



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 3, 2011

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 3, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1005)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS OF CANADA

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to table today, in both official languages, the 2011 public accounts of Canada. The Government of Canada committed to strictly managing our financial resources and to showing more accountability and transparency in our reports. For the 13th consecutive year, the government has received an unqualified audit opinion from the Auditor General of Canada on the financial statements. The Government of Canada has every reason to be proud of this.

* * *

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (B), 2011–12

A message from His Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (B) for the financial year ending March 31, 2012, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

* * *

[*English*]

MEMBERS' EXPENDITURES

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table a document entitled “Individual Member's Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 2011”.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to three petitions.

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts in regard to the certificate of nomination of Michael Ferguson to the position of Auditor General of Canada.

* * *

CELL PHONE FREEDOM ACT

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-343, An Act respecting the locking of cellular telephones.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to introduce a private member's bill, the cellphone freedom bill. The bill takes an important step, providing more consumer choice and promoting competition in the domestic wireless market. It would do that by striking a healthy balance on the issue of mobile phone network locks.

Network locks means that Canadian consumers' cellphones are locked to work only on the network of the carrier from which they buy their phone. The cellphone freedom act would level the playing field for Canadian cellphone customers. It would mandate that consumers buying new cellphones in Canada must be informed of any cell network lock on their phones before sale. It would require phone companies to unlock handsets upon request, without charge, when consumers purchase new phones outright. It says that carriers must unlock handsets upon request, free of charge again, when a consumer comes to the end of his or her service contract, or any time thereafter.

I invite members of all parties to stand up for competition and consumers and support the cellphone freedom bill.

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

* * *

•(1010)

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That, in accordance with subsection 3(1) of the Auditor General Act, R.S.C. 1985, c. A-17, and pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, this House approve the appointment of Michael Ferguson as Auditor General of Canada for a term of 10 years.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Routine Proceedings

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1050)

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

(Division No. 51)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Bateman	Benoit
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hillyer
Hoback	Hoepfner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayer	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Oda	Opitz
Paradis	Payne

Penashue
Preston
Rajotte
Reid
Richardson
Ritz
Schellenberger
Shea
Smith
Sorenson
Storseth
Sweet
Toet
Trost
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Raitt
Rathgeber
Rempel
Rickford
Saxton
Seeback
Shipley
Sopuck
Stanton
Strahl
Tilson
Toews
Trotter
Tweed
Valcourt
Van Loan
Wallace
Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Ashton
Aubin
Bellavance
Bevington
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brosseau
Cash
Chicoine
Christopherson
Comartin
Crowder
Day
Donnelly
Dubé
Dusseau
Freeman
Genest
Giguère
Gravelle
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hughes
Jacob
Kellway
Larose
Laverdière
Leslie
Mai
Martin
Mathysen
Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Nantel
Nunez-Melo
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Raynault
Saganash
Savoie
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Stewart
Sullivan
Toone

Angus
Atamanenko
Ayala
Benskin
Blanchette
Boivin
Boulerice
Brahmi
Caron
Charlton
Choquette
Cleary
Côté
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Fortin
Garrison
Genest-Jourdain
Godin
Groguhé
Harris (St. John's East)
Hyer
Julian
Lapointe
Latendresse
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Énard)
Liu
Marston
Masse
May
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Mulcair
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PETITIONS

HEALTH CARE

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, petitions continue to pour in from my riding of Hamilton Mountain, all of which address the urgent need for a national pharmacare program in our country. The petitioners point out that our goal ought to be a national drug plan that would enable all Canadians to enjoy equitable access to medicines and at the same time control the rising cost of drugs.

The petitioners are keenly aware of a report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, which concluded that the existing patchwork of private and public plans in Canada is inequitable, inefficient and costly. The report found that Canada was the third most expensive country for brand-name drugs because it deliberately inflates drug prices in order to attract pharmaceutical investments.

Instead of tackling the issue head-on, the government is talking about privatization and user fees. Those are hardly the answers for an aging population that is already finding it difficult to make ends meet and whose retirement savings are again put at risk by yet another economic downturn.

The request by the petitioners is as straightforward as it is urgent. They simply want the government to acknowledge that there is a sound economic case to be made for universal public medicare and to get on with the job of developing and implementing a national pharmacare program.

While I know that the rules of the House do not allow me to endorse a petition, I will conclude by commending the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada for its timely leadership on this important issue.

The Speaker: I would just remind hon. members that the Standing Orders provide for a succinct explanation of the petition and I urge members to stick to that so we can accommodate more members who wish to present petitions.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to present a petition today on behalf of individuals who have growing concerns regarding the number of visas that are being rejected. Quite often parents and close family members are attempting to come to Canada to participate in weddings and many other celebrations. However, too many visas are being denied.

The idea of multi-year, multi-entry visas is something that needs to be acted on. We know that it is there in principle, but it does need to be acted on.

The petitioners are asking the government to give special consideration to family members.

•(1055)

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians

Routine Proceedings

who are calling upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known.

The petitioners point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined, and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, spending millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live. They also call upon the government to end all government subsidies of asbestos in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by Nova Scotians who are concerned about the fate of Mr. Philip Halliday. Mr. Halliday, a resident of Digby, has languished in a Spanish prison for 22 months without even having a trial date set. Friends and family will hold a rally in support of Mr. Halliday tomorrow and a strong turnout is expected. They have the same hope as the people who signed this petition.

The petitioners call upon the government to defend the rights of Mr. Halliday and take action to intervene on his behalf with the Spanish authorities.

The petitioners also call upon the Government of Canada to use diplomatic channels to ensure Mr. Halliday receives a fair and speedy trial, or immediate release based upon the length of his detention with no trial date and his continued deteriorating health issues.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of a number of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and also residents of other parts of Atlantic Canada calling on the government to reverse its decision to close the marine rescue coordinating centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petitioners point out that the rescue centre staff have a unique knowledge of the area, the ocean and the coastline. They are responsible for an area of 900,000 square kilometres. This rescue coordinating centre has the highest proportion of distress incidents in Canada and saves the lives of 600 people in distress each year.

The petitioners call upon the government to reverse its decision and to reinstate and keep the marine rescue coordinating centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. They are concerned that its closure will mean services will suffer and lives will be put at risk.

