

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 037 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[English]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for London West.

[Members sang the national anthem]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize the brave and courageous service of a young constable from my local Miramichi Police Force named Andrew Vickers.

On October 19, a woman threw herself into the Miramichi River in an attempt to take her own life. Constable Vickers braved strong currents and frigid water temperatures to save a life, while at the same time risking his own. Constable Vickers was supported through the rescue by Sergeant Les Saunders and Corporal Charlie Barter, who both provided encouragement and assistance. Following the rescue, the Miramichi Fire Department dispatched a boat to have the woman transported to the nearest ambulance. Thankfully, these efforts were successful and a life was saved.

This event shines a light on the vital importance of our essential services to communities across this country. It reminds us that suicide and mental health are serious problems that affect individual lives everywhere.

We on the Miramichi are happy to see Andrew following in the footsteps of his dad, a proud father, our very own Sergeant-at-Arms, Kevin Vickers.

. . .

[Translation]

SOUTH SHORE COMMUNITY CREDIT ASSOCIATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the 10th

anniversary of a community credit organization on the south shore, ACERS, the Association communautaire d'emprunt de la Rive-Sud. Over the years, ACERS has supported hundreds of potential entrepreneurs in my region who were eligible for non-traditional funding to establish their businesses. By fighting poverty and social exclusion through community credit—money loaned by individuals in the community—ACERS has helped low-income individuals start businesses and create their own jobs. One example is textile designer Mary-Lou Senécal, who was an unemployed mother in 2008, but who has now been running MaryChâle for three years and employs two other people. For 10 years, ACERS has played a unique role on the south shore and works in partnership with key socio-economic organizations in the region.

This year, 17 new entrepreneurs achieved their dreams. More than 200 people have taken advantage of the association's community credit services. This past weekend, in Alma, the general council of the New Democrat Quebec section adopted a resolution to support the development of community credit. Long live community credit and long live ACERS.

* * *

[English]

2011 QUINTE BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize the 2011 Quinte Business Achievement Award recipients from my riding of Northumberland—Ouinte West.

Among those businesses recognized, NOD Apiary Products Ltd. received the Agribusiness of the Year Award; Harbourview Marina was the recipient of the Environmental Leadership Award; Machining Centre Inc. received the Manufacturing Business of the Year Award; and RiverSide Music was recognized with the Business Excellence Award. Among the entrepreneurs recognized are Dr. Tanya Rawluk, who received the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and Glenn Kozak, who received Business Person of the Year Award.

Those entrepreneurs and local businesses are dedicated, innovative community leaders who will ensure that the private business sector continues to flourish in Quinte West. I would like to congratulate all recipients of the 2011 Quinte Business Achievement Awards and wish them all the best in the their future endeavours.

Statements by Members

KEN RITTER

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I learned of the passing this week of Saskatchewan farmer Ken Ritter, the first producer-elected chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board. He was just 64 years old. He held degrees from three different universities, taught school in Australia and practised law in Regina, but Ken's home and heart were on the farm in west central Saskatchewan.

He was an active citizen through Rotary, Kinsmen and hockey, through surface rights arbitrations and farmland security legislation, as a commissioner on the National Transportation Agency and then, for a decade, elected director and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Intellectually rigorous with a passion for honest debate, Ken was an innovator, always generating new ideas to better serve farmers.

With his three children, Ramon, Felice and Nicole, eight grandchildren, other family members and many friends, we will cherish his memory.

● (1410)

MARTIN GOUDREAULT

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day Canadian military personnel risk their lives to protect our nation.

On June 6 of last year, Sergeant Martin Goudreault from my riding paid the ultimate price in Kandahar doing the job he loved: leading soldiers. Sergeant Goudreault is survived by his parents, Aurel and Micheline, and two sisters, Chantal and Valerie. His last deployment was a reconnaissance with 1 Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group.

On Saturday, October 15, his hometown of Temiskaming Shores honoured him by naming the beautiful park overlooking the community in his honour. He will continue to watch over his community. He will be forever remembered for his sacrifice.

God bless Sergeant Goudreault. Dieu bénit sergent Goudreault.

[Translation]

SAINT-LAMBERT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to greet the people in my riding of Saint-Lambert.

Over the past weeks, I have met with representatives of various community groups in my riding. I would like to thank the following groups in particular: Le Virage, la Table itinérance Rive-Sud, la Maison de la famille LeMoyne and La Traversée. The work they are undertaking in their respective communities is remarkable.

I would like to focus on the wonderful work being done by La Traversée. Since 1984, this organization has given considerable help to thousands of women and children on Montreal's south shore who have been victims of sexual abuse. The organization's violence prevention and philosophy for children program is being used in

Quebec schools and is generating more and more interest outside the province as well.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the team at La Traversée for all that they bring to our community.

I will continue to bring the concerns and hopes of the people of Saint-Lambert here to the House and thus I will, to the best of my abilities, defend the best interests of our riding.

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[English]

ATLANTIC AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame will induct Bill Pryor of Williamstown-Centreville, New Brunswick.

While nominated by the New Brunswick Cattle Producers in recognition of over 50 years of contributions to the farm community and farm families, Bill has a deep understanding of many sectors of agriculture.

Those who know Bill are very aware of the current health challenges he is facing in his battle with ALS. However, during one of my recent visits, he was all smiles after the family had taken him out to visit the cattle in the family vehicle.

He also did not miss the chance to speak to me about suggestions on the next round of ag programs. Bill has always considered the future of agriculture, including the support of 4-H, specifically his commitment to the 4-H component of the Carleton County Spring Show and Sale. The first 4-H steers were exhibited in 1963 and, to his credit, the show continues to be a success today.

Bill has a positive influence on the industry that has been so near to his heart. He is truly deserving of this hall of fame recognition. I thank Bill for sharing with me just some of his expertise, but more important was the sharing of his valuable time. I congratulate my friend.

* * *

SPINAL CORD INJURIES

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to bring attention to a situation that affects over 86,000 Canadians today and 4,300 more Canadians every year.

I am referring to Canadians living with spinal cord injuries at great personal cost to themselves and costing billions of health care dollars every year.

Today, 25 members of this House and the other place are spending their working day in wheelchairs to get a tiny taste of the challenges that people with spinal cord injuries face in everyday activities that we take for granted. This is the annual chair-leader event, sponsored by the Canadian Paraplegic Association, and I am proud to be a part of it

Many Canadians with spinal cord injuries have accomplished great things and have provided us with inspiration, people like Rick Hansen, athletes like Chantal Petitclerc, and our own colleagues in this House from Montcalm and Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

We need to do more than take inspiration from these people. We need to raise awareness of the challenges that all Canadians with spinal cord injury face and do everything we can to support treatment and, what is very important, research and development.

We have made a lot of progress, but there are many steps left not taken.

● (1415)

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to pay tribute to a group of Canadians who deserve our special congratulations. They are the exceptional teachers who have received the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence.

These teachers, from all provinces and territories, have been nominated and judged as exemplifying the best qualities of teaching.

In my own province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have Catherine Downey, David Gill and Corey Morgan, a superhero teaching trio at Amalgamated Academy in Bay Roberts, who were awarded the Certificate of Excellence.

Glenn Normore and Darla O'Reilly of Holy Trinity in Torbay, Sean Penney of Holy Heart and Yvonne Dawe of Bishops College, both in St. John's, and Erin Walsh of St. Peter's in Mount Pearl were all awarded the Certificate of Achievement.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in congratulating these award-winning teachers and, through them, all teachers throughout our country who dedicate their careers to giving our children the guidance, the skills and the inspiration they need to be the best that they can be.

DIWALI

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the resounding mandate of 67.4% given to me by the people of Calgary East in the recent election is testament to the faith they have placed in me and in our Conservative government. We will not let them down.

In the past year, our government has increased OAS benefits to seniors and helped fund affordable housing construction. As part of the Asia-Pacific Gateway, we are in the process of upgrading 52nd Street South East, which will enhance the safety and efficiency of transportation infrastructure.

We are working hard to keep our streets safe and neighbourhoods free of crime. In this regard, we remain committed to passing the safe streets and communities act within 100 sitting days.

Statements by Members

Before I finish, I would like to remind all members that today is Diwali, the Festival of Lights. My family and I take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy Diwali and a prosperous New Year.

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[Translation]

LA MOUVANCE WOMEN'S CENTRE

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize the work of La Mouvance, Centre de femmes, a very dynamic organization serving the Saint-Eustache region. This organization helps break the isolation of women by providing services for the various stages of their lives.

I would especially like to acknowledge the dedication of Angèle Poulin, who has devoted herself to La Mouvance, Centre de femmes in Saint-Eustache for over 22 years. Her many accomplishments include organizing events in the Deux-Montagnes RCM for the World March of Women, creating a food assistance program, contributing to the founding of Maison d'Esther, establishing La Chanterelle, a drop-in daycare centre, and organizing conferences on health and legal aid.

On October 12, 2011, Ms. Poulin was awarded the Order of Saint-Eustache and the title of "great citizen". I would like to thank her for the work she does and wish La Mouvance continued success.

. . .

[English]

ALEXANDER JOHNSTON

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—West-dale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, a Canadian soldier was laid to rest with full military honours at Cantimpré Canadian Cemetery in Sailly-lez-Cambrai, France.

Private Alexander Johnston died during the Battle of the Canal du Nord on September 29, 1918, a battle fought during the final 100 days of the war.

Private Johnston was born in Scotland in 1885 and moved to Hamilton, Ontario, in his late twenties. He fought as part of the 78th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Raillencourt-Sailly, France.

The remains of this former steelworker were discovered in 2008 and were identified through DNA testing earlier this year.

Private Johnston paid the ultimate price in the service of our country. This morning, it was Canada's honour and duty to properly lay this brave soldier to rest.

Oral Questions

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT PRINCIPLE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 10th anniversary of the Responsibility to Protect Principle, which authorizes international action "to protect a state's population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity" if that state is unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens—or worse, is the author of its criminality, as in the recent case of Libya—is not only a landmark normative principle but has been characterized as the most significant development in the defence of human rights since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Yet, given that there have been millions of preventable deaths over the past 10 years, what ultimately matters is translating this principle into practice, organized around the four pillars of the responsibility to prevent to begin with, the responsibility to respond and protect, the responsibility to bring war criminals to justice, and the responsibility to rebuild.

In a word, this principle is about saving lives, about protecting international peace and security, and about protecting human security. We ignore it at our peril.

(1420)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

We are united as Conservatives from coast to coast to coast to end the measure that unfairly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. It does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous criminals.

However, there is nothing but division within the NDP on this important issue, and no one need take my word for it. The opposition House leader confirmed it on Friday.

Canadians are confused as to where the NDP stands. The member for Thunder Bay—Superior North said that the registry was "ineffective" to stop crime. However, the NDP leadership candidate from Outremont said, "to destroy the long gun registry is to destroy lives". The NDP member for Davenport said that he was for an "about all out ban" on guns.

The NDP members need to be honest with Canadians. Will they stand with this government and end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, or will it force its members to—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to recognize the 40th anniversary of the policy of official multiculturalism in Canada.

Canada has always been a meeting place of diverse cultures. From the distinct traditions of Canada's first nations to the waves of immigrants from across the world who have come to call Canada home, we are a shining example to the world of multiculturalism at work

We have managed to create a country of tolerance and respect. We have built a nation where we can unite as Canadians while retaining our unique customs, languages and traditions. While we join together as proud Canadians, we celebrate our differences.

Multiculturalism is not always an easy proposition. It can be challenging to understand the perspectives of people who do not share one's background, religion or cultural practices. However, official multiculturalism recognizes that these challenges are well worth overcoming.

In communities across Canada, we recognize that diversity makes us a stronger, more vibrant society.

On behalf of every member of the official opposition, I express our best wishes for another 40 years of celebrating multiculturalism.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is leading the way. Yesterday, Standard & Poor's affirmed Canada's AAA rating. Standard & Poor's noted that Canada's superior economic situation and strong monetary policy make Canada a stable force amid global economic uncertainty.

Our Conservative government has been focused on what matters to Canadians: job creation and promoting economic growth. This is just another example of Canada's global economic leadership, which includes the strongest job growth record in the G7, the soundest banks in the world, and forecasts showing that Canada's economy will be among the strongest in the G7 this year and next.

However, Canada is not immune to the economic turbulence facing the global economy. That is why our government is working hard to implement the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and its job creation measures. The last thing Canadian families need now is the NDP's massive job-killing tax hikes that would cost jobs and hurt the economy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance finally realized that his numbers were too rosy, that he had been overly optimistic with his economic projections. He could have saved a lot of time if he had listened to the NDP.

Despite the flip-flop, the minister is still intent on cutting services to people and giving big gifts to big corporations. Why does he not take this opportunity to change direction?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thankfully, we did not listen to the NDP, because had we done so, we would have massively increased our deficits, our debt, our taxes, and we would really be in the soup.

Instead, we took the responsible course. We paid down debt when the times were good. We have managed to responsibly control spending while investing in the economy during the global downturn. We have cut taxes cumulatively by \$190 billion, for over \$3,000 for the average family, leading Canada to have the strongest economy in the G7. As well, we have created over 650,000 net new jobs.

• (1425)

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the session, the NDP has been saying that the government is wrong, that the Minister of Finance has to face the facts and that his projections are too optimistic. Economists are echoing the warnings of the NDP, the IMF and many others. The question now is whether the Conservatives are going to make the necessary corrections, since the minister rather reluctantly had to downgrade his economic forecast.

Will he finally go the rest of the way and cancel the next corporate tax cut?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan for creating jobs. That is how it has created more than 650,000 new jobs since the beginning of the global recession. The NDP has a plan for killing jobs. It wants to increase taxes for job creators. We are against this destructive plan that will cut the number of jobs available to Canadians. We are pleased that Standard & Poor's has again today affirmed Canada's AAA rating because of—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the number of homicides committed with long guns has decreased, the Conservatives have decided to turn a deaf ear with regard to the firearms registry. They are turning their backs on women, victims, the police, the victims' ombudsman and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. They are even going to destroy the data in their ideological blindness.

Why destroy \$2 billion in accumulated information when the provinces and the police want to keep it?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are getting rid of the ineffective and useless long gun registry. I agree with a number of experts on that.

[English]

Let me quote someone who said, "I have always believed that the gun registry is a failure in principle and a failure in policy, and that we could have done much better with different policies." Who said that? It was the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Oral Questions

Another member said, "My intention is to see the wasteful long gun registry ended." Who said that? It was the NDP member from Thunder Bay.

Another member said, "I've always opposed the long gun registry because I thought it was unfair to law-abiding firearms owners." Who said that? It was the NDP member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new information released today by Statistics Canada shows that homicides in Canada are at a 45-year low. The main factor is fewer deaths caused by rifles. Yet, on this very day, the Conservative government wants not only to turn its back on police, but also to burn all the data that helps keep the homicide rate in Canada low.

Why is the government putting a divisive ideology ahead of our communities' safety?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the registry has done nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. In order to protect the privacy of law-abiding long gun owners, records held by the Canadian firearms program on currently registered long guns will be destroyed.

Let us be clear. The only reason the NDP wishes to retain these records is to reinstate the long gun registry whenever it is in the position to do so. What we will do is abolish the long gun registry once and for all.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is no excuse to destroy life-saving data that would help police keep our streets safe. The Conservative government's plan is tantamount to a \$2 billion bonfire. It wants to destroy the data that police use 17,000 times a day and which the police have asked the government to keep. The police deserve a fighting chance against gun crime in Canada. If provinces also want to maintain this information for their own use, they should have the right to do so.

Why is the government handcuffing law enforcement in Canada by burning all the records?

• (1430)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as one woman from the Georgian Bay Women's Outdoors Workshops stated:

As a woman, the long gun registry does not make me feel any safer or more secure. It is wasteful, ineffective and reduces funding to do real things. The 2 billion dollars that have already been spent would have been better used on programs like healthcare, childcare, women's issues and allocating moneys to policing agencies to fight criminal and real crime.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has been an important officer of Parliament for 20 years and has always been bilingual. Even the new position description published in the *Canada Gazette* stated that proficiency in both official languages is essential.

How does the government explain that its nominee is not bilingual?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government voluntarily sought bilingual candidates for this position. In the end, this candidate was chosen on the basis of merit. Mr. Ferguson has made a commitment to become a fluent speaker of both official languages and has begun taking courses. We commend him for that.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has put the House in a difficult position. When the Prime Minister asked the leaders of the opposition parties for their views on this particular candidate, the government did not disclose the fact that he was unilingual. It did not tell us that fact. Now we are facing a situation where we find that this is the case.

We had assumed that because it was in the *Canada Gazette*, the government was going to meet the criteria which it itself had set out in the *Canada Gazette* when it was advertising for this position.

