay
Stoffer
Thibeault

Crowder
Davies (Vancouver East)
Deschamps
Donnelly
Duceppe
Freeman
Gaudet
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Hughes
Laframboise
Leslie
Lévesque
Marston
Ménard
Mulcair
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Pomerleau
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Vincent — 52

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oliphant
Patry
Pearson
Poilievre
Proulx
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Russell
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simms
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Szabo
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wilfert
Woodworth
Yelich
Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Preston
Raitt
Ratansi
Regan
Richards
Rickford
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shipley
Silva
Simson
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Tilson
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young — 188

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Ashfield
Bains
Bennett
Bernier
Blackburn
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Crombie
Cuzner
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Dosanjh
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
Foote
Gallant
Glover
Goodale
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Hawn
Hoeppner
Holland
Jennings
Kania
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Merrifield

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Arthur
Bagnell
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brisson
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooog
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Coady
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Del Mastro
Dion
Dreeshen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eyking
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Garneau
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Hall Findlay
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Holder
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
LeBlanc
Lobb
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Menzies
Minna

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin
Bigras
Blaney
Boucher
Brunelle
Généreux
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Hoback
Lauzon
Lemieux
Oda
Scheer
Bellavance
Blais
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Galipeau
Guay
Lemay
Miller
Paquette
Smith — 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare Motion No. 1 lost.

[*English*]

The question is on Motion No. 2.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion with the Conservatives voting no.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, I would like to add the member for Honoré-Mercier to our list.

The Liberals will vote no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote yes.

[English]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, members of the NDP will be voting yes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, I vote no.

[Translation]

Mr. André Arthur: Madam Speaker, I will vote no.

(The House divided on Motion No. 2, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 158)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bevington	Bouchard
Brunelle	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Dewar	Donnelly
Dorion	Duceppe
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gravelle	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
Maloway	Marston
Mathysen	Ménard
Mourani	Mulcair
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Siksay	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Vincent — 52

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Coady
Crombie	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dion
Dosanjh	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)

Government Orders

Dykstra	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Foote	Fry
Gallant	Garneau
Glover	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hall Findlay
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoeyppner	Holder
Holland	Jean
Jennings	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kania	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Murray
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nicholson
Neville	O'Connor
Norlock	Obhrai
O'Neill-Gordon	Paradis
Oliphant	Payne
Patry	Petit
Pearson	Preston
Poillievre	Raitt
Proulx	Ratansi
Rajotte	Regan
Rathgeber	Richards
Reid	Rickford
Richardson	Rodriguez
Ritz	Russell
Rota	Saxton
Savage	Schellenberger
Scarpaleggia	Shea
Sgro	Shory
Shiple	Simms
Silva	Sopuck
Simson	Stanton
Sorenson	Strahl
Storseth	Szabo
Sweet	Toews
Tilson	Trost
Tonks	Tweed
Trudeau	Van Kesteren
Uppal	Vellacott
Van Loan	Wallace
Verner	Warkentin
Warawa	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Watson	
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilfert
Wong	Woodworth
Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Young — 189	

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin	Bellavance
Bigras	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Boucher	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Galpeau
Généreux	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Hoback	Lemay
Lauzon	Miller
Lemieux	

Government Orders

Oda
Scheer

Paquette
Smith— 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare Motion No. 2 lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on Motion No. 3.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, I believe you would find agreement to apply the previous vote to the current vote, with Conservatives voting no.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, the Liberals will vote no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois will vote yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, New Democrats vote yes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, I vote no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Madam Speaker, I will vote no.

[*English*]

(The House divided on Motion No. 3, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 159)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bevington	Bouchard
Brunelle	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Crowder
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Dewar	Donnelly
Dorion	Duceppe
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gravelle	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Côte-Nord)	
Harris (St. John's East)	Hughes
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Leslie
Lessard	Lévesque
Maloway	Marston
Mathysen	Ménard
Mourani	Mulcair
Paillé (Hochelaga)	Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Plamondon	Pomerleau
Siksay	St-Cyr
Stoffer	Thi Lac
Thibeault	Vincent— 52

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders

Anderson
Armstrong
Ashfield
Bains
Bennett
Bernier
Blackburn
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Crombie
Cuzner
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Dosanjh
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
Foote
Gallant
Glover
Goodale
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Hawn
Hoepfner
Holland
Jennings
Kania
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oliphant
Patry
Pearson
Poilievre
Proulx
Rajotte
Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shiplay
Silva
Simson
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Tilson
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal

Andrews
Arthur
Bagnell
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brison
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooog
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Coady
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Del Mastro
Dion
Dreeschen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eyking
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Garneau
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Hall Findlay
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Holder
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
LeBlanc
Lobb
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinty
McLeod
Menzies
Minna
Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Preston
Raitt
Ratansi
Regan
Richards
Rickford
Rodriguez
Russell
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simms
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Szabo
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren

Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young— 189

Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilfert
Woodworth
Yelich

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin
Bigras
Blaney
Boucher
Brunelle
Généreux
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Hoback
Lauzon
Lemieux
Oda
Scheer

Bellavance
Blais
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Galipeau
Guay
Lemay
Miller
Paquette
Smith— 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare Motion No. 3 lost. The next question is on Motion No. 4.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you would find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting no.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, the Liberals vote no.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois votes yes.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, New Democrats vote yes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Once again, Madam Speaker, I vote no.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Arthur: Madam Speaker, I vote no.

[*English*]

(The House divided on Motion No. 4, which was negatived on the following division:)

(*Division No. 160*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Weland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Bevington
Brunelle
Chow
Comartin
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
DeBellefeuille
Dewar
Dorion
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Gagnon
Gravelle
Côte-Nord)
Harris (St. John's East)

André
Ashton
Bachand
Bouchard
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver East)
Deschamps
Donnelly
Duceppe
Freeman
Gaudet
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Hughes

Laforest
Lavallée
Lessard
Malway
Mathysen
Mourani
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Plamondon
Siksay
Stoffer
Thibeault

Government Orders

Laframboise
Leslie
Lévesque
Marston
Ménard
Mulcair
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Pomerleau
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Vincent— 52

NAYS

Members

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Ambrose
Anderson
Armstrong
Ashfield
Bains
Bennett
Bernier
Blackburn
Boughen
Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)
Cadman
Calkins
Cannis
Carrie
Chong
Clement
Crombie
Cuzner
Davidson
Dechert
Devolin
Dosanjh
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra
Fantino
Finley
Fletcher
Foote
Gallant
Glover
Goodale
Gourde
Guergis
Harper
Hawn
Hoepfner
Holland
Jennings
Kania
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent
Komarnicki
Lake
Lebel
Lee
Lukiwski
Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Neville
Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon
Oliphant
Patry
Pearson
Poilievre

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Allison
Anders
Andrews
Arthur
Bagnell
Baird
Benoit
Bezan
Block
Braid
Brisson
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge
Calandra
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clarke
Coady
Cummins
D'Amours
Day
Del Mastro
Dion
Dreesen
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eyking
Fast
Flaherty
Folco
Fry
Garneau
Goldring
Goodyear
Grewal
Hall Findlay
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hiebert
Holder
Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Karygiannis
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kerr
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lamoureux
LeBlanc
Lobb
Lunn
MacAulay
MacKenzie
McCallum
McGuinity
McLeod
Menzies
Minna
Murray
Nicholson
O'Connor
Obhrai
Paradis
Payne
Petit
Preston

Government Orders

Proulx	Raitt
Rajotte	Ratansi
Rathgeber	Regan
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Saxton
Scarpaleggia	Schellenberger
Sgro	Shea
Shiple	Shory
Silva	Simms
Simson	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Szabo
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Trudeau	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	Wilfert
Wong	Woodworth
Wrzesniewski	Yelich
Young— 189	

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin	Bellavance
Bigras	Blais
Blaney	Bonsant
Boucher	Bourgeois
Brunelle	Galipeau
Généreux	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Hoback	
Lauzon	Lemay
Lemieux	Miller
Oda	Paquette
Scheer	Smith— 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare Motion No. 4 lost.

● (1905)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Minister of International Trade, CPC) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

● (1910)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 161*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Andrews
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bezan
Blackburn	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brisson
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooze
Cadman	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannis	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Casson
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Coady
Crombie	Cummins
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davidson	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dion
Dosanjh	Dreeschen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Dykstra	Eyking
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Folco
Foote	Fry
Gallant	Gameau
Glover	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hall Findlay
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoepfner	Holder
Holland	Jean
Jennings	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kania	Karygiannis
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lamoureux
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacAulay
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McCallum
McColeman	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Mendes	Menzies
Merrifield	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Neville	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oliphant	Paradis
Patry	Payne
Pearson	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Proulx	Raitt
Rajotte	Ratansi

*Adjournment Proceedings***ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS**

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

G8 AND G20 SUMMITS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, last summer in Toronto at the G20 summit, Canadians were shocked to see the largest mass arrests in our nation's history. They were deeply disturbed by the multiple and repeat violations of our most cherished democratic and constitutional rights. Eleven hundred Canadians were arrested without charges being laid or had their charges subsequently dropped.