Routine Proceedings

This is a very important issue in my province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The knowledge of the people at sea and the Coast Guard auxiliary that is available are very important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

[Text]

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 151 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 151—**Hon. John McCallum:**

With regard to Infrastructure Canada, what was the estimate, prepared for the seventh report to Canadians, of the number of Economic Action Plan projects and the value of the federal contribution that would be affected by the government's December 2, 2010, decision to extend the stimulus construction deadline?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of Canada's economic action plan, Infrastructure Canada is responsible for delivering the \$4 billion infrastructure stimulus fund and the \$500 million top-up to the communities component of the building Canada fund. These two programs benefited from the government's decision to extend the stimulus construction deadline from March 31, 2011, to October 31, 2011. Two additional programs not managed by Infrastructure Canada, the knowledge infrastructure program and recreational infrastructure Canada, also benefited from the extension.

Although the seventh report to Canadians was released on January 31, 2011, it was finalized ahead of this date. At the time the report was finalized, provinces, territories, municipalities, and other partners had not yet submitted, as per the conditions of the extension, their requests for extending their projects beyond the original March 31, 2011, deadline to October 31, 2011. Details are presented on page 65 of the seventh report.

As such, figures on the number of projects seeking extension or the value of the federal contribution under Infrastructure Canada's two programs were not included in the seventh report to Canadians. This was noted on page 66 of the seventh report: "Details on the value and number of projects that will be extended into 2011-12 will be known closer to the end of 2010-11 following receipt of estimates from provinces, territories, municipalities or other partners."

* * *

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Question No. 142 could be made an order for return, this return would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Question No. 142—**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:**

With respect to the venous system, and more particularly, chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency (CCSVI): (a) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding the venous system, including (i) what does the normal venous system look like, and, specifically, what does it look like in infants, children, and adults, (ii) can the veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, look normal, and the flow be abnormal, (iii) what is the normal range of flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, (iv) how should normal range of flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and azygous, be defined, (v) what is the normal range of blood gases in veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, (vi) what causes venous pathology and when does it occur, (vii) theoretically, what is the complete range of possible vascular problems in the head, neck, chest, and spine, which ones might impact health, and specifically which ones might be linked to multiple sclerosis (MS), (viii) how does the complete range of possible vascular problems compare with those actually seen in patients, (ix) how should abnormal flow through veins, in particular the jugulars and the azygous, be defined, (x) how might abnormal blood gases in veins affect health in the short-term and long-term, (xi) what, if any, reflux is normal in veins, and, if some reflux is normal, what is the 'tipping point' to abnormal, (xii) can a catalogue of venous pathology (in the head, neck, chest and spine), abnormal flow, and potential health impacts be established, (xiii) what protects against abnormal venous pathology and abnormal flow, (xiv) who should receive venous protective measures, and when should protective measures be put in place;

(b) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding the venous system and MS, including, (i) can fluid mechanics predict where physiologic changes in the brain might occur, (ii) how does the neurologist's understanding of flow through the brain compare with that of physicists, (iii) does decreased metabolism lead to hypoxia which may lead to endothelial damage and inflammation, (iv) what occurs first, inflammatory changes in the brain or iron deposition, (v) what role does reduced perfusion have in MS, (vi) does stenosis extracranially cause less perfusion in the brain, (vii) does stenosis extra-cranially cause morphological changes in the brain, (viii) do cerebral veins actually disappear over time, or is it merely a lack of flow that makes them look like they disappear in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) studies; (ix) what, if any changes beyond lesions, occur in the spinal cord of MS patients, as a result of reduced vertebral flow, (x) do vertebral veins show a similar disappearance over time, (xi) what percentage of MS patients show evidence of venous pathology, as compared to 'normals', (xii) what other venous abnormalities might MS patients have (e.g., bladder, intestine, kidney), might these abnormalities play a role in their disease, and, if so, how should they be imaged and treated, (xiii) what percentage of MS patients show venous abnormalities below the chest (e.g., May Thurner syndrome), and does this have an impact on their disease, (xiv) how does the vascular system of someone with benign MS compare to that of someone with relapsing-remitting, primary progressive or secondary progressive MS; (c) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI and MS, including, (i) what is the prevalence of CCSVI in relapsing-remitting, primary progressive or secondary progressive MS, (ii) does CCSVI worsen over time with the progression of disease, (iii) does CCSVI play a role in MS, and, if so, how, (iv) is CCSVI specific to MS, (v) what are the potential health impacts of CCSVI in the short-term, medium-term and long-term, both with and without treatment; (d) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI diagnosis, including (i) how do the results of MRI compare with those of ultrasound for diagnosis of CCSVI, (ii) what is the best way to image the venous system and the best way to image venous pathology, (iii) what are the limitations of current diagnostic tools to image the venous system, (iv) should intravascular ultrasound be used, and what are the benefits and the risks, (v) what is the learning curve for the various diagnostic procedures, and what should practitioners undertake to become sufficiently accomplished, (vi) can a standardized protocol be established for diagnosing CCSVI in MS patients, and when should MS patients be tested for CCSVI, (vii) can a standardized system for describing lesions (e.g., type, location) be established, (viii) what should be the decision-making process regarding whether to treat or not to treat (e.g., anatomy, flow, etc.), (ix) should arterial, venous and CSF flow be monitored, how often, and for what purpose, (x) should lesions and iron load be monitored, how often, and for what purpose;

Government Orders

(e) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI treatment, including (i) what timescale is useful for treatment of CCSVI, (ii) what are the benefits and risks associated with treatment of CCSVI, (iii) what are best practices for treating each identified vascular problem, (iv) how should a successful CCSVI treatment be defined (e.g., valvular correction, reduction in stenosis, increased flow, improved blood gases), (v) can malformed jugulars and azygous be treated to achieve normal flow, (vi) can malformed jugulars and azygous be treated to achieve a normal range of blood gases, (vii) can jugulars and azygous be sufficiently treated to make up for poor vertebral flow, and, if not, what procedures can be developed to improve vertebral flow, (viii) should stents be used, and, if so, under what circumstances, (ix) what are the immediate complications of CCSVI treatment, and in what percentage of treatments does each occur for each identified abnormality, (x) what is the best follow-up anti-coagulant therapy, what are the potential risks, and what is the prevalence of complications, (xi) what are the best follow-up therapies, including, brain plasticity exercises, nutrition, physiotherapy, speech therapy, etc., and which therapies have the best associated outcomes, (xii) what are late complications, what follow-up is necessary to determine late complications, and in what percentage of treatments does each occur for each identified abnormality, (xiii) what treatments are available should a stent be occluded, either through hyperplasia or thrombosis, (xiv) what is the success rate of each identified treatment for an occluded stent; (f) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding determining the best CCSVI treatment, including, (i) is CCSVI treatment with the addition of pharmacological agents more efficacious than just the CCSVI procedure, (ii) what pharmacological agents could be used to treat venous inflammation, iron storage, and hydrocephaly, and could these agents be added to CCSVI treatment, (iii) what safe apparatuses could be developed to keep treated veins open, (iv) are vein grafts possible, and if so, on whom, and when should they be used, (v) is CCSVI treatment more efficacious with mesenchymal-derived or adipose-derived stem-cell infusion than just the CCSVI procedure alone, (vi) what methods might be added to reduce permeability of the blood-brain barrier, including pharmacological agents and stem cells, (vii) what are the effects of chelators on iron uptake and release from the brain, and might iron chelators be used as therapeutic agents;