For the last 20 years, the Auditor General of Canada has been bilingual. Every single officer of this Parliament has a working capacity in both languages. Surely the government—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member is out of time.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, the government voluntarily sought candidates who were bilingual. This candidate, after an exhaustive process with many candidates, was identified as the most meritorious candidate—

Mr. Marc Garneau: That's unbelievable.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Members will come to order.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, the government voluntarily sought candidates who were bilingual. There was an exhaustive selection process. The most meritorious candidate in the process was selected. It is clear from the leader of the third party's remarks that he was found to be a quality meritorious candidate. Mr. Ferguson has undertaken to become proficient in both of our official languages and he has already begun taking courses to do so.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is incorrect. I told the Prime Minister in my correspondence with him that I had no basis upon which to judge the qualifications of the individual in question and that it was going to be up to the

House to make that decision. Members can look at the official correspondence if they want.

We were never told that the candidate was unilingual. That remains a fact.

Is it the position of the government that there is no competent, qualified and fully meritorious candidate in this entire country who is bilingual? Is that the government's position? It is a ludicrous—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, there was an exhaustive selection process. Many candidates were considered. Mr. Ferguson was identified as the best qualified candidate for the position. He was selected on that basis. Of course, the candidates are referred to the House for this position.

I would underscore that Mr. Ferguson has committed to become proficient in both of our official languages and has already begun the process to do so.

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, information obtained by the NDP reveals just how out of touch the Conservative government is with families in need. Almost 25% of people who call Service Canada about their EI hang up because they cannot reach anyone. Half of all seniors who call for help do not even get an automated message. Now, Conservatives want to take an axe to Service Canada.

As the economy slows down, why is the government cutting services that struggling families rely on?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are doing just the opposite. While our priority is to ensure we create jobs and growth in the economy, for those who do need to access EI, we are modernizing the service. We are automating the service so Canadians can get better service, so they can get it faster, and so it is more affordable. We are working on that and we are making good progress so we can help Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have lost their jobs and who so desperately need help are losing hope. Almost 25% of people who call Service Canada about their EI hang up because they cannot reach anyone to get answers to their questions. That is unacceptable. Imagine the problems that there will be when EI processing centres close.

Families who have lost their jobs deserve better. Why is the Conservative government abandoning families when they need help?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to help those who need access to EI. We are modernizing and automating the system so that Canadians can get better service, so they can get it faster and so it is more affordable.

[English]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors who built this country are being left out in the cold by the government. Half of all CPP-related calls to Service Canada are completely ignored. There is no one to help, not even an automated message. Seniors are looking to their government for the help they deserve, but all they find is a dead phone line.

Why are Conservatives proposing more cuts after they have already failed to provide even basic services to seniors?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her facts wrong. We are consolidating and improving the service for seniors and indeed for all Canadians. We are working right now, and have been working for some time, with some very old, outdated systems, very cumbersome paper systems.

That is why we are automating systems, to make the service faster, more effective and more efficient, so we can indeed help seniors and all Canadians get access to the services and benefits to which they are entitled.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are simply not in line with the government's answer. The Conservatives are going to cut services that are already broken. They refuse to lift seniors out of poverty, and now Service Canada will not even answer the phone. Our seniors deserve better from their government. Canadians are just learning about those service reduction problems, but the Conservatives have known about it all along.

Will the government cancel the cuts to Service Canada, or just keep ignoring our seniors' calls for help? The phones are ringing.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained, we are consolidating the processing of employment insurance. That will have absolutely no impact on services to seniors such, as CPP and old age security. Why are we doing this? Because we are dealing with an antiquated paper system that needs to be replaced and automated so we can provide services faster, more accurately and more affordably.

As for Service Canada, we are keeping all of our front-line personnel in place, so Canadians can get access to the services they need.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if this is the government's response, perhaps the government does not understand what people are going through.

In September, nearly one in four Canadians was unable to reach anyone at Service Canada about their EI. Half of all seniors calling about CPP and old age security had to hang up because they could not reach anyone. Meanwhile, the government continues to make cuts at Service Canada.

Oral Questions

Do the Conservatives consider these cuts to services acceptable when more and more people are unable to get through and have to hang up?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are improving the services that Service Canada provides to Canadians, including access to the guaranteed income supplement and pensions. We have improved services for seniors. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against these improvements.

● (1440)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are saying that they are doing better than previous governments, but this is not the sort of attitude that really helps people.

Canadians are still not getting any answers from Service Canada and they are getting even fewer answers from the Conservatives in the House of Commons. The Conservatives are telling Service Canada and its employees to do more with less. However, statistics show that the services currently being provided are already inadequate.

When will this government understand that overburdening Service Canada workers will not result in better service to the Canadian public? It is a simple question, and the answer should be simple as well. What impact will the new cuts to services have on the public?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility to taxpayers: to put their money to good use. That means that Service Canada must operate effectively. That is why we are improving and modernizing our systems so that they are more effective, efficient and affordable. This will allow us to provide better service to Canadians.

. . .

[English]

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as RCMP contract talks resume this week, Conservatives continue to bring more threats than ideas to the negotiating table. The province and municipalities have said they are ready to negotiate in good faith in order to keep B.C. families safe. They are asking the government to be serious and constructive.

When will the minister stop using the public safety of British Columbians as a bargaining chip?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the solicitor general of British Columbia forwarded some of her concerns that she indicated that she would provide to me in September. I understand officials are sitting down and working together with British Columbia officials.

Oral Questions

I understand, at the same time, that some of the municipalities that are looking at moving from municipal police forces to the RCMP would like this settled. I would urge the British Columbia government to look at the proposals that we have on the table. We will look at what it presented and come to a fair conclusion.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with weeks left it shows how out of touch Conservatives are with reality. Conservatives are asking British Columbians to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to the federal government for rejecting its unfair HST and now Conservatives are threatening to pull the police off our

The province and municipalities are ready and willing to talk, so when will the government stop playing games with our public safety and start listening to British Columbians?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not hear the answer. Officials are sitting down to look over the proposals that the solicitor general from British Columbia finally forwarded to the federal officials. I thank her for sending those proposals to us. I would urge the officials to work out the bugs that remain in this contract and get to ensuring that we have an appropriate RCMP contract in place.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is constantly bragging about its law and order agenda, but it is threatening to pull the RCMP off British Columbia streets if it does not agree to a new labour contract by the end of November. Fortunately, negotiations will resume this week.

British Columbia families are wondering whether the Conservatives will start working in their best interests and in the interests of their safety, or if the Conservatives will continue to threaten to pull police officers off the streets.

British Columbia is prepared to negotiate in good faith. Are the Conservatives prepared to do the same?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I provided the answer and I do not know if the individual heard me. I would like to quote the Canadian Police Association, which members opposite should take to heart. It said:

We're quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made to work on behalf of front-line police officers, specifically with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation that has been a priority since the last election.

We would ask the NDP members to get off of their high horse and actually do things that make a difference to front line police officers and the citizens they serve.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the world teeters on the cusp of another downturn, with the turmoil and risk today in Europe, especially, will the government take three sensible steps to help make Canadians less vulnerable: cancel \$1.2 billion in job killing EI payroll tax increases, give seniors flexibility in managing their RRSPs and RRIFs, and make tax credits equally available to low-income kids, caregivers and volunteer firefighters, not just the more wealthy?

Would the government do these three sensible things?

(1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I did meet with the private sector economists, as I usually do before the fall economic update and of course before the budget each spring. We are on track for modest economic growth in Canada. We are certainly relatively better off than other industrialized countries.

We did the economic action plan when it was required. The Liberals did not support the economic action plan when it was needed a couple of years ago. It has helped create 650,000 net new jobs in this country.

I am pleased that we have taken steps in this budget that is before the House to increase-

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wascana.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very specific. There are about 25 million Canadians who file tax returns. About 15 million report taxable income, but close to 10 million do not, because their incomes are not high enough.

However, they do have children who want to be in arts programs. They do volunteer to be firefighters. They do provide home care to sick or elderly family members.

Why are these 10 million lower-income Canadians less worthy than those who are better off? To include them would cost something less than \$80 million. Why will the government not simply do this?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we have taken steps like the member suggests, like the arts credit for children and the economic action plan, he voted against them, as did the Liberal Party.

I am very pleased that Moody's recently confirmed Canada's top credit rating, a triple-A credit rating, and yesterday Standard and Poor's did the same thing, saying, "Canadian authorities have a strong track record in managing past economic and fiscal crises and delivering economic growth".

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's police want to continue to access the data in the long gun registry. The Province of Quebec would like to use the data to create its own gun control system.

This is no more a matter of privacy than car registration. Why is the government so intent on destroying a database that could be so useful to the provinces? Why does the government think it can destroy the past and control the future?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the registry has nothing to do with keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

In order to protect the privacy of law-abiding long gun owners, those whom that member and his party subjected to gross violations of their privacy, records held by the Canadian firearms program on currently registered long guns will be destroyed.

Let us be clear. The only reason the NDP and the Liberals want those records maintained is in order to reinstate the long gun registry, should they ever form a coalition to do so.

. . .

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that cuts to the public service could prevent qualified young workers from getting good quality jobs. Furthermore, the government's newly lowered growth projections do not predict anything good for our young workers.

We have an unacceptable unemployment rate of over 14%. What is the minister doing to stop wasting the talent of our young people? [English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, both the IMF and the OECD anticipate that Canada will have the strongest economic growth in the G7. We have the best job creation record in the G7, 650,000 jobs since the end of the recession in July 2009.

We have the strongest banking system in the world, the strongest fiscal system in the world, and the best net debt to GDP ratio in the G7. As I said, we are on track for modest growth this year and next.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives love to present misleading job creation numbers. The truth is that we have lost 220,000 jobs for young people since the recession began. Unemployment is up, economic indicators are down and, according to the Bank of Canada, our economy is slowing to a crawl. Conservatives want Canadians to believe that corporate tax giveaways to profitable companies are the answer. They are not.

When will the minister have something more than empty talking points to offer jobless Canadians?

● (1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite the member opposite to tell the 650,000 Canadians who are working now as result of the economic action plan that their jobs do not matter to them and that the government's policy has not mattered to them.

This is the policy that the NDP voted against. This is the job creation policy that NDP members talk about, but every time we bring a measure to the House, they vote against the measure, depriving Canadians of jobs. Now they have the nerve to suggest job creation programs.

Oral Questions

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has proven that he is good at misdirection, rhetoric and personal insults. What he is not so good at is giving straight answers. The minister hurls accusations of fearmongering, but the biggest source of fearmongering is the minister's refusal to clear the air on base closures.

The minister is the only who can put military families and their communities at ease. Will he please stand in his place and assure military base communities that they have nothing to fear?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, methinks he doth protest too much. When it comes to fearmongering, he is referring to a report that was late. The October 2011 departmental directive, which he is referring to, does not speak of base closures. What it does reference in an accompanying news article is a Liberal senator musing about base closures.

The only person who is causing alarm in the military community, their families and the country, and misleading Canadians about base closures, is the member opposite.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the directive to which the minister refers. It says:

We will also reduce portfolio size, footprint and associated overhead costs by consolidating Defence operations and programs to fewer operational sites.

Again, does this mean base closures, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is sound and fury signifying nothing. Let me be clear about what the NDP members are up to, and we have seen this before. It is an old opposition tactic: create a crisis, panic people, put fearmongering out there among military families, and then, when it does not happen, claim credit. That is what they are up to.

The member opposite is simply trying to create a crisis that does not exist. The NDP does not support the military, it does not support the investments and that is unfortunate.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that economic development and greater self-sufficiency can lead to a better quality of life for first nations across Canada and contribute to a strong Canadian economy. Once more, when first nations are full participants in the Canadian economy, all Canadians benefit.

Could the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development tell the House how our government is working with first nations to achieve these important steps?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with our aboriginal partners. Just last week I signed a memorandum to expedite economic development with Chief Robert Louie and Chief Austin Bear of the First Nations Land Management Board and Resource Centre. This will allow additional first nations to manage their land base free from the Indian Act.

In addition, this week, at the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business conference, our government announced further investments supporting economic development. This creates jobs for first nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada.

These are concrete examples of where our government continues

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

* * *

[Translation]

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka managed a \$50 million slush fund from his constituency office. We know that despite the presence of a number of senior officials, no documents were handed over to the Auditor General, and, surprise, now we find out that he did not act alone. Other ministers joined the party when they were invited to submit infrastructure projects.

Does the government continue to believe that no new facts have surfaced and that the ministers involved in the G8 scandal did nothing wrong?

• (1455)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the former infrastructure minister made these decisions. Each dollar has been accounted for. Not a penny is missing, as Mr. Wiersama, the former Auditor General, has said. He said that he knows what they got for that money. Thirty-two projects were funded and the government announced each one. They can be found on the department's website.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are among friends. We can tell it like it is. Wasting \$50 million of taxpayers' money, using government coffers for personal political spending—it all smacks of a great political, financial and ethical scandal.

The Conservatives are saying that they want to implement the Auditor General's recommendations. If one of these recommendations were to have Parliament get to the bottom of this, would the government agree to submit to a full royal commission on the G8 scandal?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, **CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there already has been an inquiry into it. There has been an exhaustive review by the interim Auditor General.

If I could quote a truly great Canadian, "the facts have not changed". Everyone could take a moment now to recognize that truly great Canadian, the hon. member for Calgary East.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 139 days and the Muskoka member is still hiding behind the backbenchers and not explaining why he hid the paper trail in his office.

The Auditor General said that he broke the rules and called on Parliament to investigate. That was before we learned about all the other cabinet ministers who were taking his lead and going to the pork buffet as well.

How many other ministers circumvented the rules, took this man's lead and used the taxpayers' Treasury Board as their own personal cash machine?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I clearly could not say this with the same level of eloquence as my colleague for Calgary East, but I will try to explain it for the hon. member, who has heard this answer so many times before. The minister responsible for infrastructure made this decision, all 32 projects were public, every dollar was accounted for and the projects came in under budget. That is the reality.

The reality also is that the member across the way has promised his constituents time and time again to support the elimination of the long gun registry. Will he honour his word, do the right thing and vote for our bill to do just that?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the big game hunter on the backbenches is going to take down this scandal, he is going to have to put a little more ammunition in his pop gun.

The facts are that since the Muskoka minister has to hide behind members like him to answer, I will do him a favour and I will speak for the Muskoka minister. He said "If set up a parallel process where the Auditor General did not know, I would be resigning right now and turning myself in to the local police".

The question for my good friends on the Conservative backbenches is this. Will someone volunteer, do the right thing, help this verbally challenged minister, put up a hand and call 1-800-Huntsville PD.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member continues to ask the same question, so he will continue to get the same answer.

The reality is that the former minister of infrastructure made this decision. He has taken responsibility for it. The reason we know what these projects are is because they are all published on the Infrastructure Canada website. There are 32 of them. We know where the funds went. We know that it came in under budget. We know every dollar went toward building the projects that have been published.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chair of the veterans affairs committee. Tomorrow he has scheduled a secret meeting, but we are supposed to be hearing from witnesses in public. Liberals submitted a list of witnesses concerned about the cuts, people and organizations like the ombudsman, the Royal Canadian Legion and many others.

Why is the Conservative chair holding secret meetings? Are the Conservatives plotting to cancel public hearings?

• (1500)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, had the member listened—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I was interrupted by the red kindergarten.

Had the member been attentive at the last committee meeting, he would have clearly understood that we are maintaining and investing in our veterans. We are doing that with skilled professionals who are working in our department, in Charlottetown, in our regional office, and with the full support of this government because we support our veterans.

HEALTH

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, firefighters from across Canada were in Ottawa to discuss three vital issues that are as much about the safety of all Canadians as they are about support for our front-line rescuers. Firefighters are asking for a national public safety officer compensation benefit, amending the National Building Code and providing priority access to vaccines.

As firefighters are the first to respond to an emergency and constantly put the well-being of others before their own, will the Minister of Health commit to protecting all Canadians by allowing firefighters priority access to vaccinations in case of pandemic?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a great opportunity yesterday to have this discussion with the member who posed the question this afternoon.

As I stated yesterday, protecting the health and safety of Canadians who are most at risk must be a priority for any government during a pandemic. The chief public health officers in the provinces and territories, who are the medical experts, recommend vaccine priority according to the nature of the pandemic

Oral Questions

virus and the risk to the population. As well, the provinces and territories delivering health care are also responsible for the rollout of vaccines in their jurisdictions.

* *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a quote of the member for Brant of April 14. He stated, "The Canadian Wheat Board...should be decided upon in terms of its existence by the farmers themselves in a plebiscite or a vote as to whether it should continue with the mandate it was originally given".

If the member for Brant can understand this basic principle of fairness and democracy, what on earth is wrong with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food? How can he let the members who are in conflict of interest vote on the future of the Wheat Board when he will not allow the same right to the very prairie farm producers who rely on it for their economic well-being?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous quote here, too. Let me put this on the record. It states, "when the government is intending to change the legislation, I honestly don't see the grounds for going to court. The government has the right to change the legislation. I don't see the case for taking it to court".