New Democrats immediately went to work to get answers for the questions Canadians were asking: How could this happen in a country like Canada? Who is responsible? How do we ensure this could never happen again?

New Democrats were successful in getting the public safety committee to launch a parliamentary inquiry into the many issues surrounding security at the G8 and G20 summits. New Democrats helped secure five days of hearings, comprised of ten hours of testimony from twenty-three individuals, and these hearings revealed some very startling new information.

It was thanks to these hearings that we learned from Toronto Police chief, Bill Blair, that 90 Toronto police officers had covered or removed their name badges while policing the G20 summit, in direct violation of a policy set personally by Chief Blair.

We heard shocking testimony from *TV Ontario* news anchor, Steve Paikin, about the mistreatment of journalists who were covering protests at the summit. Journalists assembled in a public place on the streets of Toronto were told they had to leave or they would be arrested. One journalist was the victim of unprovoked police brutality when he had the audacity to assert his right to freely assemble in public and cover public events.

The committee heard graphic testimony about the conditions in detention from four students who were arrested at the University of Toronto gymnasium. We heard about the abusive, sexist, derogatory and violent taunts aimed at individuals in detention, language so shocking that I am not permitted to repeat it in the House but anyone can view the committee transcripts and see what I mean.

We heard that individuals were kept 20 people to a cage, were not given sufficient amounts of food or water, were denied access to medicine and were forced to toilet themselves in porta-potties with no doors in front of police and fellow detainees of both genders.

The committee was presented with conclusive evidence that the right to peacefully assemble in public, the right to be informed of the charges against oneself upon arrest, the right to contact a lawyer and the rights of free press and free speech were all systematically violated during the G20 summit in Toronto.

Rathgeber
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Rota
Savage
Scarpaleggia
Sgro
Shiple
Silva
Simson
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Tilson
Tonks
Trudeau
Uppal
Van Loan
Verner
Warawa
Watson
Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)
Wong
Wrzesnewskyj
Young— 189

Regan
Richards
Rickford
Rodriguez
Russell
Saxton
Schellenberger
Shea
Shory
Simms
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Szabo
Toews
Trost
Tweed
Van Kesteren
Vellacott
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilfert
Woodworth
Yelich

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Angus
Atamanenko
Bevington
Brunelle
Chow
Comartin
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
DeBellefeuille
Dewar
Dorion
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Gagnon
Gravelle
Côte-Nord)
Harris (St. John's East)
Laforest
Lavallée
Lessard
Maloway
Mathysen
Mourani
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Plamondon
Siksay
Stoffer
Thibeault

André
Ashton
Bachand
Bouchard
Charlton
Christopherson
Crowder
Davies (Vancouver East)
Deschamps
Donnelly
Duceppe
Freeman
Gaudet
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-
Hughes
Laframboise
Leslie
Lévesque
Marston
Ménard
Mulcair
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Pomerleau
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Vincent— 52

PAIRED

Members

Beaudin
Bigras
Blaney
Boucher
Brunelle
Généreux
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Hoback
Lauzon
Lemieux
Oda
Scheer

Bellavance
Blais
Bonsant
Bourgeois
Galipeau
Guay
Lemay
Miller
Paquette
Smith— 22

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): I declare the motion carried.

Adjournment Proceedings

The work of New Democrats in securing these hearings was crucial in obtaining this information and getting it on the public record. However, parliamentary committee hearings are not sufficient to get the necessary answers to the very serious questions that remain.

The committee hearings are limited to five and seven minute rounds of questions, which is not sufficient time to properly question a witness. Parliamentary committees do not hear evidence given under sworn oath in general. Parliamentary committees have limited power to subpoena documents and witnesses. The committee hearings are marked by partisanship when a more judicious approach is needed to get at the truth.

Despite the hours of hearings and the pages of testimony, key questions remain unanswered. Who is responsible for the mass rights violations? Who made the decisions on the ground that led to them?

Ultimately, Canadians want the government, their government, to be accountable for the events that took place on its watch. It was the Conservative government's summit and it spent \$1 billion of taxpayer money running it. The Conservative government planned and executed the security.

The government owes the Canadian people some answers and only a full judicial inquiry will get those answers. Will the government launch a public inquiry into the rights violations that occurred at the G20 summit in Toronto?