(g) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding possible impacts of CCSVI treatment on MS patients, including (i) what impact does CCSVI treatment have on patients immediately, (ii) what impact does CCSVI treatment have on patients at 24 hours, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (iii) what does the magnetic resonance venography (MRV) of a treated patient look like at 24 hours, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (iv) what percentage of MS patients show functional improvement at 3 months, 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years, (v) what are the most appropriate scales to measure any health impacts following CCSVI treatment as reported by MS patients, (vi) do new scales have to be created to measure reported changes following treatment, (vii) which patients show the greatest improvement, and does early intervention allow for a better outcome, (viii) what are the treatment outcomes associated with each of the identified venous problems, (ix) what percentage of MS patients show a reduction in MS attacks and brain lesions following the CCSVI procedure, (x) what percentage of MS patients with little or mild blockage show improvement following the CCSVI procedure, (xi) for those MS patients whose conditions do not improve or become worse, why does this occur; (h) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding CCSVI re-stenosis and diagnosis, including, (i) what is rate of stenosis for each identified vascular abnormality, (ii) what changes should patients be told to look for to in order to recognize whether they are possibly re-stenosing, (iii) what diagnostic methods should be used after treatment for CCSVI, (iv) what diagnostic methods should be used to look for re-stenosis, and at what timescales; (i) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding secondary procedures for CCSVI, including, (i) are secondary procedures safe, and if so, how many, (ii) what should be the follow-up protocol for secondary procedures, (iii) should there be a methodology established regarding whether to do a secondary procedure or not; and (j) what, if any, steps is the government taking to address research questions regarding prevention in the next generation, including, (i) do vascular issues develop in utero, during childhood, or later, and what would be the best methods to discover circulation problems at the earliest time possible to avoid health impacts at a later date, (ii) might vascular birthmarks and tumours be an indication of potential vascular problems, (iii) might skin discolouration, skin abnormalities, and even proliferation of moles be an indication of an autoimmune or neural condition, (iv) might giving vitamin D to pregnant mothers reduce the risk of children being born with, or developing, vascular problems and other conditions and, if so, what dosage is appropriate, (v) do antioxidants, vitamin D and omega 3 reduce vein inflammation, (vi) will giving children and adolescents vitamin D reduce the risk of developing vein inflammation and venous hypertension and, if so, what dosage is appropriate, and what quantity should be recommended for a child with a

family history of CCSVI, vascular problems or MS, etc., (vii) what would be the optimum time to undertake CCSVI treatment to avoid health impacts at a later date?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

BILL C-20—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the Bill; and

At fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business on the day designated for the consideration of the said stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67(1) there will now be a 30-minute question period. I would ask hon. members to keep their questions and responses to about a minute so we can accommodate more questions and more members.

As in previous question periods, members of the opposition will be recognized more often than government members to allow questioning from the opposition parties. Some members of the government will no doubt be accommodated as well.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

• (1100)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are again going down the same road which the government has obviously chosen to go down to thwart debate in the House, and quite frankly to thwart the democracy that the debate supports.

I want to put on the record again in *Hansard* that the Conservatives have obviously decided that they want to set a record for the number of time allocation motions. We are up to 43 sitting days so far in this session of Parliament. They are trying to catch up with the Liberals and are doing a really good job at it.

The Liberals took 122 sitting days before they set the record with nine time allocation motions. As this is the seventh one by the government in 43 days, I ask the government House leader, how many more are we going to have? On what possible basis can he say that we need time allocation for this bill which has changed quite dramatically from its earlier incarnation? There is a significant shift in the bill that requires significant debate.

Government Orders

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the question, if there is a record being set, I think it has been set by the opposition. That would be the record for the most number of reasoned amendments ever in such a short period of time. Those are amendments from the opposition that aim to prevent a bill from getting past second reading. The opposition has moved such a reasoned amendment, saying that this bill should not go past second reading. The opposition has made up its mind. It has said that the debate is over. It has said that it is going to vote against the bill. All that is left is to allow this House to decide. That is the purpose of our motion, to allow it to happen.

The reason we think it is important to do so in this case is best captured in the words of the member for Hamilton Centre, the NDP critic for democratic reform, who said, “If we don't have those seats available”—the ones that are being generated by this bill—“for the next election, then the government has failed in terms of the promise they made”.

As we know, the census results will be released in February. The redistribution process will begin at that point. That means this bill has to get through this House at second reading, through a committee, back to this House for report stage and third reading, then over to the Senate for second reading, through committee, and third reading there, and then royal assent by the Governor General, all before the redistribution process in order to fulfill the objectives set out by the NDP critic for democratic reform.

That sets out the imperative of the timeline we are under, the reason we feel the need to move in this fashion to achieve those objectives. That is indeed why we are doing it in this case.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened to the government House leader, particularly when he was quoting me, which I stand by.

I think it is the purpose for all of us. We go through a lot of different processes in the course of debate. There is a lot of zigging and a lot of zagging, but at the end of the day, I think there is a collective commitment, certainly I know the government has one and we in the official opposition have one, to have the appropriate bill in place that gives our provinces and territories the appropriate number of seats.

We have a challenge in front of us. We have the government bill in front of us, which I believe is the third go-around on this matter. We also have the bill put forward by the official opposition. They are apart, but I want to say that there is a closer resemblance to our bill and where the government is now.

If the government is planning to slice off debate here due to the time limits, will the government House leader assure us that we will have adequate time at committee to do the work that is necessary, or is he going to thoroughly stifle all democratic debate on a democratic bill and deny us the opportunity to do the work we need to do?

• (1105)

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, our government received a strong mandate to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons.