That was said by the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's proposed dismantling of the Wheat Board is already having a negative impact on Churchill. Things are already being cleared out of the port. People are being told that shipments will not be coming through. They are worried about losing their jobs and having to uproot their families.

Why is the government creating chaos and uncertainty in communities like Churchill and communities across the Prairies? When will it put aside the interests of big agra and stand up for western Canadians and their communities?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): What we are trying to do on the government side, Mr. Speaker, is bring clarity and certainty to the grain industry in western Canada. What is not helpful is when the chair of the Wheat Board, Allen Oberg, and his seven friends from across western Canada bring uncertainty to this role. That is the problem that we are having with Churchill. Those guys are implementing a scorched earth policy, trying to prove the inevitable by simply being intransigent to this change that we are trying to bring.

Freedom to western Canadian farmers is priceless.

Oral Questions

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. My constituents have told me repeatedly that they want to see an end to this measure, which needlessly and unfairly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. We see the long gun registry as no less than an attack on our way of life.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on what our government is doing to address this important issue?

(1505)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the work that he has done on this important file.

On May 2, Canadians gave the government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Canadians across the country have called for this measure. For example, Michelle Vardy of the Georgian Bay Women's Outdoors Workshops and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters stated:

As a woman, the long gun registry does not make me feel any safer or more secure. It is wasteful, ineffective and reduces funding to do real things. The 2 billion dollars that have already been spent would have been better used on programs like healthcare—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for St. Paul's.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today 25 parliamentarians from all parties are participating in the Canadian Paraplegic Association's fantastic chair-leaders event to experience first-hand the obstacles that people with disabilities face every day.

We understand that after five inaccessible years, the minister responsible for persons with disabilities has finally moved her constituency office. We hope the minister will welcome the opportunity to rise in the House today, advocate for accessibility and reassure the House that her new office on Kent Street in Simcoe is totally accessible.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has done more than any other to help people with disabilities and ensure that we have an environment that is fully inclusive across the country. That includes my new office in Simcoe, Ontario. I am pleased to say that we were finally able to secure that.

I would also point out that the Office for Disability Issues that is part of the government for the first time is now accessible, because it was not under the Liberals, and is a full model of accessibility not just for the mobility impaired but for the visually—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

SHARK FINS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto is the latest city to join others in Canada and across North America in banning the sale and use of shark fins. Up to 75 million sharks are finned and thrown away at sea every year, often while still alive.

Will the government work with us to end this practice and ban the import of shark fins to Canada?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, shark finning is an offensive practice. It has been banned in Canada since the early 1990s.

* * * CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Allen Oberg confirmed that he will be launching a reckless and baseless legal challenge against the federal government for bringing marketing freedom to western Canadian farmers.

In September of this year he stated:

There's no doubt you wouldn't want a board that's of the belief that this whole thing won't work and that it's a recipe for failure.

Mr. Oberg is actively working to prevent marketing freedom for grain farmers by using any means possible.

As Mr. Oberg launches this reckless legal challenge, will the Minister of Agriculture remind the House of its ability and duty to pass this important legislation?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a government we not only have a right to change legislation, we have a responsibility to deliver on our promises.

Farmers have earned the right to market their own grain, whether on an open market or through a voluntary Canadian wheat board.

The director of the Wheat Board said today as he resigned:

The CWB's decision this week to launch a legal challenge against the Federal Government over the proposed changes to the CWB ACT...is simply wrong.

That says it all.

[Translation]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, homelessness and the lack of affordable housing are not just big city problems. In my riding of Trois-Rivières, the Le Havre shelter does not have enough beds to meet the demand. I would like to congratulate all the community organizations that have become involved and offered their assistance, but it is only a short-term solution.

When will this government take care of families in need and adopt a long-term strategy to provide Canadians with affordable housing?

Allen (Welland)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills **Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, two years ago we extended the five-year program for housing and homelessness. Through our economic action plan we have 14,000 projects under way to build, or renovate existing, affordable housing operations.

Unfortunately, we did that in spite of the NDP, because that party voted against every one of these initiatives to help people get the housing they deserve.

• (1510)

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie-La Mitis-Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are true believers in the abolition of the firearms registry.

In addition to abolishing the registry, now they want to destroy all its records. This would prevent Quebec, which has asked for the data, from salvaging a tool that saves lives, a tool that has cost nearly \$2 billion in public money—part of that from Quebec, a tool the Conservatives now want to trash. What a waste.

Does the Conservative government, which brags about its openness toward Quebec, intend to reply to the request by Quebec's public safety minister to have the data returned, or will it again thumb its nose at the unanimous will of the National Assembly of Quebec?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position has not changed. We made an election promise to abolish this expensive and ineffective long gun registry. We have a bill before Parliament, and I hope that the opposition members will support us, because we feel that there is a consensus among Canadians to have effective measures to fight crime. This registry has not prevented criminals from obtaining firearms.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

The House resumed from October 25 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:11 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion.

Call in the members.

(1520)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

Business of Supply (Division No. 45)

YEAS

Members

Andrews

Ashton Angus Atamanenko Aubin Ayala Bélanger Bellavance Bennett Benskin Bevington Blanchette Blanchette-Lamothe Boivin Borg Boutin-Sweet Boulerice Brosseau Caron Byrne Cash Casey Charlton Chicoine Chisholm Choquette Christopherson Chow Cleary Coderre Comartin Côté Crowder Cotler Cuzner Cullen

Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) Davies (Vancouver East) Dionne Labelle Day Donnelly Doré Lefebvre

Dubé Duncan (Etobicoke North) Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)

Dusseault Eyking Foote Fortin Freeman Frv Garneau Garrison Genest Genest-Jourdain Godin Goodale Gravelle Groguhé

Harris (Scarborough Southwest) Harris (St. John's East)

Hassainia Hsu Iacob Inlian Kellway Karygiannis Lapointe Larose Latendresse

Laverdière LeBlanc (LaSalle-Émard)

MacAulay Martin Masse Mathyssen May McGuinty McCallum McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood) Michaud

Morin (Chicoutimi-Le Fiord) Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine) Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot) Murray

Nash Nicholls Nunez-Melo Papillon Patry Perreault Péclet Pilon Quach Rae Rafferty Raynault Regan Savoie Scarpaleggia Sellah

Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Win

Sims (Newton-North Delta)

St-Denis Sitsabaiesan Stoffer Sullivan Thibeault Toone Tremblay Turmel **—** 126 Valeriote-

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy Adams Albas Aglukkaq Albrecht Alexander Allen (Tobique-Mactaquac) Allison Ambler Ambrose Anders Anderson Ashfield Armstrong Bateman Aspin Benoit Bernier

Points of Order

Bezan Blaney
Block Boughen
Braid Breitkreuz

Brown (Leeds—Grenville) Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)

Bruinooge Brown (Barrie) Calandra Calkins Cannan Carmichael Carrie Chisu Chong Clarke Clement Davidson Daniel Dechert Del Mastro Dreeshen Devolin Duncan (Vancouver Island North) Dykstra Fast Fantino Finley (Haldimand-Norfolk) Flaherty Galipeau Fletcher Gallant Gill Goldring Goguen Goodyear Gosal

Gourde Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George) Hawn
Hayes Hillyer
Hoeppner Holder
James Jean

Kamp (Pitt Meadows-Maple Ridge-Mission) Keddy (South Shore-St. Margaret's)

Kenney (Calgary Southeast) Kent Komarnicki Kerr Kramp (Prince Edward-Hastings) Lake Lebel Lauzon Leef Leitch Lemieux Leung Lobb Lizon Lukiwski Lunney MacKay (Central Nova) MacKenzie McColeman Mayes Menegakis Menzies Merrifield Miller

Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)

Moore (Fundy Royal)

Norlock O'Connor O'Neill Gordon Obhrai Oliver Oda Opitz Paradi Penashue Payne Poilievre Preston Raitt Rathgeber Reid Rempel Richards Richardson Ritz Saxton Schellenberger Shea Smith Shipley Sopuck Sorenson Storseth Stanton Strahl Sweet Toet Tilson Toews Trost Trottie Truppe Tweed Uppal Valcourt Van Loan Vellacott Wallace Warkentin Warawa

Watson Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to

Sky Country)

 Weston (Saint John)
 Wilks

 Williamson
 Wong

 Woodworth
 Yelich

 Young (Vancouver South)
 Zimmer- ___ 150

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period today, the member for Winnipeg Centre quoted this member as saying something that I categorically did not say. I would like him to table the document that he is referring to where that quote was made, as well as the source and the time that he is referring to for the quote he put forward.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to. I appreciate the opportunity to table the time, the location, and the date; in fact, the member can go onto YouTube right now and watch the entire movie. It was the April 14 all candidates' debate for the federal election campaign.

I could read the quote again if he likes, if he wants to double-check: "The Canadian Wheat Board should be dis—"

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Wascana is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to seek clarification from the Chair with respect to an incident that occurred in question period today. A very specific question was addressed by a Liberal member to the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The chair was pre-empted from answering the question by the intervention of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I would point out that the question did not pertain to the responsibility of the government or the minister. The question related to the work of the committee, which would be under the purview of the chair and the members of the committee.

I am seeking clarity from you, Mr. Speaker, about the proper procedure in this sort of matter. Is it now permissible in the House for ministers to effectively muzzle the chairs of committees and impose on committees the views of the government? We always take the position in the House that committees are masters of their own affairs, that they determine the time of meetings, the witness lists and the order of business. The work before the committee is under the control of the committee.

If it becomes permissible for ministers simply to pre-empt all that—to take that responsibility away from the chair and to place it under the minister—then I think we have undergone a rather profound change in our long-held traditions with respect to the proper functioning of our committees.

Mr. Speaker, I seek your clarification on that matter, because it is very important to the integrity of how our committees function.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I may be of assistance, your predecessor, Speaker Milliken, set out quite clearly what the practice is in circumstances like this. On February 7, 2008, there was a question addressed to a chair of a standing committee. I think that happened twice, and the government House leader at the time responded. The Speaker, Mr. Milliken, advised clearly that the role of the Speaker is to "...take a look at those who are standing to answer and choose who is going to answer".

When that question came, I looked very carefully and saw that only one individual was rising to answer, so I believe you responded appropriately and in accordance with the practice that had been established and articulated clearly by Speaker Milliken.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be clear. When the chair of a committee is asked a question, it is none of the government's business; it concerns the committee. If ministers can now muzzle committee chairs, what is the point of having parliamentary committees? We need to be careful. We do not want to set a dangerous precedent.

● (1525)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I rise simply for the sake of completeness. I omitted to advise the House of the dates in question: February 7, 2008, in *Debates*, page 2743, and February 8, 2008, pages 2835-2837. This is all referenced in O'Brien and Bosc at page 506 in footnote 90, if people wish to see the definitive ruling.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, there is one further point on this matter to draw to your attention because of the importance of the independent integrity of the committees of the House.

It would seem to me that if the chair of a committee chooses not to rise in his or her place, as the government House leader has suggested a committee chair might choose to do—that is, not answer the question—it would then be appropriate, Mr. Speaker, for you to turn not to a minister of the government, who is not in charge of the order of business before a committee, but to a vice-chair of that committee, and to invite the vice-chair to respond on behalf of the committee, because it is the committee, not the government, that is in charge of the agenda of committee business.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the important work done by parliamentary committees, their chairs and all committee members. I myself have had many opportunities to be a member of a committee. As we all know, committees have their own rules and procedures.

But we are in the House of Commons now, and the question the member asked was clearly addressed to me, since it was my department officials who answered the question. Unfortunately, the member was not paying attention, which is why I thought it a good idea to remind him that we are maintaining all programs for veterans and we will continue to do so.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to intervene because I am a bit concerned about the comments from the government House leader.

We do have committee chairs who are not on the government side of the House and who act under the responsibility and right of the official opposition.

I would not want the interpretation or ruling of Mr. Milliken, the Speaker at that time, to be read as meaning that a minister can stand up when a question is directed in particular to a chair whose responsibility is that of the official opposition and not of the government.

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Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): On the same point, Mr. Speaker, the committee will meet again tomorrow. Then, presumably, I will get my answer, live and in colour.

If the same question is posed tomorrow, will it be the chair of the committee or the minister who will answer that question?

The Speaker: I thank the members for their interventions. I assure that House that I will take this matter under advisement, consult the various books of precedents and procedure and get back to the House in due course.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the course of question period and specifically during the questions I asked, there were calls from the government benches, and I believe also from the Minister of National Defence, for me to table the document I was referring to in my question.

Given the fact that we would like as many Canadians as possible to see this document and draw their own conclusions, I seek permission to table this document before the House.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

SECURITY INTELLIGENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2010-2011 annual report of the security intelligence review committee, in accordance with section 53 of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act.

* * *

• (1530)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning its participation at the International Parliamentary Conference entitled "Parliaments, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Effective Participation in Politics", held in Chiapas, Mexico, from October 31 to November 3, 2010.

Also pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning its participation at the Parliamentary Conference on the Global Economic Crisis, held in Geneva, Switzerland, May 7-8, 2009.

Routine Proceedings

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of legislative committees on Bill C-11 and Bill C-18.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), the report is deemed adopted.

* *

[English]

OIL AND GAS OMBUDSMAN ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-336, An Act to establish the Office of the Oil and Gas Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to the business practices of suppliers of oil or gas.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to reintroduce my bill calling for the creation of an oil and gas ombudsman on behalf of consumers right across the country who are tired of getting hosed at the pumps.

While it is true that the combination of growing demand, worries over the turmoil in the Middle East and the closing of several strategic refineries in eastern Canada will continue to keep gas prices high for the foreseeable future, it is also true that speculation by unregulated derivatives traders and index investors operating without enough government oversight exacerbates those price hikes.

Rampant speculation has thrown the fundamentals of supply and demand right out the window, and if the supply and demand fundamentals cannot discipline the price discovery, then the price can be whatever it wants, and any excuse can be used.

That is where the oil and gas ombudsman would step in. The ombudsman would be charged with providing strong and effective consumer protection to make sure that no big business can swindle, cheat or rip off hard-working Canadians.

As it stands right now, people can only complain to each other about being gouged at the pumps. Clearly that is not good enough, so my bill creates a meaningful vehicle for having those complaints taken seriously, with effective mechanisms for investigation and remediation to help consumers fight the squeeze.

I am pleased to report that my bill has been endorsed by the Consumers' Association of Canada and that it is being seconded today by the NDP's critic for gas prices, the member of Parliament for Windsor West. Together we will put an end to highway robbery.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

ALBINISM IN TANZANIA

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a motion to the House that was unanimously supported at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. I believe if

you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House:

- condemn the murder and mutilation of Tanzanian adults and children with albinism for their body parts;
- express the support of the citizens of Canada for people with albinism in Tanzania who have been the victims of such attacks;
- recognize that the murder and mutilation of people because of this genetic condition constitutes what UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called an "unacceptable violation of human rights";
- 4) urge the Government of Tanzania to prosecute actively and aggressively and convict all perpetrators of these crimes;
- call on the Government of Tanzania to take immediate action to prevent further violence against persons with albinism and to bring to swift justice those who engaged in such practices;
 - 6) notify officially the Government of Tanzania of this.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1535)

PROPOSAL TO DIVIDE BILL C-10

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that it have the power to divide Bill C-10, An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts, into two bills; the first containing the provisions of the Bill with respect to sexual offences against children, and consisting of clauses 10 to 31 and 35 to 38, and the second containing all other provisions of Bill C-10.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present this motion, which I think is extremely important to all Canadians.

Right now we have before the House what is known as an omnibus bill on criminal justice. It is a complex bill consisting of nine separate pieces of legislation. Bill C-10 is rather lengthy and complex with over 100 pages dealing with various matters. In fact, the long title of the bill refers to enacting a justice for victims of terrorism act and amending the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other acts. It is complicated because the legislation deals with a number of individual topics.

Our proposal is that the provisions relating to sexual assault and sexual matters relating to children be dealt with separately. The rationale for this is very simple. The complexity and controversial nature of the entire bill is such that it would take a considerable amount of time for it to get the proper consideration by this House in accordance with the proper form, through committee, third reading, and through the other place, before it became law. There is some urgency with respect to the provisions of this bill in relation to sexual offences against children. That is essentially part 2 of the bill, although we have not included all of this in the instruction.

There is an original act which has to do with terrorism and lawsuits against foreign states. There are particular provisions that deal with sexual offences against children. There are amendments to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, amendments to the Criminal Code in relation to conditional sentences, amendments to the Criminal Records Act, amendments in relation to the international transfer of offenders, amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which are very particular and complex, and amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It is a very complex bill, some of which has been debated before and some of which has not.

There is a particular reason that sexual offences against children ought to be considered and debated separately. We believe this can be dealt with fairly quickly in the House and also in the other place. The other place has indicated there would be fairly quick passage. I believe these provisions have passed through the other place before. We could anticipate fairly quick passage to make this law within a very short period of time so that prosecutors and police would have the opportunity to make use of it.