● (1915)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a fact that international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits that engage the participation of a large number of world leaders, routinely draw large numbers of protesters. Some protesters are determined to undermine the agenda of these meetings, destroy public and private property and carry out various acts of senseless violence. In fact, they plan to do so on a premeditated basis, planning and evolving techniques to cause as much disorder as they are capable of.

The international community has witnessed this trend over a decade now, starting with the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999. Similar acts of civil disobedience are not restricted to countries halfway around the world. Canada witnessed this firsthand in Quebec City in 2001. As a government, we were committed to ensuring this type of activity was kept to a minimum.

When international events, such as the G8 and G20 summits, are held in Canada, the RCMP works in partnership with police and security partners through the Integrated Security Unit. The goal is to provide a safe environment for the participants and visitors, as well as the general public.

The RCMP takes particular care to ensure the fundamental freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are respected. The provision of security for the summits was no small undertaking and required the largest, most complex peacetime security operation in Canada's history to protect Canadian residents, as well as guests and leaders from around the world.

Throughout the preparation, delivery and closing phases of the summits, this government has demonstrated that it takes security, transparency and accountability seriously. The government provided the necessary resources to ensure the summits could proceed in a safe and secure manner. To be as transparent as possible with security preparations, policing and security agencies worked closely with members of the community to keep them aware of security developments. This approach led directly to the summits being deemed a success by participants and by this government.

Although the summits were a large undertaking that required significant security requirements, the government remains committed to ensuring public trust and accountability. In fact, each of the participating Integrated Security Unit partners has existing police oversight mechanisms in place to receive and assess public complaints should members of the public wished to make a complaint about police response during the summits.

● (1920)

Mr. Don Davies: Madam Speaker, the 1,000 people who had their rights violated did not consider the summit a success.

The government likes to talk about law and order. The fact is the rule of law was abandoned in Toronto last summer and replaced with arbitrary and illegal acts by security forces that someone must be accountable for. The government claims to be tough on crime. Crimes were committed at the G20 summit, including by agents of the state and of the government. We know this because some charges have already been laid.

The government planned and funded an event that resulted in unprecedented violations of Canadians' most basic and fundamental rights: freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, the right to retain counsel and the right not to be arrested without proper cause, the right to security of person and property and freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. I hear laughing on the government side when I recite these facts.

Instead of stonewalling, why will the government not recognize the massive violations of these rights that occurred on its watch and call a public inquiry to get to the bottom of it if it has nothing to worry about?

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Madam Speaker, the government is committed to ensuring that the rights of Canadians, as guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, are protected. For this reason, the government allocated the required resources to protect Canadians and visitors to this country from those who would break Canadian laws and disrupt our society through violent actions.

The massive security operation that was involved in the G8 and G20 summits was designed to protect the internationally protected persons participating in the summits, residents of this country and the guests who came to peacefully participate in the summits. The security operation involved a large amount of resources to achieve these goals and was in fact highly successful.

There are existing mechanisms in place to handle public complaints and provide an oversight function for every police force that participated in the Integrated Security Unit. These oversight bodies exist to perform the oversight function that ensures police are accountable to the citizens of their respective jurisdiction.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had asked a question with regard to the procurement of the F-35s.

Very clearly, as a former parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance, I know how difficult it is when the government is in a deficit situation. For the current government, it is \$56 billion and it wants to spend \$9 billion, with a total package of probably \$16 billion on the F-35s.

I want to make it very clear that we support new aircraft for the military. The issue is how this is being brought about.

I want to quote the treasury board guidelines that say competition remains the cornerstone of the Canadian government procurement process, that it is the most efficient way of achieving both goals of procurement and gives suppliers the incentive to bring forward their best solution at a competitive price.

The issue is the government has decided to sole-source this contract. It has done it in a way in which the minister, prior to his announcement in July, during the summer when the House was not sitting, indicated that there would be a competitive process. The government claims that there has been a process, that it has been competitive and we should not worry. We should just be happy.

In fact, we know the cost of this aircraft, which was about \$50 million, is now up to about \$92 million. It has been delayed and delayed. There was a recent delay in January with regard to this. The head of the air force in the United States announced it.

When we have a competitive procurement program, which would allow various individual companies to come forward, why has the government decided to do a sole-source contract?

At the defence committee, we had various companies come forward. They all indicated that they would be prepared to bid. The problem is the government has decided, for whatever reason, to ignore the guidelines that have served many governments, both Liberal and Conservative, over the years, and simply has decided to do this as a sole-source contract.