We have presented a principled formula, a formula that is fair for all provinces and moves every single province closer to representa-

tion by population. It is based on population figures. It is based on the fact that we have growing provinces. The provinces of Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario are significantly under-represented. It is important that we add seats to those provinces to bring them closer to representation by population.

Again, this formula brings every province closer to representation by population. We have made a commitment that we would move forward on this. That is exactly what we are doing.

The NDP members have already staked out their position. They do not even want this bill to get to second reading. They do not even want it to get to committee. They are talking about committee, but they are the ones who do not want this bill to move to committee.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for the House leader.

This is the umpteenth time we are debating closure instead of using House time to debate bills. I am wondering how his calculation has now come down to one day. Does that mean all future bills will be debated in less than an hour or 10 minutes, or is it going to be brought down to a few seconds? That is my question to the House leader.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is important that we get this bill to committee and passed, so the seats are available to bring Canadians fair representation and every province closer to representation by population as soon as possible. We ask the opposition to support us in passing this bill.

I have a question for the opposition. What does it have against Alberta, B.C. and Ontario getting closer to representation by population? They are significantly under-represented. As members of the House, it is our responsibility to ensure that every province gets closer to representation by population.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find the trend of the government to be deeply disturbing. One is an obvious contempt for the traditions of Parliament. We are sent to the House by people from across this country to represent our regions and people, and to ensure that there is balance in legislation. Nothing is more profound than the discussion about new seat distribution.

I see the second element of the Conservative agenda being wedge politics, to accuse opposition members, who want to ensure this is done right, of somehow having something against Alberta or Ontario. I find that an odious inference.

But I find it much more odious that the government will not allow proper debate on a bill which is fundamentally about nation building. Why does it continually show contempt for the House? If it does not want debate in the House, why is this place open at all? Why is not just a Mr. Harper autocracy?

Government Orders

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I would remind all members to refrain from using the names of sitting members.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, I am very sorry for saying Mr. Harper's name in the House. An autocracy of—

The Deputy Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to come to order.

The hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the NDP talks about debate, but the fact is that after having just started debate on fair representation in the House of Commons yesterday, within the first hour it moved an amendment not to allow this bill to pass second reading and get to committee. It talks about working in committee, but it moved an amendment not to allow it to get to committee.

It has made up its mind. It is not going to support this bill. Conservatives believe that members of the House of Commons should decide on that. We should have a vote and let them decide.

•(1110)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, I strongly support the government moving expeditiously on this bill. This is an incredibly important bill. This bill would ensure fair representation by population in the chamber. This is one of the most important pieces of legislation the government has brought forward. In fact, this is the third iteration of a bill that was introduced in previous parliaments. This is incredibly important.

We have record high levels of immigration to Canada. We admit people from around the world and we cannot have that policy on the one hand and on the other hand deny new Canadians in the emerging new Canada a voice in the House. This bill would give Ontario an additional 15 seats. In regions of Ontario which are most rapidly growing, places like Brampton, Mississauga, the greater Toronto area, this is an incredibly important bill.

This is the base on which Confederation was founded in 1867. It was the leader of the Liberal Party, George Brown, who argued for representation by population. This bill respects that fundamental constitutional principle.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, my colleague brings up a very good point. He talked about new Canadians and visible minorities. The fact is that through immigration our population has been growing, and visible minorities and new Canadians tend to live in the fastest growing provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario. They live in communities that are the fastest growing and that has left new Canadians and visible minorities among the most under-represented.

I would ask the opposition to move forward with this bill in order to allow fair representation for new Canadians and visible minorities. It should not delay this bill. It is very important that we get this bill passed and allow fair representation for all Canadians. It would bring every province closer to representation by population.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, all governments believe that their bills are very important and should be passed expeditiously, but the process of our democracy is that we debate bills in the House in order to improve them, so that they can get to the best point to be passed. That is the

purpose of first reading, second reading, third reading and committee work.

In the past, time allocation was an unusual procedure in the House. I use, for example, Louis-René Beaudoin who was the member for Vaudreuil—Soulanges in the 1950s. He was also Speaker of the House and during the famous pipeline debate, he moved with the government a time allocation motion. There were weeks of chaos in the House due to the cutting off of debate because it was so unusual.

I find it sincerely disturbing that the government is using this so often. Where is the respect for democracy? Where is the respect for the traditions of the House?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is true that many bills of this government are very important. We made a commitment that we would move forward and get those passed as soon as possible.

Specifically, the bill adds more seats to the under-represented provinces and is based on a timeline. There is no doubt that we have a timeline here. We have made a commitment that we would pass this bill and go through the entire process within our mandate. It is important that we do that. It is important that we do that so the under-represented provinces gain more seats and move closer to representation by population.

The bill actually brings every province closer to representation by population. It fulfills our commitment to move the House closer to fairer representation.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we find it truly amazing that the bill came before this chamber just yesterday. Just yesterday the government introduced a bill that is going to substantially increase the number of members of Parliament. The Conservatives then expect within a few hours of debate that we should all be content with that and allow the bill to go to committee.

My question is for the government House leader. How does he, with any credibility whatsoever, go to the public and say that this is a just system, that this system is allowing for open debate, that we are allowing for the public, through their elected members of Parliament, to be able to question the government, to stand and express what they think?

Why, within minutes of having the bill debated, have you taken the heavy hand of a majority government—

•(1115)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask all members to direct their questions through the Chair.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, actually before we took the step of moving time allocation in this case, there was already a motion from the opposition that the bill not proceed beyond second reading, that it not go to committee. That was the purpose of the opposition's motion, that it not be allowed to go through the process and that debate actually be cut off. That was not our idea. The idea to cut off debate at the end of second reading was a motion from the opposition.

Government Orders

After that we felt it necessary, since it was clear the issue was decided, as the opposition had indicated it would oppose it and the government was going to support it, that it was time for the House to decide and allow it to go to committee where the work can be done.

Then it would go to report stage where work can be done, to third reading where again there will be votes and work can be done, and then to make it over to the Senate. We do have that priority of ensuring that the bill puts fairness into our democratic system to ensure that we move closer to that fundamental democratic principle of each individual's vote having equal weight in time for the next redistribution when the census results do come out early next year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Madam Speaker, once again, this is undemocratic, undemocratic, undemocratic.

How can this government stand before Canadians and dare to say that it was elected by a majority of Canadians, when only 39% of Canadians voted for it?

How can it say that this bill is fair, especially to Quebec, which will be under-represented, even though it was recognized as a founding nation of the country in a motion unanimously adopted by the House in 2006?

Quebec will now end up under-represented in this House. How can the government claim that this bill will be fair to everyone?