There are some provisions of this legislation that we agree are necessary because they add some new offences to the Criminal Code, particularly in the case of sexual offences against children.

There are new provisions which would prohibit, as a new and specific crime, making pornography available to children. Giving pornography and pornographic images to children would be a separate offence which could be prosecuted separately and would not have to involve other activity.

The second new provision that we think is extremely important would make Internet luring an offence. Internet luring as a separate offence is necessary because under the current provisions of the Criminal Code, it is required that there actually be something more than that.

In the case of dealing with someone on the Internet, I think we have all heard of cases where a police officer pretends to be a child in order to be lured into a meeting with a perpetrator. The police officer nabs the perpetrator and is able to charge that person because the person went to a hotel room or place where the person thought a child would be waiting.

● (1540)

These are complicated offences that require a great deal of police resources. They require some sort of a sting, as I discussed, in order to protect children, because children cannot actually be used as the bait for an offence like this. It would be unethical to do so. Therefore, it is difficult to prosecute these types of offences.

In effect, the new offences would be preventive in nature. Police would be able to intercept the types of Internet predators we see all

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too frequently these days. They would be intercepted before they actually had a chance to make arrangements to meet with a child for sexual purposes. Sometimes it is called "grooming", where the offender builds a relationship with a child and uses that relationship to take the next step. Criminologists and police officers refer to it as grooming a child for eventual predation. That itself would be an offence.

We believe that is something that ought to be put into law as quickly as possible. There is no requirement for any actual abuse. In fact, this step is normally a preliminary step to sexual offences against children that we see all too often. We want to protect children. The NDP is steadfast in wanting to see the law improved to ensure that children who are potential victims of sexual predators are protected.

People on the other side do not like to hear that because they want to be able to say that the NDP does not support any measures designed to protect children. It is the exact opposite. That is why this motion is being presented. We want this to be part of the bill. It is accepted and sought by many people across the country. There is virtual unanimity throughout the academic and legal communities regarding the necessity for this provision. As well, police officers and prosecutors want the tools to prevent these crimes. As a parent, I am most anxious to see this brought forward as well.

That is in contrast to a lot of the measures in the rest of the bill. This omnibus bill has been called many names and has been roundly criticized as being full of ideologically based measures by experts who have been to the committee already. The committee is studying this. We have already had three meetings. We have heard a number of witnesses. We have heard experts in children's law, the law on young offenders, criminologists and representatives of the Canadian Bar Association who have examined this bill and have said there are serious problems with it.

The short title of this bill is the "safe streets and communities act", but experts have said that this bill will not make our streets safer, that the measures will increase crime, will lead to greater violent crime and a more unsafe society. That is directly contradictory to the bill's short title and supposed aims of the government. We hear from people that the measures in this bill will lead to longer sentences, more hardened criminals, and less rehabilitation. People will be more likely to reoffend. All those things are going to increase the likelihood of crime, which is the exact opposite of what is intended.

● (1545)

They have been tried in other countries. They have been tried in the United States. We have seen examples of states in the United States that have gone down this road of treating people, who are convicted of offences, with a great deal of severity. They have now come to realize that they have driven up their costs of incarceration enormously, to no greater safety of their communities.

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In fact, they are leading to greater crime. Many of these states in the United States are finding ways to change their policies to focus on prevention and rehabilitation and, in some cases, do a massive diversion such as in Texas where its drug courts have the universal appeal of all sides in its legislature there.

I spoke to the reporter who did the story on the prisons in Texas and the plan to divert people from courts to drug rehabilitation programs. He said they were there for several days and were looking around, and fully expected to have a program in which there would be defenders of the current system and opponents. They wanted to present both sides of the story.

It was surprising, to the producers and journalists undertaking the program that was on CBC a couple of weeks ago, that there was only one side of the debate. Everybody, including Republicans, Democrats, judges and police officers, agreed that this approach was costing a fortune. This was in Texas. We are talking about one of the hard line states of the southern U.S. when it comes to criminal justice. There was unanimity there among the political leadership that this was a good idea, that it was saving money, reducing crime with results.

These kinds of debates and questions are being raised in committee. I can assure members that these debates need to take place. There are debates about that aspect of the law. There are debates about the youth criminal justice provisions.

We had a renowned law professor from Queen's University, Nicholas Bala, who has been testifying before parliamentary committees for 20 years. His opinions, expertise, and articles are quoted by courts throughout the land, including the Supreme Court of Canada. He has told us that he supports some of the provisions and the changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act because they are good measures.

However, he has made it very clear that some of these provisions would lead to a greater criminalization of individuals who come before the law under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and, in fact, would lead to greater criminality, more criminals, and less safe communities as a result of the changes that are being proposed in this legislation.

Members can be sure that this very complex so-called omnibus bill deserves to receive great scrutiny through the committees of this House and through the debates in this House for a fair bit of time, for as long as it needs, in order to do a proper job. It is a very complex bill.

On the issues of the relation to civil remedies for terrorism, we had a debate in committee on Tuesday this week. We had an individual who is part of a committee that is opposed to terrorism and an individual whose husband, sadly, was a victim of the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in New York, who testified, talking about the need for this legislation and the need to improve it.

These aspects have to be looked at in terms of what changes need to be made to make these bills effective and work. There needs to be the kind of debate that should take place.

We had the Canadian Bar Association come before us and say that there were serious problems with this bill. Some people like to dismiss the Canadian Bar Association and say, "Oh, they're just defence lawyers". However, that is not the case. When the Canadian Bar Association came to testify before Parliament, it had a very lengthy presentation of over 100 pages and also an oral presentation. Its response was primarily the work of the Canadian Bar Association national criminal justice section which represents prosecutors and defence lawyers as well as legal academics from every part of Canada.

(1550)

The Canadian Bar Association is not on one side or the other of a particular paradigm. Its body represents an analysis of this legislation based on the views of Crown prosecutors who prosecute offences throughout the country. It has brought together the views of prosecutors, defence counsel and legal academics throughout the country. Similarly, we had representations from the Barreau du Québec, as well. There were advocates on both sides of the justice divide, both prosecutors and defence counsel, very experienced and learned people who we should hear from.

I am also certain, based on the experience in the past of some of these constituent bills that are part of this, there will be significant debate within the Senate that will see this legislation not back to this House very soon. The plan of the government to have this passed in 100 days from when Parliament began to sit is very unlikely to be met.

What we want to do is put, in the hands of prosecutors and police officers, as soon as possible, the provisions that provide for protection of our children from sexual assaults, from Internet luring, from the use of pornography to groom or to involve children in sexual offences, which are most abhorrent to all citizens of this country. They ought to be given a priority and a special consideration by this House for speedy passage.

I will acknowledge that there are some aspects of the legislation which give me a little trouble. As a lawyer I have strong feelings about mandatory minimum sentences because it fetters the discretion of judges. In some cases the minimum sentences also become maximum sentences, and judges who might be inclined to give a strong sentence because of particular circumstances may be inclined to stick to the minimum mandatory sentence because it is prescribed by law. That is a point that we can debate fully. I have serious reservations about that.

However, for the sake of getting this matter into the hands of prosecutors and police officers for the protection of our children, we want to see this legislation separated out from the existing bill, and then brought before this House so that it can receive speedy passage and be out of here within a matter of days. It could then be sent to the other place and become law very shortly.

It is now near the end of October. I am certain this could be dealt with before the middle of November, and then be law before the end of November, before we break for Christmas. I think that is very likely and very possible.

With the will of the government to co-operate on this particular motion, that could be done for the benefit of all Canadians, particularly for the benefit of the young people who will be protected and hopefully, potentially, saved from sexual assault and sexual abuse. How many? We do not know. It could be 5, 10, 100 or 200. There is an opportunity here to ensure that this bill is put into law as soon as possible.

The rest of the legislation is flawed. It has been called tough on crime, harsh, excessive, and unfair in some cases. Rather than replicating the errors of other places, we could learn from them. However, we cannot have that debate with this flawed bill.

This is an opportunity for this legislation because there is consensus in this House. It has passed before. It has gone through the Senate before. We think that it can pass very quickly. I do not imagine there would be a terrible amount of debate.

I would ask hon. members opposite to support this motion because it is timely, urgent, and can save children from sexual assault.

(1555)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to questions and comments, I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

The hon. member for Mount Royal.

[English]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I support the member for St. John's East in his particular recommendation with regard to protection against sexual predators, particularly with regard to that piece of the omnibus bill.

However, I also want to refer to his generic concern that he also expressed, that the real problem here is that we have nine pieces of legislation bundled together in one omnibus bill, each of which deserves its own differentiated and separate treatment.

Indeed, we not only have an abbreviated time limitation debate in this chamber but we will necessarily have abbreviated debate in committee. The result will be that parliamentarians, particularly those who have been elected for the first time, will not have had an opportunity to debate these measures, some of which were in the previous sessions and previous parliaments and some of which were not, and even those that were, were never addressed by the new parliamentarians, nor did they have a chance to discuss it with their constituents. This raises a basic concern with regard to the parliamentary and democratic process, as a whole.

I want to recommend to the member for St. John's East that we unbundle the entire omnibus package and address each of those bills one by one, some of which I would also support, but the majority of which I cannot.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member for Mount Royal. This whole process is seriously flawed.

Some of the bills that are now packaged in the omnibus bill were before this House and received amendments that were passed by this House. Those amendments do not even appear in these bills. It is

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rather confusing. It is very frustrating, as well, to people presenting to the committee to know that there may not be time to fully debate these particular sections.

I agree with him that these should be unbundled. I certainly would welcome any motions that he might want to bring to separate out other parts of this legislation for separate debate. I chose this one because it is one that has received the largest amount of consensus and could be passed fairly quickly, and it would be sure to save children from sexual abuse and sexual assault.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for St. John's East for putting so clearly the number of things that we would like to see unbundled. Many members in the opposition parties want effective legislation to oppose criminal activity. However, we know that many sections of this bill fly in the face of evidence.

I would like to confirm our support for unbundling and also to support the hon. member for Mount Royal that it would be best to take each piece of this legislation piece by piece, so the good pieces could be passed expeditiously and we could improve those sections that need improving.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I know the government claims, on a daily basis, to have a strong mandate to do all sorts of things. I do not think it is right to say that it has a strong mandate to do all of the things that are listed here in this omnibus bill that, in fact, experts tell us are going to lead to greater violent crime and less safe communities without having an opportunity for full discussion. We are not talking about people coming up with this just to delay matters. They are coming up with it because they have experience, they have understanding, and they have the knowledge to make predictions based on evidence as to what this bill would do.

I thank the member for her support and would welcome her to bring forward motions of a similar nature to see if we can unbundle the bill.

● (1600)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was at church on Sunday. My congregation had a petition out front on this topic, so I will be presenting that at some point in the future, calling on this Parliament to do more to protect our children. I hear that complaint a lot.

This part of Bill C-10 is one of the few times I have seen the government, since it has been in power, actually take an approach that is preventative, in particular, with regard to the new crimes that we are creating of luring and grooming.

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I have to say with some pride that those sections, those proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, first surfaced in this Parliament in the form of private members' bills from the NDP, back as early as 1995, 1998, somewhere in that time period. Liberals never did anything about it and until we finally saw this bill about a year and a half ago, the government did.

I would ask my colleague from St. John's East this question. What does he see as being the greatest advantage, in terms of protecting our children, with regard to those two sections, in particular?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for pointing that out. The preventive aspect of this is key. I say that as someone who, unfortunately, has had considerable experience in dealing with victims of assault and sexual abuse as a legal counsel throughout most of the nineties. This does enormous damage to individuals' lives, to their prospects and to their mental health.

Preventing sexual abuse and sexual assault is a magnificent goal and one that would achieve tremendous results. I urge hon. members opposite to help us do that.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to all the questions and the speech made by my colleague from St. John's East. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is currently studying Bill C-10 for the first time. It is a very large bill. We hear from a ton of witnesses every time we study it. I think that the hon. member for Mount Royal mentioned that earlier. I am one of the members who is hearing these things for the first time. We must make it easier to hear from the various witnesses.

Just to give you an idea: when I look at our schedule for tomorrow, I see that over the course of one hour we will have the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers, the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and also Joanne Jong, as an individual. All of that will take place over the course of one hour. Each person or group is given five minutes. Every issue related to Bill C-10 is very important.

There is near-unanimity in the House on one of these issues. Perhaps the member for St. John's East could repeat what he said, but I find it difficult to understand why the government is being stubborn about splitting a matter that has unanimous support, where progress could be made.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, as a member of the committee, I do sympathize very much.

We have had proposals from numerous witnesses. A renowned criminologist, Irvin Waller, proposed a crime prevention board for Canada. That is a worthy topic for consideration because it is in all of our interests to find ways to prevent crimes, to avoid victimhood and to have safer streets. He said that there should be a mechanism in place to focus on crime prevention. We would have less victims and safer communities. We could monitor the work that is already being done. That is something that deserves consideration but it cannot be done quickly.

What can be done quickly is to provide something that will make prevention more readily possible and save innocent people from becoming victims of sexual assault. That type of legislation could get to the other place quickly and could be adopted quickly by the House. It is a tool that we could put in the hands of prosecutors and police throughout this country.

● (1605)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, 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 Scarborough—Rouge River, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Windsor West, Public Safety.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I can assure you and members of the House that my remarks will be brief.

I want to point out to all members of the House and anyone from the viewing public who may be watching that we are now scheduled to be speaking to Bill C-19, a bill brought forward by this government to repeal the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Instead, we have a frivolous motion brought forward by a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

I would point out that I find it richly ironic that members of the opposition consistently have stated over the past few weeks that our government is limiting debate on important issues and yet, today, when we were to enter into debate on an issue that has gripped the House for many years, the opposition has chosen to use a procedural manoeuvre to limit and stifle debate. Whenever opposition members stand in this place and accuse our government of limiting debate, I will point to this day.

I would also point out to the House that in order to get back to debating the issues of the day, we have no recourse but to deal with the same procedural manoeuvres that they are trying. Therefore, I move:

That the House do now proceed to the orders of the day.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The previous speaker misinformed the House. This motion was on the order paper before the bill was even tabled, and to call it reactionary and frivolous is dead wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the motion is in order.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: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 Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Wilks

Brahmi

Woodworth

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The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay. Sopuck Sorenson Stanton Storseth Strahl Sweet Some hon. members: Nay. Tilson Toet Toews Trost The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it. Trottier Truppe Tweed Uppal And five or more members having risen: Valcourt Van Loan Wallace The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members. Warkentin Watson Weston (West Vancouver-Sunshine Coast-Sea to Sky Country) Weston (Saint John)

(1650)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

Young (Vancouver South)

YEAS Members

Ablonczy Adams Aglukkaq Albas Alexander Albrecht Allen (Tobique-Mactaquac) Allison Ambler Ambrose Anderson Anders Armstrong Ashfield Aspin Bateman Benoit Bernier Bezan Blaney Block Boughen Braid Breitkreuz

Brown (Leeds-Grenville) Brown (Newmarket-Aurora) Brown (Barrie)

Calandra Cannan Carmichael Carrie Chisu Chong Clarke Clement Daniel Davidson Dechert Del Mastro Devolin Dreeshen

Duncan (Vancouver Island North) Dykstra Fantino Fast Flaherty Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk) Galipeau Gallant Gill Goldring Goguen Gourde Grewal Harris (Cariboo-Prince George) Hawn

Hayes Hoeppner Holder James

Kamp (Pitt Meadows-Maple Ridge-Mission) Keddy (South Shore-St. Margaret's)

Kenney (Calgary Southeast) Komarnicki Kerr Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings) Lake Lauzoi Lebel Leef Leitch Lemieux Leung Lobb

Lizon Lukiwski Lunney MacKay (Central Nova) Mayes McColeman Menegakis Menzies Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) Moore (Fundy Royal)

Shipley

O'Connor O'Neill Gordon Obhrai Oda Oliver Opitz Paradis Penashue

Payne Poilievre Preston Raitt Rathgeber Reid Rempel Richards Richardson Saxton Schellenberger Shea

Smith

(Division No. 46)

NAYS Members

Brosseau

Wong

Yelich Zimmer- — 148

Allen (Welland) Andrews Ashton Angus Atamanenko Aubin Ayala Bélanger Bellavance Rennett Benskin Bevington Blanchette Blanchette-Lamothe Boivin Borg Boutin-Sweet Boulerice

Byrne Cash Chicoine Charlton Chisholm Choquette Christopherson Cleary Coderre Comartin Côté Cotler Crowder Cullen

Cuzner Davies (Vancouver East) Dionne Labelle Davies (Vancouver Kingsway) Day Donnelly Doré Lefebvre

Dubé Duncan (Edmonton-Strathcona)

Dusseault Faster Foote Eyking Freeman Garneau Garrison Genest Godin Genest-Jourdain

Groguhé Harris (Scarborough Southwest)

Harris (St. John's East) Hsu Hughes Hyer Julian Karygiannis Kellway Lapointe Latendresse Lamoureux Larose

Laverdière LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)

MacAulay Mathyssen Liu Masse May McGuinty

McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood) Michaud Morin (Chicoutimi-Le Fiord) Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine) Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe-Bagot)

Nash Nicholls Nunez-Melo Pacetti Papillon Patry Perreault Pilon Plamondon Ouach Rae Rafferty Raynault Regan Sandhu Sellah

Simms (Bonavista-Gander-Grand Falls-Wind-Sgro

sor) Sims (Newton-North Delta) Sitsabaiesan St-Denis Stewart Stoffer Sullivan Thibeault Toone Tremblay Turmel Valeriote- - 121

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PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to begin debate on Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

This is a great day for Conservatives across Canada. It marks the beginning of the end for a nearly 17-year-old legacy of waste thrust upon Canadians by the previous Liberal government. I know I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that this has been a very long time in coming. For years, many of us have stood in this place even when we were on the other side and took a stand for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters.