I know my friend across the way will say that this is the best aircraft that money can buy. The problem is the metre is still running. We do not really know how much this will cost. We also do not have guaranteed economic benefits across the country. That is another issue in terms of the spinoffs that we will have. Normally we would have those benefits laid out. Again, this is a concern.

Lockheed Martin has indicated that it will be able to do this, but, again, the price has been going up and it is continuing to go up.

Given these guidelines, why ignore what has been a time-honoured tradition, best value for the taxpayer? Given the deficit we have today, we can afford no less than the best aircraft at the best possible price.

There is no contract to tear up because there is no contract. We are not interested in any of that nonsense. We are interested in an open competition. If it turns out that the F-35 is the best aircraft, fine. However, without that competition, it is very hard to determine that.

Adjournment Proceedings

What I heard before the defence committee was that there were others in the marketplace that were quite prepared to come forward.

It is the issue of this. If the government decides to bypass the procurement process on one of the largest military procurements in our history, what other things will it sole-source? What else will it bypass?

Why have procedures in place if the government is prepared to ignore them? To me, that is not best value for the taxpayer. The taxpayers obviously want to ensure they get that value and they cannot get it if it is all shrouded in secrecy and government tells them to trust it, that this is what it will go with and that it best meets the best needs of the military.

There is no question that I want the best for the Canadian air force. I just want to ensure that the process is followed.

● (1925)

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague 100%. We absolutely have to get the best aircraft for the best price for the Canadian men and women who will be put in harm's way for the next 30, 40 or 50 years. That is exactly what we are doing.

I want to thank him again for his question because it gives me a chance to clarify some of the misconceptions that have been put out there. The government is indeed committed to finding the best value for Canadian taxpayers' dollars in the case of our decision to purchase 65 F-35 Lightning II strike fighters. That is exactly what we are doing. We are following the most cost-effective option and it does follow Treasury Board guidelines. To say that it does not is just simply false.

Canada joined the multinational joint strike fighter partnership back in 1997 under the Liberals and conducted a competitive process to select what would become the JSF, the only fifth generation fighter aircraft available to Canada and the rest of the western world with the exception of the United States.

The whole point of the joint strike fighter program is to develop a cutting edge adaptable, sustainable, multi-role aircraft for the 21st century that permits full interoperability with our allies and friends, and benefits from economies of scale inherent in a project that foresees the production of nearly 5,000 aircraft over a 40-year span.

Indeed, experts from within the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces did conduct extensive evaluations of the leading fighter aircraft, analyzed data provided by industry, and through government-to-government channels, and undertook lengthy consultations with manufacturers.

Adjournment Proceedings

Of course, someone will come before the defence committee to say that they can do that. However, they are not the ones making the decisions. The decisions and the advice needs to be taken from the experts who have extensive experience and expertise in this because they have no agenda other than to get the Canadian Forces the best aircraft possible at the best price.

The conclusion was that only the F-35 meets all the mandatory criteria in the statement of operational requirements and these experts then recommended to the government that it acquire the F-35 joint strike fighter. It is the government's confidence in the expertise and experience of these military and civilian officials and their recommendations that has led to its choice of a procurement process.

To hold a second competitive process to select Canada's next generation fighter, as critics have called for, would waste time and money, and needlessly delay the replacement of our aging fleet of CF-18s, which will reach the end of their service life by 2020.

However, more fundamentally, such a competition would be a farce as we cannot hold a competition when there is only one viable competitor. To persist in holding such a lopsided competition would be to select the very aircraft that we already know is the only one that meets the air force's requirements. We would lose our place in the production schedule and to lose out on the lucrative economic opportunities for Canadian industry contained within the industrial participation plans signed among the JSF partner nations and Lockheed Martin.

Purchasing the F-35 through a competitive bidding process with an attached industrial regional benefits package, as the opposition has been demanding, would mean purchasing the aircraft outside the joint strike fighter memorandum of understanding that Canada signed onto in 2006. We get special privileges inside that MOU, not the least of which allows us to purchase the F-35 without having to pay foreign military sales fees or research and development recoupment costs that are built into the price for non-partner nations, such as Israel. These cost waivers amount to savings of \$850 million to \$900 million off the purchase price of our 65 aircraft.

Not only that, but those industrial participation plans that permit Canadian companies to bid on contracts for the full F-35 global supply chain would be immediately suspended with a decision to hold a competition as these plans are conditional on Canada purchasing the F-35 through the MOU.

Canada's world-class aerospace companies have already won \$350 million in contracts. That is even before full production has begun. Based on this success, estimates suggest that Canadian companies could win up to \$12 billion in contracts for production, sustainment, and follow-on development of the F-35 over the 40-year duration of the project.