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, we received a strong mandate from Canadians to bring every province closer to representation by population. We made a commitment that Quebec's representation would be equal to its population. Quebec has 23% of the population so after this formula is in place it would have 23% of the seats in this House of Commons. The numbers speak for themselves and we need to move forward on this bill.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are two fundamental issues in this bill. The first is seat distribution and the fair representation of all Canadians in this House. Another thing that many Canadians are wondering is whether we will continue to increase the number of seats every time we have a census. Is there a limit? Those are the two main issues, which are perhaps a bit contradictory, that should be at the heart of the debates.

When we pass a bill at second reading it means that we pass it in principle. That seriously—and in some cases almost completely—limits the possibility of making amendments in committee. I think that one day of debate is not enough time for members from all the parties to return to their ridings and talk to their constituents. A government member said it himself: this is the third version. Is this formula the right one? Did the government take the right approach? I think we should have had the time to consult our constituents so that we can properly represent them in this rather important debate.

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, this formula, which is fair for all provinces, would bring in reasonable growth for the House of Commons now and into the future. When the Liberals were in

government, they always picked winners and losers and they put one part of the country against another.

I would ask the hon. member, under the Liberals' plan who are the winners? Which provinces would win and which would lose? Under the Liberals' plan, they would be taking away seats and giving them to others so they would choose winners and losers. Who would be the winners and who would be the losers under their plan?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the minister if, while weighing this issue, he is keeping in mind the possibility of a constitutional crisis, as we have seen in the past. If he is not considering that, I am wondering if perhaps it is part of the Conservative strategy to create a constitutional crisis.

● (1120)

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, the provisions in this bill were actually changed, under section 44 of the Constitution, which is within the authority of Parliament to do. This has been done in the past. In the late 1980s, Parliament changed the number of seats in the House of Commons through section 44. So it is within Parliament's authority to change the Constitution to bring under-represented provinces closer to representation by population.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Madam Speaker, in his speech a few minutes ago, the hon. member for Compton—Stanstead mentioned only one concern about the bill the government has introduced. And I heard the word “ridiculous”. When the first concern was raised, members of the government, without hesitation, used the word “ridiculous”, off the record. Are we to understand that the goal is to silence debate on a fundamental issue, thus demonstrating clear contempt for democracy and the opposition's opinions? Are we to understand that there will be no debate on an issue as important as representation in this House?

[*English*]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I actually did not hear a question. However, I will take the time to outline the commitments of our government on fair representation.

We committed that we would bring more seats to the under-represented provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario because their populations have been growing and they are significantly under-represented. We committed that we would maintain the seats of the smaller provinces and we also committed that the representation of Quebec would equal its population. We made those commitments, we received a strong mandate to move forward on those commitments, and this bill, the fair representation act, does that. It is important that we move forward and I would ask the opposition to support us on that.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to ask the minister a question on the proposed legislation. I am from the province of Alberta. Alberta has been under-represented for a long time. It is really important that the bill go through so that the officials will have time to make all the adjustments necessary to add riding seats in the various provinces.

Government Orders

My question for the minister is this: how many seats would Alberta get, and what would that do in terms of fixing under-representation in Alberta?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, under this formula Alberta would get six new seats. That would bring Alberta closer to representation by population.

It is only fair that these under-represented provinces of Alberta, B.C. and Ontario be fairly represented. They have had increases in population, either through immigration or through people moving from one part of the country to the other, and Canadians expect fair and equitable representation in their democratic institutions.

To the greatest extent possible, every vote should carry equal weight. This bill would bring every province closer to representation by population.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government repeatedly alludes to representation by population and fairness as being the key issues here. We do not have much opportunity to investigate what the government perceives to be fair or unfair because of its time allocation.

I will present the following circumstance. The President of the Queen's Privy Council, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, represents a constituency with 30,000 people, called Labrador.

In applying its principles of fairness and representation by population, is the government announcing to the House that it intends to dramatically expand the boundary of the current electoral district of Labrador to include a much broader constituency with representation by population equal to the rest of the country? I ask because we could only conclude at this point in time, without any proper debate, that it indeed intends to do so, and the people of Labrador should be aware of that intention.

• (1125)

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, it is quite obvious that the hon. member has not read the bill.

We made a commitment that we would protect the seats of the smaller provinces that have not had the growth. Perhaps he should be very careful and listen to what his own party, the Liberal Party, is proposing. It is the Liberal Party that is proposing to move seats around and take seats away from those provinces. I would suggest he talk to members in his own party and his own leader to see what their plan is, because it is a dangerous plan. We, on the other hand, committed to protect the seats of the smaller-growth provinces.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Madam Speaker, I just heard the minister say that he was going to protect the seats of the smaller provinces.

I would like the minister to tell me if he is going to protect the seats in northern Ontario. We have some huge ridings in northern Ontario. To go from one end of my riding to the other end takes me anywhere from six and a half to eight hours.

Is the minister willing to protect those ridings in northern Ontario where the population is spread out over probably three or four times the size of Prince Edward Island?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, yes, we would actually add 15 new seats to the province of Ontario, because it is under-represented.

The population has grown, and we would add those seats to bring it closer to representation by population.

The question also gives me the opportunity to explain that the bill would add seats. The redistribution of the ridings themselves would be done by an independent non-partisan commission. It would begin its work sometime next year, if the members support us in moving this bill forward, to look at the redistribution of the ridings themselves.

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Madam Speaker, debating is not delaying; it is democracy.

My question is for the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. Does he not find it painfully ironic that he is stifling debate for approximately 45% of the House when we are discussing representation? The government is stifling representatives from talking about representation. Does the minister not find that ironic?

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I believe the hon. member was probably not here yesterday when her own party—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges on a point of order.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the hon. member will know that it is not parliamentary to refer to a member's absence or presence in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the hon. minister is aware of that.

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I understand. I am saying that the hon. member may not have known that it was her own party that, within the first hour of debate on the bill, moved a motion to end debate and not let it move to second reading. Those members do not even want the bill to go to committee stage.

NDP members have already made up their minds that they will not support the bill. They do not want debate. They do not want it to move to committee stage, but the House of Commons should decide on the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, today we have to realize that this bill is important. It changes the political weight of all the provinces, and that of the Quebec nation in particular.

Earlier, I heard the Minister of State for Democratic Reform respond to a question from the opposition. He asked why the opposition was unhappy to see Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia have their political weight increased. He chose not to mention Quebec. You can check the blues, Madam Speaker. The minister really did word it that way.