We repeated time and again that the long gun registry was wasteful. It was ineffective. It did nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Yet still the parties that now form the opposition stood against us and against the law-abiding Canadians for whom we were standing.

It is true that occasionally we found allies across the aisle as long as they could be assured that their vote against the registry would not actually result in the registry being dismantled. Those individuals ended up listening to their Ottawa bosses rather than standing up for the voices of their constituents. However, we are here today to look forward, not back.

On May 2, Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and this is exactly what we are doing.

I would like to take a moment to discuss that mandate. From personal experience, I have received literally thousands of phone calls and letters advocating a quick end to the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I know from talking to my colleagues that they have had similar experiences.

Conservative candidates from across Canada stood at doorsteps and spoke to their constituents. Time after time they heard people say "When are you going to end the long gun registry?" Specifically, the members for Yukon, Nipissing—Timiskaming, Sault Ste. Marie and Ajax—Pickering heard from their constituents how important it was to elect a member of Parliament who stood against the wasteful long gun registry.

There have been many discussions over what the bill would do and what it would not do. What it would do is ensure that law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters would no longer be treated like criminals simply because they owned a rifle or a shotgun. What the bill would not do is eliminate effective gun control.

The fact is, and this is no secret, the Conservative government is committed to keeping our streets and communities safe. We have brought in measures to do just that. Specifically, we have brought in mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and targeted those who engage in dangerous criminal activity such as drive-by shootings. We have also funded numerous programs through the national crime prevention strategy that helps stop gun crime before it happens. That is how we keep Canadians safe, through tough and effective laws and smart prevention programs, not through needlessly increasing red tape and targeting law-abiding Canadians.

The bill would also provide for the destruction of records held by the Government of Canada relating to the registration of long guns and it would only make since. If we are getting rid of the registry, we get rid of the registry. The registry is comprised of information. We are getting rid of that registry.

The reason for this is the simple fact that we do not want to assist anyone to set up a back door registry. As we heard from the NDP members during question period, they have clearly indicated that they will reimpose a long gun registry should they ever have the opportunity to enter into a coalition with the Liberals on that fact.

The reason for this being unacceptable is that it focuses on lawabiding Canadians who should not have been targeted. This information should never have been collected in the first place. To maintain the registry and the information is a complete violation of law and the principles of privacy that all of us in the House respect.

• (1655)

I would like to bring this back down to a fundamental truth. In rural Canada oftentimes long guns are simply a part of everyday life. Whether it is owning hunting rifles for sport or using a shotgun as an everyday tool on the farm to protect their crops or livestock, there are a plethora of reasons that law-abiding Canadians would own long guns.

As we have said consistently, long guns are not the weapon of choice for criminals. Primarily criminals use hand guns or other restricted or prohibited firearms, the registration requirement of which is not affected by the bill here today. I would like to emphasize that.

The current system imposed by the previous Liberal government and supported by the NDP opposition is blissfully ignorant of this fundamental fact. The justice minister who ushered in this proposal, Allan Rock even went so far as to state that it was his firm belief that the only people in Canada who should have firearms are police officers and the military. That is a frightening statement and our government completely disagrees with this premise.

Frankly, the fact is there is no evidence that the long gun registry has prevented a single crime in Canada. Let us think logically about this for a moment. Is it reasonable to assume that thugs and criminals who have no problem committing armed robbery or other serious offences with firearms will sit down and fill out the paperwork? The response is obvious and it is a resounding no.

Rather than preventing criminals, the long gun registry has actually created criminals. The opposition has frequently used the analogy of registering cars and boats or other everyday items. This is simply not an accurate analogy. If people let their car registration lapse, they do not contravene the Criminal Code. They do not receive a criminal record. More important, they do not face the prospect of serious jail time. This is the case with the long gun registry. Again, reasonable people find this unacceptable.

As I stated earlier, one of our government's main priorities is keeping our streets and communities safe. I note the Canadian Police Association just came out with a statement saying that our government has received a mandate from the people on May 2 and that it is moving past the issue of the long gun registry. It wants to work with us on issues like the ingredients of Bill C-10 and the lawful access legislation. We, in fact, are committed to working with the police in that respect.

Some proponents of the long gun registry maintain that eliminating it will cause anarchy. This, again, is simply hyperbole and is not the case.

First and foremost, all individuals will still be required to be licensed to possess a firearm. We are committed to ensuring that only responsible and qualified individuals own firearms. Even after the passage of Bill C-19, to obtain a licence, individuals must still be able to pass the required Canadian firearms safety course and comply with safe storage and transportation requirements. They will also need to pass a background check, including a review of the individual's criminal record, any history of treatment for mental illness associated with violence, or history of violent behaviour against other people.

There will still be proper controls over restricted and prohibited firearms. We will continue to ensure that they are registered, as we have for many years.

In essence, Bill C-19 retains licensing requirements for all gun owners, while doing away with the need for honest, law-abiding citizens to register their non-restricted rifles or shotguns, a requirement that is unfair and ineffective. Let us be clear. Canadian firearms owners are law-abiding members of our society and deserve to be treated as such. Burdening these citizens with unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy at the risk of a criminal record is not only unreasonable, it is unfair and it is wrong.

• (1700)

The NDP members said they had a solution. They said they would not make it a criminal record but rather an offence. If it is no longer a criminal record it is then outside the area of criminal law which makes it unconstitutional. Although they realized that the bill would be unconstitutional, they were trying to foist it on Canadians in order to save this unfair and unreasonable legislation.

We have heard loud and clear from Canadians who own long guns that they want the long gun registry eliminated. They want to ensure that their private information is not distributed to others. That is what is proposed under Bill C-19.

We are not proposing a fundamental overhaul or scrapping of the entire licensing or registration system. Rather, we are proposing changes that do away with the need to register legally acquired or

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used rifles and shotguns, many of which are owned by Canadians living in rural or remote areas. Put simply, we are scrapping the long gun registry just as we said we would do.

We need a system with effective measures in place to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, not law-abiding hunters, farmers or sport shooters. That means we need to put more police on our streets. The government has acted on that. That also means our laws must be tough and effective. Again, the government has acted on that. The government is determined to ensure that law-abiding citizens are treated fairly while it is combatting the criminal use of firearms and getting tough on crime.

The bill before us today is about making sure that we invest in initiatives that work. It is about making sure we continue to protect the safety and security of Canadians without punishing people unnecessarily because of where they live or how they make a living.

We must ask ourselves how laws that penalize law-abiding citizens on farms or in the north can help reduce gun crimes in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg or Vancouver. The answer is clear: they do not.

When we hear statements made by members of the NDP, such as "Guns gotta go, folks. I'm for a full-out ban on these things" from the member for Davenport or "To destroy the gun registry is to destroy lives" from the NDP leadership contestant from Outremont, it is clear that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the issues at play in a country like Canada.

I will also touch on the issue of cost. When the idea of registering long guns was first discussed, the Liberals said it would be a simple process and would cost no more than \$2 million. I remember Allan Rock coming into my office when I was the attorney general of Manitoba telling me that Manitoba must enforce the long gun registry. I told him that Manitoba would not enforce the long gun registry because it was a bottomless pit and that it was a law the federal government would have to enforce. He threatened to sue me.

Allan Rock is long gone and the lawsuit never materialized. Unfortunately, the effects of what Allan Rock and the Liberals did, which is now supported fully by the NDP, continues on. That is no understatement. The CBC, the state broadcaster, reported that the costs have ballooned to over \$2 billion. That is unacceptable.

From 1995 to 2011, the money was spent on a program that did not save one life. Imagine how many police officers that money could have paid for or how many crime prevention programs it could have funded. The legacy of waste is shameful. I am proud to be part of the Conservative government that is putting an end to this wasteful and ineffective boondoggle.

As my time for debate is coming to an end I will sum up my arguments as to why all members should support this important legislation.

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First, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry does not do a single thing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Front-line police officers, notably with the Canadian Police Association, agree with the government that the best approach to combatting gun crime is to ensure tough and effective sentences.

(1705)

Second, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry targets lawabiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. Those people who own guns as a part of their rural way of life or simply as firearms enthusiasts are treated like criminals because of this unbalanced policy. As a government and as a country we must ensure that the measures we take on important public safety issues are effective.

Third, the costs associated with this program are inexcusable. Two billion dollars to implement a policy that does not do a whit to protect Canadians is unacceptable and must not continue.

Most important, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Canadians expect no less of us than to implement this key plank of our platform without delay.

As I stated earlier, several former Liberal and NDP members are no longer in this place because they listened to their Ottawa bosses instead of their constituents.

I call on all members opposite to listen to Canadians and pass this important legislation quickly.

I will specifically mention the members for Timmins—James Bay, Welland, Sackville—Eastern Shore, Sudbury, Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Nickel Belt, Malpeque, Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor and Avalon. They promised their constituents that they would oppose the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I hope they will live up to their word.

I will reiterate the fact that Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. That is exactly what the bill will do.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know when the government was elected in 2006, having campaigned on the same issue that it campaigned on in the last election, that for five years it did nothing to fix the problems of the registry or bring forth legislation such as that which is before us today.

When the private members' bills that were stalking horses for the government's legislative intent were brought forward, both in the House and in the Senate, greater measures were included to actually protect and maintain information on the sale of guns by businesses, whose records had to be kept. Also, when a gun was being transferred, the individual transferring the gun had to notify the administrators of the registry and ensure that the individual to whom the gun was being transferred was in fact licensed to own a gun. These measures are absent from the bill.

Also contained in the bill, which was not in any of the others, is the destruction of records. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police specifically asked the minister in a letter to keep those records and make the information available to its police forces in an effort to help save lives and trace guns. I have a copy of that letter, dated May 19.

Why is the minister bringing in legislation that, in addition to abolishing the long gun registry, is weakening gun control protection in Canada as well as destroying valuable records which the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has begged the minister to keep for use as a tool to help save lives?

● (1710)

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, it is difficult for me to point out all of the inconsistencies in the arguments made by my colleague across the way.

Let me start with the simple premise that he said that the government did nothing and in the same breath said there was all kinds of stalking horse legislation brought forward by the government. That is the kind of duplicity we can expect from the NDP on this matter, which we see on a continual basis.

With respect to the destruction of information, let us be clear. We are getting rid of the long gun registry. What is the long gun registry? The long gun registry is a database of information.

The member across the way is saying that we should tell the Canadian people that we will get rid of the long gun registry but not really do it. That is what the NDP members are prepared to support. That is exactly the kind of hypocrisy that Canadians have had enough of.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is an extremely sad day for Canada. I cannot help but think about the victims at Dawson College and the École Polytechnique. We could make all sorts of personal attacks, apply all kinds of labels and use the minister's rhetoric, but the reality is that there is information that the provinces want to use. The National Assembly spoke out today. The Government of Quebec said that it wants to have this information. The Conservative government is partisan and unable to do its job. We know that police officers use the registry and that it is an important prevention tool. They want this information so that they, at least in Quebec, can create their own gun registry.

Why is the government so determined to keep this information to itself? Is it because it is an ideological party that flagrantly ignores the facts and wants to do things its way? Why will it not give this information to Quebec? Taxpayers paid \$250 million for it. It is not the government's registry; it belongs to Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I do not know how I can make this any clearer. Our government indicated that we would get rid of the long gun registry. The registry is nothing more than a database of information containing the personal and private facts of law-abiding Canadian citizens. We said we would get rid of it. That is our commitment to the Canadian people. That is exactly what we are doing.

I do not understand what the member meant when he said that we promise the Canadian people one thing and then allow it to happen through the back door. Quite frankly, we are not prepared to break faith with the Canadian people with respect to that issue.

The Canadian Police Association recognizes that our government received a mandate from the Canadian people on this particular issue. It wants us to get Bill C-10 and the lawful access legislation passed, which will make a difference in fighting crime.

(1715)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard from the opposition that it wants to reconstruct this registry if given half the chance.

I want confirmation that all records, copies and backups of the registry will be destroyed. As well, I want to know when that will be done.

Also, I ask the minister, do the people who are receiving renewal notices in the mail have to complete them in order to be compliant?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as the member is aware, when we formed government in 2006 we granted amnesty with respect to the long gun registry through regulation. As far as I am aware, that amnesty is still in effect.

With regard to the information, the legislation states clearly that it must be destroyed. Any agency that has that documentation must destroy it, otherwise it would be in breach of the law.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, on that note, I wonder how the Minister of Public Safety would respond to the Quebec government, which said today that it intends to challenge Parliament's legislation concerning the destruction of information, as stipulated in clause 29 of the bill. Quebec fully intends to maintain the register in question at the provincial level. [*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, the information was created under a specific piece of legislation. That legislation is being repealed. It would be unlawful for the information that was collected to remain in the hands of individuals after the legislation is repealed. We expect all law-abiding Canadians and agencies to follow the law.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, we all know that criminals do not register their weapons. This has been an ineffective tool, if it is a tool at all.

Perhaps the minister could elaborate on how much money has gone into this registry that is really not providing any real service to Canadians.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my comments, the state broadcaster CBC stated that the cost was about \$2 billion. There is no evidence of that expenditure ever having saved one life.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister spoke several times about how inexpensive this program was. We know what was wasted when the program was set up. However, the RCMP says that it costs \$4 million a year to operate the long gun registry part of the gun control program.

Could the minister comment on that?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as I understand it, the Auditor General indicated a few years ago that the cost was approximately \$70 million. I do not believe that the direct costs are that high. The direct cost of the long gun and short arms restricted firearms registry would be somewhere in the range of \$22 million a year, and most of

Points of Order

the guns registered are long guns. However, this does not take into account all of the indirect policing costs that are passed on to the federal, provincial and municipal agencies. Perhaps that is where the Auditor General took the larger figure from.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-317—INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is a continuation of an argument on a point of order that I raised last Tuesday and which was responded to by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale yesterday. The point of order I raised at that time was with regard to Bill C-317. It is an act to amend the Income Tax Act as it affects labour organizations in this country.

When I raised the point of order, I asked the Speaker at the time that he rule that the proceedings to date under Bill C-317, standing in the name of the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, that the introduction and first reading has not respected the provisions of our Standing Orders and is therefore null and void, and that he direct that the order for second reading of Bill C-317 be discharged and the bill be withdrawn from the order paper.

I will summarize that quickly. What I was asking for and continue to ask for is a ruling that the bill, in effect, is improperly before the House and should not even have made to this stage, so we should be taking it off the order paper and not allow it to proceed into the future

My objections to the bill were laid out on the grounds that the bill would have the effect of creating taxpayers where ones did not exist before.

This, of course, is the sole prerogative of the ministers of the Crown and cannot be done through private members' business.

The attempt here, by doing it through a private member's bill, is clearly contrary to all sorts of precedents where governments, when they are doing this, do it through the form of a government bill, a ways and means motions and a budget bill.

In his remarks, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale attempted to discredit the arguments that I presented on October 18.

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Over many years in the legal field and in the courts of this country, I came to recognize that type of argument, that type of case presented by an opponent counsel. It always represents the last gasp of a lost argument, which is what we saw yesterday. It was a bit disturbing. I felt that he had misrepresented and, in one case, actually misquoted my words, attributing words to me that I did not say. He also ignored my most substantial argument. Finally, he held on for dear life to the straws of a paraphrased reference while ignoring the actual precedent on which the reference was based.

Madam Speaker, if you go back and look at my original argument, you will see the distinguishment I was making in that regard.

In his brief remarks he said:

My colleague also raised the issue of my bill creating a "new class of taxpayer". According to the Income Tax Act....

He said that was what I said. He went on from there and spent the next 276 words of his response critiquing my apparent reference to the creation of a new class of taxpayers, as though it were the crux of my argument, which it was not at all.

Unfortunately, the member opposite attributed to me that I used the word "class" only one time. He repeated it I do not know how many times in his argument. I used the word only once. When I used that word, he appeared to have completely lost that context that was coming forth or he ignored it. I used it to point out that the guideline for determining whether or not a ways and means motion was necessary, and I was quoting from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition at page 900 where it uses the words, "extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayer".