The Canadian industry rightly sees the long-term benefits of this novel procurement process. By participating in such huge international projects, the government can help to stimulate and strengthen Canadian aerospace and defence companies to bid on and win major contracts worldwide.

The choice facing this government in this process is a no-brainer: proceed with the purchase under the best process—

● (1930)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. member for Richmond Hill.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Madam Speaker, the member talks about misconceptions; I talk about ill-conceived.

Here we have a situation where we do not have transparency or accountability for the Canadian taxpayer. We do not even know how much per aircraft this will cost because again the meter is running. It is costing more and more every day. This has certainly been seen in the United States. I would think that it is prudent for us to take a close look at this again.

The member indicates that people, of course, will come to the committee and say that they can sell us whatever it is and not to worry. The reality is that I do not think that some of the major firms that came before us would have said that they can do what it is we are looking for if, in fact, they could not deliver. They made it very clear that they can.

Obviously, Lockheed Martin has sold the government a nice bill of goods. It said there is no problem at all, but by the way do not worry about the cost as it goes up. As I have said, from \$50 million per unit now we are up to about \$92 million, and again it continues.

In a deficit situation, we need openness, transparency, and the government has not shown that in this case.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is not telling the truth about the price of the airplane. He is taking U.S. costs for U.S. aircraft. He is not talking about our program.

We are not writing a cheque for \$16 billion tomorrow. We are spreading the \$9 billion cost of the aircraft over seven years, a cost that includes simulators, infrastructure, training, and so on, a lot of which comes back to Canadian industry. Starting in 2015, the sustainment cost of the airplane will be spread over 20 years. We are not writing a cheque for \$16 billion tomorrow: this is spread out over a very long period of time.

The simple fact is that we have had 10 highly advanced countries look at the same challenge and every single one has come up with the same answer: the F-35. That is not a coincidence.

We have experts here whom we should trust. These are the people with no agenda. Every company has an agenda. That is a given, and somebody will come to us and say they can do whatever. Of course they are going to say that. That is why we hire people with the expertise and the experience to give us the advice and the answer.

Back in the CF-18 days, the program I was involved in, we had the same people saying the same kinds of things. At least in those days the Liberals came to their senses and supported the program. I wish the Liberals today had the same common sense.

TERRA NOVA NATIONAL PARK

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I am happy to rise in the House, as there is an impending issue in regard to my question for the Minister of the Environment.

We have a new minister now, but this has been a recurring issue, at least for me, since 2004. For the people who reside around Terra Nova National Park, it has been an issue going back decades, even half a century.

I do want to follow-up on my question some time ago about Highway 301 and Highway 310. I will get to that shortly, but right now as we speak, there is an issue that is brewing in the park that we need to discuss. I hope the minister is available to provide some answers on that and to get some input.

I have always thought of the town of Charlottetown, which exists around Terra Nova National Park, as the town that is pinned in by the park and its rules and regulations. Now I am biased and think that the Terra Nova National Park has some of the greatest scenery in the world, but for many of the residents who live near this park, what some would consider a right or freedom has been quashed.

Time and time again the government has said “no we cannot”. It would seem that every time I write a letter or approach the ministry, I get stonewalled on this issue. It just does not want to get involved at all, which brings us to February 13.

On February 13, residents of the town of Charlottetown will stage a protest. Here is what they want, and I think they are right in demanding it.

Snowmobiling now is an incredibly large activity within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is an economic generator, as well as a right for everybody to go among the trails. However, the people of Charlottetown cannot traverse the park at all to get to the main trailway that we have invested millions of dollars in grooming and in upkeep for the residents and tourists. They are not asking for free-for-all snowmobiling throughout the whole park; they are asking for an access route to the main trailway. It is an access route to get the people of this town among the general population out for snowmobiling. This is not a lot to ask. It is a trail that they know themselves; they have mapped it out.

This coming weekend they are going to make a strong statement to say that they feel they are not being listened to, and they are not. They should be given attention and should be given a fair hearing.

Also, residents within this area, not just of Charlottetown but also of the Eastport Peninsula and the town of Terra Nova, would like to have some pavement, but I will get to that a little later.

On the snowmobiling issue, there are other privileges, rights really, that other people throughout the province enjoy that they cannot enjoy because of where they are.

Let us keep in mind who came along first. Was it the park? No, the people and their ancestors did. Their ancestors, dating back many generations, have invested in this area. It was where they brought up their children and now where their great-great-grandchildren are growing up.