When a bill is drafted that changes the political weight of representatives from each province, it is important to consider that reality. I would like to hear the minister's thoughts on that.

Government Orders

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, I was talking about the under-represented provinces. Alberta, B.C. and Ontario are under-represented; Quebec currently is not under-represented. It is actually fairly represented or overrepresented.

We made a commitment that Quebec would remain proportionally represented according to its population. At the end of the day, when everything is done here and the bill passes, Quebec will have 23% of the population and 23% of the seats of the House of Commons. That is fair. This bill is fair for all provinces.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord has 30 seconds to ask one last very brief question.

• (1130)

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, unfortunately, so much remains to be said.

Where is the urgency? We are talking about the future of this country and this House. The next election will be in four years' time. Where is the urgency?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal: Madam Speaker, absolutely there is urgency. As the government House leader has explained, in February the Statistics Canada census numbers are revealed and a process begins. If we are to move forward on adding seats to the under-represented provinces to move every province closer to representation by population, we need to move the bill forward. We have made the commitment to move this bill forward, to pass the bill and complete the entire process within our mandate.

The formula is a principle-based formula. It is fair for all provinces. It is important that we move forward.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1210)

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

(Division No. 52)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Adler	Aglukkaq
Albas	Albrecht
Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Ambler
Ambrose	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Oda
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rajotte
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Seeback
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Toews
Trost	Trottier
Truppe	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace

Government Orders

Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Weston (Saint John)	Wilks
Williamson	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Oakville)	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 153	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day	Dionne Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Giguère	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Larose
Latendresse	Laverdière
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nantel	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Piampendon	Quach
Rae	Ravignat
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	Stewart
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sullivan
Sitsabaiesan	Toone
Stoffer	Trudeau
Thibeault	
Tremblay	
Valeriotte— 119	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, although the Minister of State for Transport was in his chair, he was not in his seat when the

call for the vote occurred and, therefore, his vote should be discounted.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I was going to rise on the same point of order. Although some members of the House may not have noticed, I sneaked in just after you began the vote. I concur that perhaps in this case my vote should be withdrawn.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, before the minister made that comment, I was rising to my feet to say that, given the responsibility that we have to accommodate, his vote should be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: The minister of state has indicated that he was not in his place at the correct time, but is it the will of the House to allow his vote to count?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration from November 2 of the motion that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. For the record, I appreciated that there would have been unanimous consent in the House but I refused that consent to allow my vote. I appreciate the sentiment for accommodation but, at the end of the day, the rules are the rules and they must be followed, regardless of who the individual is or why the individual missed the timing, which is why I refused the unanimous consent.

I do appreciate the sentiment of the House, which was to allow the vote. It makes for an interesting philosophical debate, and I am thankful.

The Speaker: The House appreciates both of the sentiments on the particular question.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh on debate.

● (1215)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not be taking up the rest of my speech because I need to be in committee at this point.

The Speaker: The hon. member had 18 minutes left. However, if his speech is finished, we should have questions and comments.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one very brief question to the member.

I am curious to know what the NDP position is regarding the Conservative proposal that we increase the overall number of seats inside the House of Commons. Does the NDP have a position as to whether we should be increasing the number of seats?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, that is our party position.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to answer a question I asked one of his colleagues yesterday—the member would have to stay here, though—about the NDP amendment. If the amendment is rejected by the House—which is what will most likely happen, considering the Conservatives' attitude on this—what will the NDP's position be regarding the actual vote on the Conservative government's bill? I would remind the member that the bill denies the Quebec nation's rights and goes against the will of Quebec, particularly that of the Quebec National Assembly, which has unanimously adopted motions on several occasions calling on the government to maintain Quebec's political weight here in this House.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, as for our position, we in the NDP want the political weight of Quebec to remain unchanged. It absolutely must stay the same, if possible. That is our position and we will continue to fight for that.

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the honourable NDP member a question regarding the relatively short speech he just made. I was in the House when the speech was shortened because so little time was allocated. I would like to know what the member really thinks of Quebec's political weight, which will decrease under the bill introduced by the government. We heard the Liberals' position yesterday. I would like him to compare the positions taken by the government, the Liberals and the NDP.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my understanding is that the Liberals do not want any changes. They do not wish to add any seats in this chamber. To answer the rest of the question, it is very clear that the position of the Conservative government at this point is that three seats should be added in Quebec. That is all it is willing to do and we do not find this acceptable.

[*English*]

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak today in support of Bill C-20, the fair representation bill.

Last week, I had the privilege of being in Brampton with the Minister of State for Democratic Reform when we introduced the bill. I was happy to host him in my riding because Brampton West, as members of the House may or may not know, is somewhat of a poster child for the need for additional representation in the House of Commons.

As the minister mentioned yesterday in his remarks, according to the 2006 census, my riding was the largest in Canada. I have to admit that may not necessarily be the case now, as my friend from Oak Ridges—Markham may have overtaken me in the last five years, but I still represent one of the largest ridings in the country.

By the last census, Brampton West was home to the largest number of Canadians in any one constituency, in excess of 170,400 people. The population growth has continued and the number of people in my riding has significantly increased and, by my estimates, now stands at approximately 190,000 people. As the minister remarked yesterday, that 170,000 compares to an average national riding size of just under 113,000. That is quite a gap. Representing that many people is a challenge.

I represent a lot of people in a small geographic area. I also recognize that representing a smaller number of Canadians but over an exponentially larger riding is also a daunting challenge of a different type, which many of my colleagues face.

Which ridings are largest, whether on the basis of population or land, is not as important as the principles of fairness behind the system that apportions our ridings. The current formula that determines the number of seats in each province is unbalanced and needs a fix. In fact, under our current formula, Ontario would only receive three additional seats. This bill is a fair, principled and reasonable fix.

The bill also fulfills our government's commitment to move toward fairer representation in the House of Commons. During the last election, we made three distinct promises to Canadians with respect to fairness in representation.

First, we committed to increasing the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the population growth in the faster growing provinces of British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta. Second, we committed that we would continue to protect the number of seats for smaller provinces. Finally, we committed to protecting and ensuring the proportional representation of Quebec.

We made those promises during our election campaign and Canadians delivered a strong, stable, national, majority Conservative government. Our strong, stable, national, majority Conservative government will be fulfilling those promises with this bill.

Canadians strongly believe in fairness in representation. Fairness in representation for all Canadians is an important goal. We said this before and we will continue to say it. The vote of every Canadian to the greatest extent possible should have equal weight. Without the passage of the bill, we will continue to move away from fairness.