The root of that reference is Beauchesne, not me, who does not use the words "class of taxpayer" at all. In quoting me in such a way would be a similar way of me saying that he agreed with my case where, in a fragment of one of his sentences he said, "It is accepted that the bill may have the effect claimed by my colleague". That is the kind of argument he was making. It was completely out of context and it was quite erroneous of the argument I was placing before the Speaker on October 18.

• (1720)

Such a selective use of quotes would be irresponsible and misleading, as it was when my colleague opposite did so yesterday.

Madam Speaker, while clearly lost on the member opposite, I am confident that you will see the marked difference between the paraphrasing he used for my argument, "a class of taxpayer", and the actual reference from Beauchesne's, which states, "an extension of the incidence of a tax so as to include persons not already payers". The difference between them may seem negligible but, in this case, it means the difference between it being eligible for a private member's bill or being required to be brought forth by way of a ways and means motion by the government of the day and, therefore, ineligible for a private member's bill.

The member went on in his remarks to counter my assertion that a member of a labour organization's dues were actually discretionary. This one actually blew me away in the sense of the level of lack of knowledge on the part of the member. He was arguing that the fees that union members pay were akin to the contributions one makes to a charitable organization. They are not.

I know very well that union members are required by the laws of this country, if they are represented by a union,to pay union dues. This came out of the Rand Formula, which came out of the city of Windsor as a result of a Ford strike back in 1946. It was a long fight. It is very much a major part of the history of this country. Mr. Justice Rand at that time was appointed to deal with it. He created the Rand Formula, which makes it mandatory for members of unions to pay dues. It is not a choice.

This was what he said, and it blew me away. He said:

—union members whose union has lost its tax exempt status for refusing to disclose have the right to exercise certain options. Those options include the option to be represented by another union....

That is totally false. It is not how the labour relations system in this country functions at all. An individual union member cannot just go across the street and tell another union that he or she now wants to be a member of that union and ask that it represent him or her. It does not work that way. The argument is really at the level of being preposterous.

Labour unions or organizations are democratically elected by their members. It is very similar to a government in that respect. There is a formal election process. I wonder if the member would feel that the taxes citizens pay to the federal government are discretionary in this sense as well. The answer to that is obvious: it is not at all discretionary. It is not discretionary for people to pay their taxes and it is not discretionary for people to pay their union dues.

As I said, after his remarks yesterday, his efforts to discredit my remarks had virtually no substance and my argument today confirms that. There was one exception to that and that was his contention that his bill did not actually change the tax rules. This was basically a new point that he had raised. I will summarize what he said. He said that it made the provisions of financial disclosure that must be followed that much more stringent, so it was not changing things. I disagree strongly with that interpretation, but the argument got me thinking about what door we would be opening if in fact, Madam Speaker, you found that line of argument persuasive

I will now take this idea close to the limits of its application. There are provisions in the Income Tax Act that, if broken, revoke the tax benefits of businesses, charities or non-profits, just like the one dealt with in this bill. The member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale asserts that no ways and means motion is required for amending the rules which would trigger the loss of those benefits.

Just last month, in September, the government adjusted some of the tax benefit rules in its second budget implementation act, specifically the rules around the business partnerships that allow taxes to be deferred within the partnership arrangements. In fact, what happened with regard to that change in benefits was that the government tabled a ways and means motion ahead of the bill being presented. That is what is required in that circumstance. It is what is required in the circumstances that we are dealing with in Bill C-317.

(1725)

I do not want to be extreme in my examples regarding the ability to allow this type of an amendment. However, we have to look at the door that we would potentially open here. I say that from this vantage point.

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A few years ago, as part of the G8 preparatory meetings, I happened to be in Russia and in the course of the meetings we met with a number of human rights groups, set up by our embassy there. Human rights groups were showing the leadership of that country, at that time, taking extreme measures, and I equate that to some degree with what we are seeing here. We are certainly away ahead of where this bill would be, but it is along the same slippery slope.

What Russia was doing was imposing such onerous requirements on the human rights groups to report and report that even large organizations were having to spend anywhere from 25% to 50% of their human resources and budgets on this reporting function. It made it virtually impossible for them to continue to function. The law was just coming into effect at that point, but since then a number of the organizations have collapsed under the weight of that kind of rule

We could see the same thing happening if we continue to go down this route, where we have private members' bills coming forward, in one of the examples I used, that require a human rights non-profit group or union to have a transcript of every phone call or communication made by an employee of the organization and that information had to be provided to the government.

That was the kind of thing being done in the Russian legal system to, in effect, thwart the good work that a number of those human rights agencies were doing. That is the kind of thing we could be seeing, in any number of sectors, where that kind of an approach would have the effect of either significantly encumbering the operation of the organization or, in fact, putting it out of business.

To some degree, that is a problem with this bill. The requirements of this bill are so onerous, especially to small local unions of, say, 100 or 150 members in the local community. They would be required to do so much to comply with this bill that they could be put out of business, leaving their membership with no representation.

Mr. Jack Harris: And they talk about red tape reduction.

Mr. Joe Comartin: My colleague from St. John's mentions that the government always talks about red tape reduction, when in fact in this case it is just piling it on for ideological reasons in its ongoing attack against the labour movement in this country.

Let me conclude with these few remarks. This precedent with Bill C-317, for all intents and purposes, allows private members' bills to increase taxes on entities that are covered by these income tax laws by putting a hair trigger on those requirements. That is exactly what is happening here.

It goes contrary to the spirit and the letter, I believe, of the Standing Orders of this place. I am confident that once you, Madam Speaker, have reviewed all the arguments you will agree.

I once again renew my request to the Chair that what has happened up to this point with regard to Bill C-317 be dismissed from the record of this House and that Bill C-317 be found to be out of order, and not allowed to proceed on to second reading.

Bill C-317 is currently scheduled for the first hour of debate as a private member's bill on November 4, so it will be necessary for the Chair to give us a ruling on this before that date.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon, member for his intervention and that information will also be considered by the Speaker in the decision on this bill.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, first, on the same point of order, I note that the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale may wish to address some of the points raised by my friend, the opposition House leader, and we will advise whether he wishes such an opportunity to do so.

* * *

● (1735)

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

BILL C-19 — NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, on another matter, I would like to advise that with regard to Standing Orders 78(1) and 78(2), an agreement has not been reached under those provisions with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at said stage.

I want to advise the House that it is my intention to allot three further days of debate, which would bring the total to four sitting days, including today. Following second reading debate, the bill would be referred to a committee for detailed study of this measure which will cease to treat farmers and outdoor enthusiasts like criminals.

On May 2, Canadians, including the good people of Yukon, Labrador, Madawaska—Restigouche, Nipissing—Timiskaming and Sault Ste. Marie, gave our government a strong mandate to follow through on our commitments. Our government has been clear that we will end, once and for all, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak at second reading on Bill C-19.

We have a bill from a government that has spent at least the last five years using the whole notion of the firearms registry to divide Canadians, to bring about a division between urban and rural Canadians, between aboriginal Canadians and the rest, and between men and women.

Even in rural areas, where the government claims a great deal of opposition to this legislation, we find women being supportive of this legislation. In fact, even women whose husbands and family members may possess long guns in their houses are supportive of strong measures of gun control because of the importance to their personal safety.

What we are seeing happening is that all of the problems that existed could have been addressed by the government over the last five years in a co-operative method of bringing people together instead of showing how they could be divided, as the government has done.

Our party has done a tremendous amount of work trying to bring about measures and bring forward suggestions and ideas that would bring people together. If I may, before I finish today, read a quote from our leader, Jack Layton, on the issue from August 2010, he said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians...[The Conservatives] are stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down".

This is un-Canadian. This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

I want to ask members of this House and Canadians to reflect on the words of our late leader, Jack Layton, who talked about bringing people together to find solutions that help us stop gun violence in our country. It is a priority for both urban and rural Canadians.

We learned today from Statistics Canada that, happily, the homicide rate in Canada is now at the lowest that it has been in 45 years, and that is a good thing. We do not want to do anything to change that.

• (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for St. John's East will have 16 minutes remaining for his speech when the House next resumes debate on the motion and also 10 minutes for questions and comments.

It being 5:39 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NATIONAL PUBLIC TRANSIT STRATEGY ACT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP) moved that Bill C-305, An Act to establish a National Public Transit Strategy, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today millions of Canadians were left behind. They were stuck in traffic or they just could not squeeze into the subway car, or the bus was full and did not stop for them. The millions of Canadians who were left behind were on their way to work, to school, to shop, to play, or to take care of their families.

[Translation]

Millions of people across Canada have been left behind: in big cities like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, as well as in small towns and villages.

[English]

Millions of people were left behind because Canada is falling behind on public transit. We are falling behind the rest of the world. All other G8 countries have a national transit plan, not Canada. Most have predictable capital funding, not Canada. Most have transit-related research and development funding, not Canada. Most have recognized the essential importance of transit in this day and age as a national priority, not Canada. We are falling behind. We are failing to invest where it counts and it is costing us dearly.

In 2006, five years ago, traffic congestion in the Toronto and Hamilton areas alone cost \$6 billion in lost productivity; \$6 billion five years ago and the congestion is much worse now than it was ever before. Canadian cities are now among the worst in the world.

Add to those costs the cost of traffic accidents, wasted fuel and lost opportunities. Billions and billions of dollars every year go up in smoke with nothing to show for it but bad air and road rage. Those are a lot of bucks. We can do better. We must do better. What is required is resolve and leadership.

With the national transit strategy set forth in this bill we have the chance to show that leadership and move Canada forward. If we do so we will have a positive impact on the lives of all Canadians. There is an urgent need for national leadership, so let us not miss the bus this time. Let us not pass the buck and say that public transit is not the jurisdiction of the federal government. Let us take the lead.

Here are some wise words on jurisdiction: "The national transit strategy would mean the leadership to align a common vision and the opportunity for all three levels of government to work together and define the roles, responsibilities and priorities of each jurisdiction". Those are not my words. They are not words from the NDP. They are not the words of a federal politician. Those are the words of Her Worship Hazel McCallion, the legendary mayor of Mississauga. Those words were in a letter she wrote to me a few weeks ago in support of this national transit strategy bill.

It is interesting that Hazel McCallion was just ranked number one in a Canadian poll as the most popular mayor. Naheed Nenshi, the major of Calgary, is number two. He is the Prime Minister's mayor and he supports a national transit strategy. Gregor Robertson, the mayor of Vancouver, is number three and he too supports a national transit strategy. These mayors are all in touch with their constituents. They all know what is needed.

Here are some more words: "We would encourage all parliamentarians and all parties to support the creation of a national transit strategy" They are not the words of a big city mayor. They are the words of the mayor of Grande Prairie.

The mayor of Winnipeg said that this provides an excellent framework for a national transit strategy. He was talking about the bill.

On the east coast, the Charlottetown city council supports the bill for a national transit strategy. That endorsement is echoed in all parts of the country, the transit authorities of London, Ottawa, Kelowna, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which represent over 2,000 cities large and small, from coast to coast to coast.

● (1745)

Business groups such as the Toronto Board of Trade, and just today, the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, are on board.

There is a reason that all these great community leaders, business groups and ordinary Canadians are crying out for us to act. Transit is important; in fact, it is vital.

It is hard to imagine anything else that could touch the lives of so many Canadians in so many positive ways in every part of our vast country every single day in every season of the year. People going to work are affected every day, as are students going to university, parents trying to get to the daycare centre before it closes, seniors going shopping or to a doctor's appointment, as well as teenagers going to a movie or a hockey game.

Here are some good words that every member of the House should hear:

Investments in urban transportation help ensure the efficient movement of goods and people, thereby strengthening the economy, reducing traffic congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and improving the quality of life of Canadians

Those words sum it up in a nutshell. I could not have said it better myself. I am sure that every member of the government would agree because those words are the very words of the government. They are on the Transport Canada website and have been for over a year. I think we all agree that public transit is critical. That is why we must proceed with a national transit strategy.

We had an opportunity to move forward in the last Parliament. My colleague, the hon. member for Victoria, introduced Bill C-466. That bill would have provided tax incentives to employers to support green commuting by their employees, not just by bus, streetcar or subway, but by bike and on foot. It would have achieved more than the current transit tax credit would, and would have cost less. It was supported by environmental groups and municipal politicians, but the government did not get it done. If we proceed with a national transit strategy, we should be able to revisit this forward-looking approach once again as part of a national solution.

Canada has been left behind, but let us not miss the bus again. Let us not pass the buck. Let us not say that it is not our jurisdiction. A national vision is our jurisdiction. National leadership is certainly our jurisdiction and our responsibility. Municipalities are looking to us for help, as is every Canadian who is sitting in traffic or has just missed the bus. Canadians need more than words, they need action and leadership from this House.

Private Members' Business

It is not just a question of money. Major investment funds are needed, of course. We have a huge shortfall in what is required for transit capital funds, but we need more than money. We need a strategy to ensure a consistent, reliable, predictable, long-term plan and accountability rather than a piecemeal approach. That is what we need to ensure fast, reliable, accessible and affordable public transit in and between cities and communities large and small, east and west, south and north.

Without a strategy that is hammered out and agreed upon by different levels of government, capital funds are often driven by political considerations and do not achieve long-term national goals. Which transit lines are worthy of support? Why choose subway lines rather than streetcar lines when streetcar lines are cheaper? Why are there buses to one town but not to another town of the same size? Should the number of buses be based on current riders, or on population and potential riders?

We need co-operation, transparency and accountability to ensure that we deliver on our goals. It is a national issue and we need a national solution to a growing national crisis.

[Translation]

Let us find solutions to address the public transit crisis that is affecting the entire country, and use this as an opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of all Canadians.

● (1750)

[English]

This should be a priority for every part of the government, every department and minister, because moving Canada forward with public transit is so important.

Considering the implications for the government and Parliament, clearly a national transit strategy would have a major impact on achieving the goals of the Minister of Transportat and Infrastructure. Nothing could give more bang for the buck, so let us not pass the buck.

Think of all the goals of every government department.

For the Minister of Finance, there would clearly be a major impact on the economy, on growth, on mobility, and on the productivity of the workforce, as well as on the livability and competitiveness of our cities.

Think of the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. Mobility of the workforce is a vital goal for them.

The government has made law enforcement a priority. Think what could be achieved by moving forward on transit. There would be fewer traffic accidents, less drunk driving by teenagers, less road rage, the ability for emergency vehicles to get around, fewer muggings, better public safety. Think, for example, of the positive impact of reliable, affordable public transit for a woman going home after a night shift. Think about how many lives we can enhance.

For the Minister of the Environment, a central focus on public transit would help us meet our international commitments on greenhouse gas emissions, would reduce our carbon footprint, and would lead to more innovation and research.

For the Minister of Natural Resources, when it comes to energy, better public transit would mean better energy utilization and lower reliance on fossil fuels, and more emphasis on innovation and research.

For the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, there would be an impact on immigrants. New Canadians bring such a wealth of talent to our cities and rely heavily on transit.

Think of the benefits for the Minister of Health with better air quality, less stress and fewer traffic accidents. Better transit means a healthier Canada. Think of the ability of patients and seniors to get to the doctor, the hospital, the clinic, or the outpatient facility. Think of the ability of ambulance drivers to quickly get through the traffic to the emergency wards. Think of the ability of hospital staff to get to work, to get to a night shift, to get home. People could afford to commute in cities where living downtown has become so expensive.

For the Minister of Industry, major investment in public transit and infrastructure would create jobs. Building train systems, buses and subway cars would improve competitiveness. It would move us forward with innovation and would open up more export opportunities.

We all would win, so let us not miss the bus or pass the buck. I am sure every minister in the government could think of many positive benefits of investing in public transit. It is hard to imagine any negative examples.

[Translation]

Think of children going to school or to their sports clubs, breathing in the fresh air, or going for a walk with their grandparents. [*English*]

Think of working men and women who would be able to get to work on time and back home and spend more time with their children. People would exercise more.

Think of how many people we could help and how many lives we could touch. Let us not miss the bus or pass the buck. Let us move forward for all Canadians with all Canadians. Let us not leave anyone behind. Let us not hear anyone say that it cannot be done.

(1755)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her opening remarks, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina stated that there is not consistent stable funding for municipalities regarding public transit. Six of Canada's largest cities, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton, invest over 90% of their gas tax fund allocation into public transit. Also, this government, in our budget 2011, made this gas tax funding permanent, a budget which the member voted against. I would like to ask the member, will she explain to these urban centres why she would not support them in that measure?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, actually I had a lot to do with getting the gas tax to municipalities. I was on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and when I was a city councillor we

mounted a very big campaign to persuade the former Liberal government and then the Conservative government to make sure that the gas tax would be transferred to municipalities.

The former leader of our party, Mr. Layton, took one extra cent of the gas tax. Rather than letting it be used as a corporate tax cut, he made sure that the extra cent went to municipalities for public transit only. That fund was allocated through the ridership formula, and not just per capita.