Adjournment Proceedings

The park came in and imposed restrictions that I believe are unfair. Again, they are not asking to snowmobile throughout the park as some sort of free-for-all recreational activity. Rather, these people are asking for an access route.

Would the minister please rise and help us address this important issue for the people of Charlottetown?

• (1935)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to remind the member the late night proceedings are supposed to relate to the question that he asked regarding the devastation from Hurricane Igor to Terra Nova National Park. I spoke to him, one-on-one, and explained the status of the road construction.

I was told that the question tonight related to the road construction in the park and the status report on that. Now the member is asking about snowmobile access. If he had given me fair notice, I would have been glad to speak to that, but that is not the case.

I will answer the question based on what I was told. It is in response to the status on the park.

Parks Canada is committed to ensuring that parks' roads are maintained and safe. Parks Canada's first priority is the safety of visitors, local residents, and the travelling public. Road maintenance is conducted regularly through the year on all through highways and roads in Terra Nova National Park, in accordance with the national Parks Canada standards.

Parks Canada recognizes the importance of roads in the parks to local residents and visitors alike. Emergency interim repairs to the roads in Terra Nova National Park were immediately implemented after Hurricane Igor. Permanent repairs to Highway 301, Highway 310 and the Trans-Canada Highway in the park were completed on schedule in November 2010.

Hurricane Igor swept across Newfoundland and Labrador on September 21, 2010, destroying bridges, flooding roads and homes, knocking out power lines, and leaving dozens of communities isolated and in a state of emergency. Many roads and highways were closed, including parts of the Trans-Canada Highway and most of the Burin Peninsula regional highways.

The member knows that the work was done quickly.

If the member would like to talk about snowmobile access, I would be glad to talk to him about that, but he has to give fair notice so we can be prepared. I look forward to talking to him more on that.

I also want to remind him that for 13 long years the Liberals had opportunities to deal with snowmobile access, to deal with the issues that are important to him. It took this Conservative government to get it done. That is always what happens. We keep our promises and we get things done.

Mr. Scott Simms: Get what done exactly, Madam Speaker?

I will tell members what the Conservatives have done. There was an announcement made last year, a big grandiose announcement that the highways in national parks out west had been twinned. I believe Jasper was the park. They twinned the highways. Good for them.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would be happy with just some asphalt to the town of Terra Nova. This is a capital construction project that is necessary for these communities.

I will leave the snowmobiling issue. But by the way, he mentioned that this snowmobiling issue is a new thing. I have been writing letters since 2006.

If the parliamentary secretary wants to talk about highways, it is a situation where we are only asking for about 10 kilometres of road on both Highway 301 and Highway 310, from the Eastport Peninsula to Terra Nova.

The repairs that were done were expedient and I congratulate the local staff and management who worked on that. We now need some capital money so that we can take a look at these roads. There are people travelling to school every day. People who are sick have to travel the road and it is becoming a mess—

● (1940)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member congratulating the staff at Parks Canada because they work around the clock to ensure public safety. They did a terrific job and he is absolutely right.

However, for him to say in the House that he has been writing letters since 2006 when he became a member of the official opposition, what about since 2004, when he was first elected? He did not get it done. Maybe the Liberal Party did not care enough about that area, but this government cares about the environment and getting things done.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Monday, February 7, 2011

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Canadian Human Rights Act

Mr. Siksay	7757
Bill C-389. Third reading	7757
Mr. Hawn	7759
Mr. Bagnell	7759
Mr. Rathgeber	7760
Ms. Leslie	7761
Mrs. Jennings	7762
Mr. Siksay	7763
Division on motion deferred	7764

Suspension of Sitting

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:55 a.m.)	7764
--	------

Sitting Resumed

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)	7764
--------------------------------------	------

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada-Panama Free Trade Act

Bill C-46. Report stage	7764
Mr. Atamanenko	7764
Mr. Trost	7765
Mr. Regan	7765
Mr. Keddy	7767
Ms. Ratansi	7767
Mr. Bagnell	7767
Ms. Ratansi	7768
Ms. Sgro	7769
Mr. Bevington	7769
Mr. Bagnell	7770
Ms. Crowder	7770
Mr. Lamoureux	7771
Ms. Sgro	7771
Ms. Charlton	7772
Mr. Bagnell	7772
Ms. Charlton	7773
Ms. Crowder	7774
Ms. Coady	7775
Mr. Marston	7775
Mr. Cuzner	7776
Ms. Crowder	7777
Ms. Coady	7777
Ms. Charlton	7778
Mr. Keddy	7779
Ms. Ashton	7779
Mr. Lamoureux	7780
Ms. Crowder	7780