The faster growing provinces need to be treated much more fairly. Furthermore, failing to provide a fair level of representation to these rapidly growing provinces and regions is to deny new Canadians, and visible minorities in particular, their rightful voice in the chamber.

I have the privilege of representing a riding that has a large number of visible minorities and new Canadians. By recent statistics, Brampton West is home to a 55% visible minority population and their votes right now are not being treated equally with other voters across this country.

The proportion of new Canadians living and arriving in the fast growing areas of the country is much higher than elsewhere. Population projections confirm this. The GTA, the region where I come from, is projected to grow by 50% over the next 20 years. A similar trend is projected for Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton.

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•(1220)

The number of visible minorities in our country will continue to grow. In fact, Statistics Canada reports that, by 2031, one in three Canadians will be a visible minority, up to 14.4 million Canadians. The fact is Canadians in the fastest-growing areas of our provinces are being severely shortchanged with their representation. The effects of the representational imbalance are real. They are real for Canadians in fast-growing provinces whose voices are not heard in the chamber, not represented here and not heard as strongly as they should be.

By allowing under-representation to continue, we are sending a signal to those Canadians that their interests are not as important as those from other regions of the country and that they should somehow count for less. That is not fair. This is not what we should be saying to the, but it is the result of the current flawed formula and it will stay that way until we change it.

The bill proposes to change it and change it in a principled, balanced and fair way. That is why I do not understand the reasoning behind the NDP's amendment. It moved an amendment yesterday to refuse to give second reading to the bill, and I am quite surprised. I recall just last week, on the day we introduced the bill, the NDP critic, the member for Hamilton Centre, sat beside his leader and told the assembled media that this was a good bill. He said that the bill was a positive step that moved in the right direction. We are still moving in the same direction and the direction has not changed. We are moving in the direction of fairer representation for Canadians in faster-growing provinces who are increasingly under-represented.

This problem is particularly serious in and around my riding. Within a 15-minute drive of my riding, I can reach seven of the ten largest ridings by population in all of Canada. The member for Hamilton Centre can get to all of those seven ridings in a fairly short trip as well. He is from an urban centre just as I am. He knows we face large representation problems that must be fixed. He has said so in the past. In fact, a large number of his NDP colleagues should well know the under-representation problems we face. After all, many of them were elected in the hearts of urban centres.

There are fundamental and important questions that need answering and fairness that needs achieving. The NDP amendment says no, that there will be no answers. It says that New Democrats do not want balanced, reasonable, nationally-applicable fairness. It says that they want something else. They are wrong. New Democrats do not seem to be on board with ensuring fair representation to the rapidly-growing populations of Canadians in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Instead, they are obstructing this fair and reasonable bill and attempting to offer a flawed alternative in its place. Their alternative has dubious constitutional credentials and I personally do not think it will fly.

As I have said, their bill's viability aside, we are dealing with important issues of fundamental, democratic fairness. These issues get to the heart of our ability to be effective representatives for our constituents. One of the greatest demands of constituents is a sense of equality in their voting power and privilege. Their votes should have roughly equal weight. As we all know, right now that is not the case.

Taking a look at the riding of Brampton West is the perfect example of that. The riding of Brampton West has a larger population than Prince Edward Island, which has four members of Parliament. The voices of voters in Brampton West are not being treated equally.

Yes, change is a very complicated thing, no one is denying that, and I understand the desire to get it right, but we cannot make perfect the enemy of very good. There is no way we will ever have a perfect system of representation by population in Canada. We have other competing but equally-important principles that must also be preserved for the health of our country. We do not propose to move so far toward representation by population to disturb the other constitutionally-enshrined principles.

•(1225)

Bill C-20 would allow smaller and slower-growing provinces to maintain their current number of seats. This is fair. We must maintain their effective representation. The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation in the House of Commons at a level proportionate to its population. That is also fair. We are keeping our promise that we made to Quebecers.

We will also be fair by ensuring that the seat allocation formula will ensure it does not move overrepresented provinces under the levels which their populations warrant. This is also a very important point, as it will protect and promote the principle of proportionate representation, one of the fundamental principles in our Constitution, right along with representation by population. As we have been emphasizing, the bill would also better respect and maintain representation by population. The bill has national application that is fair for all provinces.

As the minister has said, Canadians from all backgrounds in all parts of the country expect and deserve fair representation. However, we have allowed the House to move too far away from representation by population, that founding constitutional principle. The gap between how many voters an MP represents in a fast-growing province compared to one in a smaller or slower-growing province has never been greater. The gap today is bigger than at any point in our country's history since 1867. I know first-hand about that inequality and it is something we absolutely have to change.

While balancing the need to respect the other foundational principles, we need to move much closer to representation by population. Bill C-20 would do that by increasing the seat counts for the faster-growing provinces, both now and into the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the principle of representation by population would be followed to a much larger degree, which would be fairer to all Canadians.

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The representation gap that my colleagues have spoken of will become much smaller and the fast-growth problem, under the current formula, will be stopped. This bill would ensure that when we allocated seats to each province, we would use the best data available to us.

This too speaks to fairness. Instead of using the census population numbers, the bill would use Statistics Canada's annual population estimates. These estimates provide the best data we have on the total provincial populations across the country. In this way, we will ensure that Canadians in the fastest-growing provinces get the representation that they so well deserve. This will be especially helpful for people in areas just like mine because their growth will not stop in these fast-growing areas. Day after day, week after week more residents are moving into the fast-growing areas and into Brampton West. I witnessed them replacing the rows of corn that used to grow, with rows of houses. This growth will not stop and we cannot continue under the same formula.

We will also maintain the independent process that draws the riding boundaries in every province, ensuring that process also has the best data available to it. The readjustment of the electoral boundaries will be done using the census data, as it always has been done.

The minister and my colleagues have made this point before me, but it is important to make it again. There will be no change to the independent boundary process. It will remain fair, impartial and independent. As has been pointed out, we will make some changes to streamline the process. We will make some timeline changes, though they will not affect the quality of the process, only the timing.

• (1230)

I have made the point already that if we wait too long, Canadians will have to go on for another decade, with worse and worse representation. That is not acceptable. On this side of the House, we will ensure that this does not happen.

This bill, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is fair, it is reasonable and it is principled. It will achieve better representation for fast growing provinces where better representation is so desperately needed. It delivers on our government's long-standing commitments, and I am proud to stand in the House today and say that I fully support it, along with my colleagues.