Lots can be done, especially with the gas tax: it should be indexed, it should be more than 5ϕ , and it would be useful if it were made permanent.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a seconder of the bill that the member for Trinity—Spadina has brought forward.

I want to point out that Canada is the only country in the OECD without a national transit policy.

There is one segment of society that I am particularly concerned about that I do not think the member mentioned in her speech, and that is seniors. We have a growing demographic of seniors for whom independence means being able to get around on their own, both safely and securely. For a number of safety reasons, we should not be driving in our senior years.

Would the member like to comment on that aspect of seniors and mass transit?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I was in Whitehorse, Yukon, and met with the mayor there. She started a bus service in Whitehorse, and ridership jumped by 30% or 40% within a few months. She told me that there is a growing need for this service, because as the population ages, fewer people are able to drive.

Whitehorse is a small town, and people coming from other cities cannot reach it because there is just no bus service going into town. As well, parts of Whitehorse are not served by the bus service, because there is just not enough support from the federal government. She would welcome a national public transit strategy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the wonderful Garden City mall walker group we generated an idea about allowing seniors to ride the bus for free during non-peak hours. We talked a lot about this. During non-peak hours, and I am sure the member can relate to this, we see buses driving around empty, so we thought of allowing seniors to ride for free during non-peak hours. We all know the benefits seniors get from going out in their communities, whether it is for a cup of coffee, going out with grandchildren, or going for medical attention.

Maybe the member could provide some comment as to the idea of seniors being able to ride for free during non-peak hours.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I supported a private member's bill that asked the federal government to provide incentive funds so that if any municipalities or transit authorities wanted seniors to ride for free, they could do so. Quite a few countries in the world provide free transit to their seniors. It is a wonderful and much-needed service.

This transit bill pushes for fast, reliable, accessible and affordable public transit for everyone, especially seniors.

● (1800)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise today to speak on this important piece of proposed legislation. I congratulate the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina for introducing it. Certainly she has a lot of experience in the field of municipal infrastructure and a background as an elected official at a municipal level, which perhaps explains why she is so interested in the direct management and operations of public transit.

While that knowledge and background adds to her ability to serve in this House, I think it has also caused her to put forward a proposal that would have the federal government overstretch its jurisdictional bounds and participate directly in the operations of an otherwise municipally-controlled and run service.

Paragraph 4(b)(ii) of the bill proposes that the federal government would fund the operations of municipal infrastructure. That is a fundamental change to the way our government has functioned in this country since its founding. The Government of Canada has, for years, provided capital funding for qualifying projects within municipalities. The government provides a stable stream of revenue for municipalities through the gas tax fund; then those municipalities take those gas tax dollars and apply them where they believe appropriate, within some limited federal confines. Sometimes they use it for transit, other times not.

The federal government does not, even in this fund, provide dollars for operations, nor should it. For reasons of both good management and constitutional jurisdiction, the Government of Canada cannot and must not fund operations.

Let us start with good management. As Napoleon once said, "Better one bad general than two good ones". The same goes for the idea of having two levels of government run the same transit system at the same time. When Canadians assess the quality of a service, they should know who provides it. The municipalities are entrusted with the operation of public transit because it is the municipal government that is closest to the people who use that particular service. If the system fails the voters in that given municipality, they know whom to blame; if it succeeds, they know whom to thank. That is accountability.

If every level of government is responsible for operating the same bus route, then no government is responsible for it. Let us consider the scenario that follows.

Private Members' Business

Let us imagine a rapid transit line that is failing commuters: its service is poor, its costs are unacceptably high and its trains never run on time. With the passage of this bill, no one could be held accountable for the poor operation of that service. Operations would be shared between orders of government. No one, therefore, can really accept the blame for that scenario.

Clear division of responsibility, therefore, is essential to good management and accountability.

I will now move on to constitutional responsibility. Section 92(8) of the Constitution states that municipalities are creatures of the provinces. Our forebears did not make it so by accident. If municipalities are the government closest to the people and the provinces are the second closest, it follows that the former are creatures of the latter. To have the federal government jump over the provinces and jointly operate services with the municipal administrations would create a cobweb of funding and management that would render the entire system unruly for both taxpayers and commuters.

The bill seems to acknowledge this point, to its credit, in clause 3. Clause 3 of the proposed act exempts Quebec, in recognition of that province's legitimate historical desire to protect its jurisdiction from federal encroachment. That makes sense.

Why would the equally legitimate jurisdictions of the nine other provinces and three other territories, all of which live under the same Constitution, not then enjoy the same exemption?

● (1805)

The reason is that the bill seems to go beyond the legitimate powers given to the federal government in the Constitution.

That brings us to the practical reason that our forebears created a system in this way—that is, the unfairness in a bill that would provide special funds for a service that only some Canadians could enjoy.

One of the benefits of our system of gas tax transfer is that it goes on a per capita basis to the municipalities. Some municipalities do not use public transit because they do not have the geography or population concentration to benefit from it, so chances are that people who live in Iqaluit or Wainwright or another smaller municipal jurisdiction in this country do not have a major public transit facility that their municipality could benefit from under the funding proposed in this bill. Only large urban centres would receive the funds, even though taxpayers from all sorts of municipalities would be forced to contribute to the annual operating costs of those transit projects.

This is compensated for in the system that we have at a national level, whereby the federal government invests in transit systems at a capital level when municipalities seek it, and then invests in other projects more appropriate for small jurisdictions when those municipalities seek funding. It might be a water treatment plant in Kentville, while it might be a large urban transit project in Trinity—Spadina

This bill fails to acknowledge the difference between those two different types of jurisdictions, and would thus create a funding inequity through which funding received by large urban centres for municipal projects would not be offset with corresponding benefits for smaller jurisdictions.

That brings us to the next issue, which is cost. Like time, dollars are finite. We must remember that every time someone demands the government extend a benefit, the government cannot provide any benefit without first taking it away. Governments do not have money. Only taxpayers do. Given that the government is currently in a deficit, the only way to pay for new funding commitments, as this bill prescribes, is through more borrowing or higher taxes, neither of which are acknowledged in this bill, nor would they be defensible to the taxpayer. We must focus relentlessly on deficit elimination by the scheduled 2014 target date and we must do it through spending restraint.

For these reasons, and while we respect the good intentions of the bill and its author, the government is obliged to present opposition to the bill and will be voting against it. That being said, we look forward to working with all members of the House in order to improve the transportation and infrastructure that Canadians enjoy so that we can continue to move forward as the greatest country in the world.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this fits in with the work currently being done by the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities where we have come face to face with the reality. Canada does not have a national public transit strategy. The population is getting older. There are environmental considerations. We must work on improving coordination between all levels of government. We have made huge investments in infrastructure. Therefore, we obviously need a national public transit strategy.

Despite what the government says, and because I am from Quebec, I respect areas of jurisdiction, everyone knows that. We must ensure that jurisdictions are respected when we look at implementing a strategy. Basically, this bill calls for and would result in coordination. This complementarity would be achieved by holding a federal-provincial-territorial conference. It does not mean that we will do the work of the others involved. The principle of Quebec as a nation is recognized in clause 3, but the purpose is to ensure that we will all be able to work together. The same taxpayer is footing the bill, but today we can see that the money should perhaps be better spent. For that reason, we in the Liberal Party will vote in favour of this private member's bill.

When in power, the Liberal Party always invested heavily in infrastructure. I remember that, when I was a minister, we looked at public transit issues. In 2011, we can see what is happening in the municipalities. We have met on several occasions with representatives of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the mayors come to see us. We need to work on this file. I went to see the people at the Fédération québécoise des municipalités a few weeks ago. It is a top priority.

The bill clearly states—and it does not mention money—that the government is not being asked to pay for things; the government,

through the minister, is being asked to establish a strategy that would look into with funding mechanisms.

Everyone will try to take credit for it. We will commend Paul Martin, in particular, the first prime minister to address the situation by having the gas tax redirected to municipalities. The measure was subsequently made permanent and we support that. However, municipalities are telling us that this money is used for other things, that mass transit is necessary, and that the money must be found somewhere else.

Should we index this gas tax? Out of all the federal excise taxes, should we eventually take an additional sum from the gas tax and send it to the municipalities? That is the type of question we should be addressing when we talk about coordination and a federal-provincial-territorial conference. We really have no problem with that

The word "national" might get some people excited—the Quebec nation or the Canadian nation? We will not get into the constitutional arguments today, but we will ensure that the jurisdictions are respected.

The Canadian and Quebec reality is that the municipalities are the key to the future. The role of government, of Parliament, is to protect people's quality of life and make sure we can improve it.

● (1810)

[English]

When we talk about a national strategy, Canada is not one size fits all. We have to ensure that the rural and urban municipalities are covered. We need to ensure that if we are talking about quality of life, helping seniors, youth and workers, that we do not have a one size fits all. A national strategy does not mean that we apply the same thing everywhere. It means that the country respects all the regional specificities in a common goal. That is what a national strategy should be. That is why we should take a look at this.

We should talk about the technology. We have to ensure that we use natural gas, electricity and new ways for public transportation. The bottom line is the environment, to protect our country and planet and public transit has a major impact on greenhouse gases.

[Translation]

We know that the Conservatives do not have a national strategic vision, but let us not be partisan. We are already working on this in the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I imagine that the government and its majority has just taken a bite out of the hon. member's ambitions for a good bill. We will carry on at report stage in the transport committee. A report from transport —that rhymes; I am such a poet today.

However, we will have to address another matter. Governance is one thing, but there has to be complementarity along with respect for each jurisdiction. The bill does not mention funding, but we should talk about it. The Liberal Party believes it is not just a public issue. This has been brought up in the transport committee. We have to turn to the private sector as well. We can have a public-private partnership, with rules to ensure security. We have to define what is meant by developers and by partnership with the private sector. In any event, the money all comes out of the same pocket.

This bill talks about strategy and therefore about partnership. Partnerships are not just about governance; they also involve economic considerations. If all the players could be gathered around the same table, we would be in a position to improve Canadians' quality of life.

We somewhat jokingly say that just because something is laughable does not mean that it is funny. We celebrated Car Free Day in Montreal. There may have been an orange wave, but there are certainly a lot of orange traffic cones in Montreal. Car Free Day lasted for a number of weeks this summer. The issue of traffic congestion must also be addressed. An investment in public transit is one way to deal with this problem but all the other methods of transportation must also be considered. The car is not our enemy. It is necessary in some circumstances. There is also the bicycle. We can give ourselves the tools and means to develop a broader strategy.

It is true that we have to think about governance, funding, partnerships and other methods of funding, but what is even more important is to inspire the public and give people hope. All the major cities in the world and all the G8 countries, currently have a strategy, except Canada. We have been addressing problems one by one, but we need to improve coordination and find a better way of doing things.

When we discuss a national public transit strategy, it will be essential that we do not take a piecemeal approach. We must consider the future of our infrastructure and think about the next 20 years. We must ensure that the existing infrastructure is adequate, but we must also consider other types of infrastructure. I am thinking here about high-speed trains, for example in the Quebec City to Windsor corridor, and light rail. When we build bridges, we must ensure that lanes are reserved for public transit.

We will enthusiastically support this bill. There are still holes, but we are here to do our job. We will have suggestions to make. We hope that everyone will take a non-partisan approach and support this bill.

(1815)

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-305, An Act to establish a National Public Transit Strategy.

I would like to commend my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, for all the hard work and dedication that she has invested over the years on this tremendously important topic.

The proposed bill provides a strategy for long-term, permanent investment in public transit funded by the federal government. It also fosters co-operation between the various levels of government in

order to ensure sustainable, predictable and adequate resources for the transit needs of all Canadians. Additionally, it establishes accountability measures that ensure governments collaborate to increase access to public transit.

For too long, Canada has been the only G8 country lacking a consistent, long-term investment strategy to maintain and expand public transit. As a result, Canada lags behind other nations in terms of providing its citizens with public transit options that are affordable, accessible and convenient.

The government must provide Canadians with the tools they need to broaden the scope of transit projects. The public has demonstrated a strong desire for greater transportation choices and is willing to take action and fund public transit.

Public transit is a vital resource for many communities. Its value extends beyond the simple movement of people and goods. Public transit provides environmental benefits as well as long-term social, health and economic benefits. The issue of climate change and of the need for healthy liveable communities must be at the forefront of this debate.

The implementation of a national transit strategy is anticipated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2.4 million tonnes a year. This means an annual electricity savings equivalent to the amount used by a city the size of Saskatoon. It allows us to reduce our dependence on oil and gas, a non-renewable resource, whose price will only continue to rise into the future. Reducing CO2 emissions will allow future generations to benefit from our vast natural resources, pristine wilderness, diverse ecosystems and thriving communities.

Public transit saves \$115 million a year in health care costs related to respiratory illnesses. As populations increase, a focus on health and prevention is vital.

An effective transit system is also a pillar of our economy. It is estimated that the economic benefit of Canada's existing public transit system is about \$10 billion a year in savings through reduced vehicle operating costs and the reduction of traffic accidents. In addition, the transit industry employs over 45,000 Canadians and creates an additional 24,000 jobs indirectly. These statistics are not insignificant, especially in these difficult economic times. By investing in public transit, Canada also has an opportunity to create green jobs for its citizens.

We need to work with municipalities, provinces and territories to provide the predictable, adequate and long-term funding necessary to fill the critical gaps in our transportation networks. Responsibility for transportation should not be off-loaded to local and regional jurisdictions that are already overwhelmed by these demands, such as what is happening in the Lower Mainland. Community planning needs to be conducted comprehensively and effectively, not piecemeal.

I urge the federal government to take a leadership role in ensuring effective public transit planning across the country. This means meeting the challenges of urban communities by building and maintaining inner-city bus and rail lines. This means establishing accountability measures that ensure all levels of government work together to increase access to public transit.

Public transit investment creates jobs for Canadians and fuels the local economy. It contributes to cleaner air by lowering greenhouse gas emissions and decreasing congestion. It reduces the pressure to build more roads and helps to create more liveable communities. Bill C-305 is our opportunity to work together and solve an issue that affects so many of our constituents.

(1820)

Far too many times I have heard from constituents who wait for a bus for too long or, in some cases, for a bus that never arrives. Transit service in my community in New Westminster—Coquitlam and Port Moody is inadequate.

Projects aimed at improving public transportation, such as the proposed Evergreen Line in my riding, have experienced countless delays. The Evergreen Line is anticipated to service 70,000 passengers a day, reduce 4.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and other air contaminants emitted by cars, and provide 9,000 construction jobs.

The project was first proposed in 1993, almost 20 years ago, and yet we still struggle to fund the \$574 million gap for this community-enhancing project.

Canadians cannot afford to wait for essential transit services any longer. Communities across the country face similar challenges and require similar supports. The Evergreen Line is only one of many projects that a national transit strategy would help address.

The current government has failed to keep pace with municipalities and Canadians' growing demand for public transit. For example, 35% of current necessary infrastructure investments in rapid transit lines remain unmet. Funding is also falling short in stock rehabilitation and replacement, maintenance facilities, and advanced technology investment.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association estimates that Canadian public transit systems face an \$18 billion funding gap in transit infrastructure needs between 2010 and 2014. The adoption of a national transit strategy would ensure that resources allocated to transit would be used in the most efficient manner possible. A national transit strategy would also go a long way to ensure our communities are healthier and more livable.

The national public transit strategy act is about securing investment in key areas within the country. It would create jobs, improve commute times, help the environment, and allow our cities and communities to plan and implement the public transit projects that they need.

The act would bring together the Minister of Transport, provincial transportation ministers, representatives of municipalities and transit authorities, aboriginal communities, and many others to design and establish a national public transit strategy to meet the needs of our communities.

The objective here is to move away from unstable short-term funding programs in favour of providing secure infrastructure planning for the future. The aim is to foster more effective cooperation among all levels of government and transit networks directed by clearly defined national and provincial objectives.

A national transit strategy would increase collaboration to provide better data collection research and to better integrate transportation systems to capture important synergies between urban development and infrastructure, and to pay greater attention to the integration of land use.

A national transit strategy would ensure better performance measurements to ensure value from investments and to improve future planning. A national public transit strategy is well supported by many people; for example, Berry Vrbanovic, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

Mayors and municipalities across Canada, from Charlottetown to Toronto to Winnipeg to Vancouver, are all calling for a commitment from the federal government for public transit. Feedback from Canadians echo these sentiments.

Affordable, efficient and well-organized public transportation networks in cities across our country are vital to ensuring Canada's success in the 21st century.

We must work together to ensure that these needs of our citizens are adequately met and that we are prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow. By adopting a national public transit strategy, we would protect our environment, improve the health of Canadians, and create more livable communities.