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Internet

Mr. Braid	7781
-----------------	------

Human Rights

Mr. Silva	7781
-----------------	------

Stéfane Bougie

Mrs. DeBellefeuille	7781
---------------------------	------

Volunteer Service Medal

Mr. Marston	7781
-------------------	------

The Economy

Mr. Breitzkreuz	7782
-----------------------	------

Salvation Army

Mr. Cuzner	7782
------------------	------

Volunteerism

Mr. Poilievre	7782
---------------------	------

Female Genital Mutilation

Ms. Deschamps	7782
---------------------	------

Curling

Ms. Hoepfner	7782
--------------------	------

Ernie Regehr

Mr. Patry	7783
-----------------	------

Female Genital Mutilation

Mrs. Grewal	7783
-------------------	------

Derelict Vessels

Ms. Crowder	7783
-------------------	------

The Economy

Mrs. Boucher	7783
--------------------	------

Member for Beauce and Bill 101

Mr. Plamondon	7783
---------------------	------

The Conservative Government

Mr. Trudeau	7784
-------------------	------

Canadian Museum of Immigration

Mr. Kerr	7784
----------------	------

ORAL QUESTIONS

Canada-U.S. Relations

Mr. Goodale	7784
-------------------	------

Mr. Cannon	7784
------------------	------

Mr. Goodale	7784
-------------------	------

Mr. Cannon	7784
------------------	------

Mr. Goodale	7784
-------------------	------

Mr. Cannon	7784
------------------	------

Quebec Language Policy

Mr. Rodriguez	7785
---------------------	------

Mr. Paradis	7785
-------------------	------

Mr. Rodriguez	7785
---------------------	------

Mr. Paradis	7785
-------------------	------

Harmonization of Sales Taxes

Mr. Duceppe	7785
-------------------	------

Mr. Paradis	7785
-------------------	------

Petitions	
Multiple Sclerosis	
Mr. Silva	7793
Animal Welfare	
Mr. Silva	7793
Canada Post	
Mr. Silva	7793
Multiple Sclerosis	
Mr. Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	7793
Veterans Affairs	
Ms. Mathysen	7793
Status of Women Canada	
Ms. Mathysen	7794
Justice	
Mrs. O'Neill-Gordon	7794
Afghanistan	
Mr. Maloway	7794
Social Housing	
Mr. Laforest	7794
Multiple Sclerosis	
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7794
Afghanistan	
Mr. Bevington	7794
Employment Insurance	
Mr. Simms	7794
Questions on the Order Paper	
Mr. Lukiwski	7795
Privilege	
Standing Committee on Finance	
Mr. Brison	7795
Mr. Lukiwski	7797

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Canada-Panama Free Trade Act	
Bill C-46. Report Stage	7797
Mr. St-Cyr	7797
Mr. Maloway	7798
Mr. Laforest	7798
Ms. Crowder	7799
Mr. Maloway	7800
Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga)	7801
Mr. Maloway	7802
Mr. Lessard	7802
Division on Motion No. 1 deferred	7802
Division on Motion No. 2 deferred	7803
Division on Motion No. 3 deferred	7803

Division on Motion No. 4 deferred	7803
Divisions deferred	7803

Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act

Mr. Blackburn	7803
Bill C-55. Second reading	7803
Mr. Maloway	7805
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7805
Mr. Lessard	7806
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7806
Mr. Blackburn	7809
Mr. André	7809
Mr. Stoffer	7810
Mr. André	7810
Mr. Blackburn	7812
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7813
Mr. Stoffer	7813
Mr. Stoffer	7814
Mr. Blackburn	7816
Ms. Duncan (Etobicoke North)	7817
Mr. André	7817
Mr. Kerr	7818
Mr. Lamoureux	7820

STRENGTHENING AVIATION SECURITY ACT

Bill C-42. Report Stage	7820
Motion agreed to	7821

Canada-Panama Free Trade Act

Bill C-46. Report Stage	7821
Motion No. 1 negatived	7822
Motion No. 2 negatived	7824
Motion No. 3 negatived	7825
Motion No. 4 negatived	7826
Mr. Van Loan	7826
Motion for concurrence	7826
Motion agreed to	7827

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

G8 and G20 Summits	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	7827
Mr. MacKenzie	7828
National Defence	
Mr. Wilfert	7829
Mr. Hawn	7829
Terra Nova National Park	
Mr. Simms	7831
Mr. Warawa	7831

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