(1825)

I urge all members of the House to consider the great need in our country for a national public transit strategy and I call on my colleagues on both sides of the House to support Bill C-305.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to compliment the member for Trinity—Spadina for her passionate introduction to this bill. I know that the member has put a great deal of effort into this subject and in bringing forward this bill. I have read the information that the member was kind enough to send to my office and I have some concerns.

I believe it is important to first give consideration to how public transit is working for Canadians today. Although I am still new to Parliament, the advice that I seek from many of my experienced predecessors is always to exercise caution. We must be careful in attempting to resolve one challenge that we do not inadvertently create many new challenges.

When I look at Canada's economic action plan, it has clearly been very successful, thanks in large part to our partnership with the provinces, territories and municipalities across this great country. Like the member for Trinity—Spadina, I am also a former city councillor. Local government understands its unique community challenges and the solutions that it can afford. It is important to have flexibility to meet the individual needs of provinces and municipalities.

I note that the member for Trinity—Spadina has reflected this language within parts of Bill C-305. In clause 3, for example, the member uses language only to the benefit of one province, however, and not equally to the others. I would humbly submit that the success of being able to recognize the unique nature of provincial jurisdiction for all provinces is equally very important because we must not forget that there is only one taxpayer paying the bill.

I believe that the success is in the results and the achievement of Canada's economic action plan has occurred for a reason. The reason is because Canada's economic action plan created partnerships that recognized the unique jurisdiction of every province and their respective local governments. Those agreements allowed Infrastructure Canada to invest \$10.6 billion into roughly 6,400 infrastructure projects all across our great nation. These funds, when combined with the contributions of our funding partners in provincial and local governments, created a \$30 billion injection into our local economies.

These unique partnerships allowed our provinces and municipalities to decide how best to improve local public transit systems within their own jurisdictions. Cities like Langley, Calgary, Guelph, Oakville, Ottawa and Montreal have received federal investments in their public transit systems that will create better commuting options. However, these options are different and unique. They might be in the form of light rail systems, hybrid electric buses, and new and improved transit facilities. In my hometown, more energy efficient buses were purchased.

We should also recognize that since 2006 our government has invested close to \$5 billion in public transit infrastructure across Canada. This has resulted in over 100 public transit investments in transit infrastructure as a result of the gas tax fund. The importance of the gas tax fund for transit investment is evidenced by the fact that a large number of cities have directed either all or a very large portion of their federal gas tax allocations to public transit. However, for smaller rural communities, public transit can also mean upgrading a public walking path, as was done in the community of Okanagan Falls in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla.

Once again, it is important to work with the provinces in a manner that recognizes unique provincial jurisdictions and the individual needs of local government. This is why our government works in collaboration with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to administer the gas tax fund in British Columbia and Ontario, respectively.

Six of Canada's largest cities, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton, invest over 90% of their gas tax fund allocations in public transit. This means we are already working with our partners to support transit initiatives in a very positive and successful manner.

Private Members' Business

Our government recognizes that transit needs vary widely in Canada, just as they differ widely in my own riding. This is why we create partnerships with provincial and local governments. These unique relationships provide for flexibility. The needs of larger cities may well differ from those of mid-size cities, such as Brampton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Red Deer or Kelowna.

(1830)

For a retirement community, low floor buses and upgrades to bus stops for increased accessibility may be a priority. Whereas in West Kelowna, a rapid bus program now takes students from that community to the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus in times never before thought possible.

This was part of a unique \$20 million investment jointly funded by our government and our partners. These are just a few examples of our investments and unique partnerships that are successfully increasing public transit and infrastructure programs all across Canada

It is important to note that our government is also taking a lead role in other areas. For example, the federal government offers a tax credit to help cover the cost of public transit. This helps make public transit more affordable for individual Canadians.

We are also supporting public transit infrastructure through targeted initiatives such as the \$10 million ecoMOBILITY program. This program provides financial support to municipalities and regional transportation authorities for transportation demand management projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, several federal departments, agencies and crown corporations work in partnership with other levels of government and stakeholders on activities which support transit. Research and development, capacity building, and the use of technology and best practices are all part of that.

For example, the West Kelowna rapid bus program, that I mentioned earlier, features buses that are equipped with technology that extends green lights at intersections, allowing them to keep moving instead of stopping.

Soon, many stations will have digital screens providing passengers with real time schedule information. I should also mention that our government, together with representatives from provincial and territorial governments, is a member of the urban transit task force.

The task force is a forum for collaboration on urban transportation issues of common interest. Clearly, a broad and unique approach to long-term infrastructure planning for public infrastructure, including public transit, is important.

In budget 2011 our government indicated that it will continue working with key infrastructure partners now and in the future.

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Key stakeholders, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association, have already expressed their interest in working with our government. It is important to continue to work collaboratively with our partners to deliver the \$33 billion building Canada plan.

I am also supportive of our recently tabled government legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent at \$2 billion per year. This means that municipalities can count on this stable funding for their transit and infrastructure related projects.

In summary, I believe that our government has demonstrated a commitment, including funding, that works with the unique needs of our municipalities, provinces and territories. These partnerships create accountability to taxpayers as they recognize the unique jurisdiction of the provinces and local governments to partner in a manner they can afford in support of projects they deem as priorities. Public transit is important, and we as members of Parliament must work together to ensure that the needs of Canadians are met.

I would like to applaud the member for Trinity—Spadina for raising such an important subject in Bill C-305.

While I believe it is important that we continue to build on our past accomplishments and work with our partners to identify the priorities of the future, we must do so in a manner that recognizes that Canada is a diverse country, and it will be partnerships that can individually recognize the unique needs of individual provincial jurisdictions and local governments that achieve these important objectives.

As a result, I cannot support Bill C-305. I am nonetheless grateful for the opportunity to stand in the House to highlight the importance of working with our partners, and to continue to build on our government's unprecedented success in creating partnerships that result in projects that Canadians can count on and afford.

• (1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, I must inform her that there will only be about a minute left, but we will start just the same.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[Translation]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the House today in support of Bill C-305 introduced by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina to establish a national public transit strategy. Canadians living in rural communities have different transportation needs than those living in urban centres, and I am proud to see that Bill C-305 responds to the needs of Canadians and Quebeckers living in the regions.

My riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has at least 42 municipalities, the vast majority of which are small communities. There is a serious lack of public transit outside the larger centres and people who do not have access to a vehicle are cut off from necessary services.

This bill establishes a national public transit strategy that will make planning possible across the different modes of transportation. It will improve the quality of life of my constituents by making services more accessible, by making transportation to work and school easier and more accessible, and even by creating jobs.

I will be pleased to talk about that the next time we debate Bill C-305 in the House.

● (1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member will have nine minutes for her speech when the House resumes debate on the motion.

[English]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for taking the time to be here tonight.

On September 27, I was grateful to have had the opportunity to co-host a screening of the channel four documentary, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, with my fellow parliamentarians, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, as well as the hon. member for Barrie. Also present was a representative from Human Rights Watch.

This documentary detailed the alleged human rights violations and crimes against humanity that were committed in Sri Lanka during the final phase of the Sri Lankan civil war. The screening of this documentary moved me, as it did everyone else in the room who was watching. That night, we demonstrated that partisan lines could be crossed in order to seek justice for those whose human rights have been violated.

On this side of the House, we have been calling on the government to take action and commit to fighting for justice for Sri Lankans. We called for action in 2009. New Democrats stood with hundreds of thousands of Canadians from across the country who were calling on the very same government to take action. Jack Layton stood with these Canadians and facilitated an emergency debate in the House, on the Sri Lankan conflict, demanding that the government stand up for human rights and justice.

We have been asking the government to call upon the United Nations to follow the recommendations provided by its own panel of experts and to launch an independent investigation into the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity that may have been committed during the final phase of the Sri Lankan conflict. Canada is home to one of the largest communities of Tamil diaspora in the world, outside of India, many of whom live in my constituency of Scarborough—Rouge River and across the greater Toronto area in general.

These are people who have lived through the atrocities committed during the Sri Lankan conflict. These are people who have witnessed their loved ones being murdered or kidnapped. These are people who have felt unsafe in their own homes. My family joined these people, fleeing our home country to come to Canada, leaving behind our friends, families and loved ones. Many of us risked our lives in order to escape the horrors taking place inside our homes and in our own backyards.

During the almost 30 years of this conflict, and particularly during the final phase of the war, Canadians and the rest of the world stood idly by. Though there were many cries for help, there was no foreign intervention in the spring of 2009. Even the United Nations left Sri Lanka during the final phase of the conflict. We cannot continue this inaction. The United Nations expert panel, as well as the channel four documentary, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, show that there are serious allegations that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed during the final phase of the war. It is time for the global community to come together to fight for peace and justice in Sri Lanka.

Representatives are meeting later this week in Perth, Australia for the Commonwealth leaders summit. With these allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity, we know that Sri Lanka will be a topic of discussion as Sri Lanka is scheduled to host the next summit in 2013.

When is the government going to fight for justice for Sri Lankans? What concrete steps will Canada take to ensure that Sri Lanka complies with and demonstrates human rights values consistent with those held by Canadians, members of the Commonwealth and the United Nations?

● (1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the parliamentary secretary, I would just remind members that during adjournment proceedings they are welcome to take any seat in the chamber. I know that it is force of habit to take the seat they usually have, but members are welcome to do that.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this issue is quite important for this government, a government that stands up for human rights.

We are very much aware of the tremendous sacrifices made by the people of Sri Lanka during the civil conflict and the relief felt as a result of the successful end to this civil war.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and myself, on my visit to Sri Lanka immediately after the war, stated Canada's position quite clearly.

Canada is very concerned that the underlying sources of conflict are not being addressed and we are of the view that a political solution, including the devolution of power, is a critical component of sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Canada urges the government of Sri Lanka to establish an independent investigation into the credible allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights committed by both sides of the conflict. We expect Sri Lanka's lessons learned on the reconciliation commission will address these issues, including the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's panel of experts.

Canada is of the view that the government of Sri Lanka must show tangible progress in the handling of political reconciliation and seriously address the credible allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law as reported by the UN Secretary-General's panel of experts.

To add to what the hon. member said about the Commonwealth conference that is taking place now in Perth, Canada is of the view that this issue must be addressed. We have made it very clear to the Sri Lankan government that we expect to see some tangible progress in Sri Lanka in terms of human rights, political reconciliation and accountability. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if he does not see any tangible evidence moving toward that direction, then he will not attend the next Commonwealth conference to be held in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, we all know the saying, "actions speak louder than words". We can talk all we want, but nothing will change until we actually take action. We need action now, not just words.

We need to call upon the United Nations to launch an independent inquiry into the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We know that the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Committee as created by Sri Lanka was deemed to be biased and not independent by the United Nations panel of experts.

We need to take concrete action to ensure that Sri Lanka demonstrates respect for human rights and human dignity and complies with these values held by progressive democracies.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague is a new member of Parliament, I would like to let her know that diplomacy works behind the scenes. We have been sending a message to the government in power that these are our concerns. That is how people can achieve results. That is what we have been doing since the civil war ended. I have visited there. If the government does not address the issues of what transpired during the reconciliation process, then we would be in a situation where possibly down the road the same conflict would start up again. In order for the country to move ahead, it is in the best interests of Sri Lanka to do that. We, as a Commonwealth nation, are willing to help Sri Lanka move down the reconciliation path.

Adjournment Proceedings

Sri Lanka must also address the credible concerns of the UN Secretary-General on the violation of human rights in that country.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to follow up on a couple of questions I had in the House of Commons that relate to cuts the government is making to a number of different services. The first is the Canada Border Services Agency and the second is employment insurance.

My riding in Windsor has the largest volume of international traffic travelling between Canada and the United States. In fact, it ranks in the world's top class. We are seeing the CBSA headquarters office move to Niagara Falls. Despite the fact that a report said that it should be consolidated in Windsor, the government has decided to move it to a minister's riding at the expense of drugs and smugglers getting into this country and at the expense of a series of different problems that we will see emerge.

The reason I know that is that I have met with the men and women who serve so ably in the Windsor region and they will now have to communicate with supervisors 400 kilometres away from the most important border crossing that this country has. It has the highest volume and it has the highest issues that have to be dealt with. It is a border crossing that consists of four independent ways to get vehicles, trains, trucks and cars across to the Detroit region and then into the United States. It is a very sensitive region.

To relocate the headquarters to Niagara Falls 400 kilometres away, when executive decisions need to be made about whether to investigate, take down or take action on smugglers, drug runners and other types of things we do not want to have in our country, is wrong.

The second issue is the cuts to employment insurance in an area of high unemployment. We are seeing 73 people who are facing layoff. The government has backed off on some of them because of the pressure. It is wrong because right now people rely upon those cheques and services. In the division that is being cut and reduced, it recently won an award in Canada for service. The employees won an award and now they get a pink slip. It is unacceptable. We want to see the restoration of those services.

The parliamentary secretary said, "we are doing that by investing" when she was referring to public safety, and the other minister said that "no impact on persons servicing is going to take place". That is absolutely not true. We know the government is cutting the Windsor service because of austerity measures. It has publicly admitted that. It has said that the reduction is taking place because it needs to reduce the CBSA file and the money in it to make way for changes with regard to the budgetary process.

We know the changes to employment insurance will affect the front-line people because we have lost the decision-makers who look at arbitrary cases for employment insurance. These are people who have been trained for a number of years to do that job. They have gone through several layers of training to become a processing person who actually looks at the cases, makes decisions and makes recommendations about someone getting employment insurance. That is critical because other boards and agencies have often tried to cherry-pick some of these workers because they are so good.

However, we are showing them the pink slip right now despite the fact that they have the best qualifications and credentials.

There is the very important position of a youth service operator worker who does outreach for young people. In my region, we have 20% unemployment for youth. It is unacceptable and we should not be losing services right now because they are critical for serving people and keeping streets in our community safe.

• (1850)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members are aware, our government departments are required to conduct strategic reviews every five years.

Last April, as part of its strategic review, the CBSA consolidated its southern Ontario regional operations. As a result of merging two regions, only one regional headquarters was required in order to optimize administrative operations and create better efficiencies.

When the two regional offices amalgamated, the CBSA was able to focus its resourcing priorities to continue to ensure an efficient, safe and secure border. It is important to understand that there were no closures or port of entry changes as a result of merging these two regions.

The only significant change was that the administration for the regional headquarters was centralized in one location. This was not a decision that was taken lightly, and all of the factors were considered. These factors included: impacts to staff, stakeholder consultations, cost effectiveness, infrastructure commitments and trade and traveller volumes. In the end, the top deciding factors were impacts to staff and the cost effectiveness for Canadian taxpayers.

It has been almost six months since the CBSA consolidated its regional headquarters into one location. I can say that the CBSA continues to serve Canadians by protecting the border with professionalism and integrity. No services have been affected and there have been no interruptions at the border.

While regional reporting structures have changed, the day-to-day work conducted by border service officers has not changed. The CBSA is committed to ensuring that these front-line operations continue to run smoothly.

The hon. members in this House should be aware that there have been many inaccurate reports about this administrative change and I would like to set the record straight.

First, and most important, no front-line positions were affected by this office relocation. Second, only a small number of positions were actually affected and, in the end, no jobs were lost as a result. Third, the CBSA will save \$1.5 million per year by merging these administrative, human resources and information technology capacities.

CBSA will continue to ensure the security of the Canadian border in an efficient, cost-effective manner, as is expected by the Canadian taxpayer.

● (1855)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it is quite amazing. I loved the preamble with regard to the parliamentary secretary saying that there were no closures between these two crossings when the amalgamation took place.

When we think about that logically, that is 60% of the trade that goes between Canada and the United States, so of course there would be no closures to crossing. To suggest that Fort Erie or the Windsor-Detroit corridor would lose crossings is completely ludicrous and it does not even make any sense. It certainly shows the efforts the government is making to change the channel.

The reality is that we did lose staff and personnel in the field, because we have managers and other support systems that are now gone. Those support systems are very important. The decision-makers who would actually make the call at the end of the day are now gone. Now we have to communicate with people 400 kilometres away.

We do not know what type of drugs are getting into the country. We do not know what kind of guns are getting into the country. We do not know what type of smugglers are getting into the country. It is all because we have devolved the entire system in Windsor just for \$1.5 million.

The busiest border crossing in this country, in this North American system, is now a headless horseman.

Adjournment Proceedings

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, last April, the CBSA created one regional headquarters to maximize its resources. Once again, this decision was not taken lightly and, in the end, the deciding factors were impacts to staff and cost effectiveness.

After almost six months, border operations continue to run effectively and efficiently. The hon, member needs to put a little more confidence in the CBSA people who are running the borders. He is crying foul when they are doing an excellent job of guarding our borders. It is also important to note that no front-line positions were affected.

By merging the administrative components of this office, the CBSA will save \$1.5 million per year. Canadians watching right now will agree that \$1.5 million is a very substantial saving to the taxpayers in Canada.

The CBSA continues to maintain border security in an efficient, cost-effective manner, as is expected by Canadian taxpayers.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): 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 6:58 p.m.)

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