• (1235)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before we resumed this part of the day, I asked the minister if this would affect the ridings of northern Ontario. I told the minister that some of the ridings in northern Ontario were bigger than some provinces. The minister did not answer. He skated around the question.

Therefore, would the member tell me if northern Ontario will lose ridings because of the redistribution?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague well knows, the decisions on how the ridings will be distributed will be made by an independent, impartial commission. It will do it in the best interests not only of Canadians, but of Canadians and Ontarians who live in the north to ensure the representation is fair going forward.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has not been here a long time, but the issue of redistribution of and adding seats has been talked about for very long time.

I also remind my hon. colleague about the massive deficit that our country is facing and the layoffs of public servants that we know is happening. A lot of people throughout Canada are unemployed.

Does he really think Canada needs more MPs at this time? Is it not fact that for those whose ridings are geographically challenged or have a population in excess of a certain number, they could simply add an extra staff member to those ridings and continue to serve their constituents just fine?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to these types of criticisms.

We are moving toward fairer representation. That is the fundamental principle of the bill. The people in Brampton West should have their vote be relatively equal to the people who vote in Prince Edward Island or in my hon. colleague's riding. The bill seeks to address that issue.

We are not going to leave the number of seats in the House of Commons the way it is, like the Liberals are proposing, or pick winners or losers. My question to my friend opposite is this. Who are the winners and losers they are picking under their formula? Which provinces are they taking seats away from? Could the member advise the House of that?

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the principle of proportional representation was established in Canada in the middle of the 19th century at a time when there was no income tax for individuals. We did not have the corporate tax structure we have now.

Would the member not agree with me that today when the role of the House in determining government spending, in ensuring accountability for taxpayers, the principle of proportional representation is more important than ever and that by opposing these measures through a period of minority government over the last seven years and in the current Parliament, the members opposite, in both parties, are in effect opposing equity and accountability for taxpayers for the way that their hard-earned money is spent by the Government of Canada?

Would the member agree with me on that?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, as I have listened to the debate in the House and heard the comments made outside of the House by members of the opposition, I am still unable to understand why they do not want to support the principle of fairness, fairness on all the levels that my friend just mentioned. This is something that is of central importance to Canadians. I know it is of central importance to the voters of my riding of Brampton West. They talk to me about it. They want us to move forward with this and that is exactly what we will do.

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[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this country, and this chamber in particular, has a long history of debates about representation. We know that Quebec had a special place in the House of Commons when our country was established.

I would like to ask my colleague, because another colleague mentioned the 19th century, what the representation of Quebecers is under the Constitution Act, 1867, in particular section 51. Can the member explain to the House what section 51 means and tell us if the bill is consistent with that section? Can he clarify section 51 of the Constitution Act, 1867 for the House?

• (1240)

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, of course Quebec is special to the Canadian federation. It always has been and it always will be. The proposals that we are making in the bill are constitutionally sound and on a good footing.

My question for the member opposite is, when he says there should be more seats for Quebec than it is being granted, what does he say to the voters in my riding? Will he go up to them and say, “I’m sorry sir, I’m sorry madam, you deserve to be continuously under-represented so we can have more seats for Quebec”. Is he willing to go to my riding and ask voters that question?

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague’s speech, in particular to a question to my colleague from York West, because it seems to me he is suggesting that there would be an ongoing process whereby every few years more and more members would be added to the House of Commons in an unlimited manner.

Based on what he is saying, if we are never prepared to take away seats from a province because of the fact that its population has not increased as much as other provinces, then we will always add more and more members. On that basis we would add on an infinite number of members in the House. We could have 1,000, 2,000. It could go on and on. Is that not unreasonable and unrealistic? Is it not possible to find a fairer way to adjust the numbers across the country without continually adding numbers to the House?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, the current formula as proposed in the bill does allow for reductions in seats based on population decline. However, what we are not prepared to do on this side of the House, what we keep hearing from that side of the House, particularly in that corner, is to pit Canadians against each other. They want to pick winners and losers. They want to say this province should have more and therefore we are taking away from that province.

That is not how we are going to approach this issue. We want all Canadians to be together behind the bill so they have fairer representation. We are not going to follow the model proposed by members from that party.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party is being disingenuous with its proposal to reapportion seats in this House. In its proposal, according to the analysis that has been completed, the province of Quebec would lose six seats in the House, Manitoba would lose three seats,

Saskatchewan would lose five seats, Nova Scotia would lose one seat, and Newfoundland and Labrador would lose one seat.

This is not a proposal that the Liberals would ever have introduced as government and it is indicative of a party that wants to play games on this issue. This is the fairest way for us to ensure that the rapidly growing populations, most of whom are new Canadians and recent immigrants who have come to this country, are in the three provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. This bill will ensure they have fair representation in the House and ensure that the number of visible minorities in the House increases after the next election.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Speaker, I could not have said it better myself. That is exactly the road that we are not going to go down on this side of the House. We are not going to pick winners and losers. We are not going to pit one region of the country against another for political gain like the members of that party seem to be suggesting. We are not going to be taking away seats from Quebec or other provinces.

That is a flawed formula. We are not following it. We have the right formula and I hope the members on that side of the House will stand with us and vote in favour of it when the time comes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise and speak on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay, a region that is larger than Great Britain. It is important to put the size of my riding into context in the debate because we are talking about what is fair.

We heard this morning the fact that the Conservative government once again has tried to shut down fair debate on the bill. There is the sense that there are beleaguered members on the government side who represent communities that are completely unfairly under-represented.

We have heard throughout the morning about the principle of representation by population, yet we know that Canada is not based simply on representation by population. If it were, we would start to erase most of the political map of Canada. Labrador, with 26,000 people in its riding, would cease to exist.

I ask my hon. colleagues from the suburbs, do they believe that those 26,000 people are somehow over-represented or the riding of Western Arctic with 41,000 people? That population would fit three times into a small Toronto riding and yet there is an impossibility of getting access to one’s elected representative in a region that is larger than western Europe. That is part of the fundamental principle of participatory democracy.

I have heard the argument that every vote should be weighted the same. My friend from Brampton West said that his vote should weigh exactly the same as Prince Edward Island. Just doing the math quickly, and my dad was great at math but I always got about 52%, that would give Ontario about 600 or 700 seats if we were to have the exact same representation by population as Prince Edward Island. Clearly, that is an absurd position.

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In my riding of Timmins—James Bay, for people to come to my constituency office from Attawapiskat would cost \$1,000 for the flight. There are no roads. If they want to see me in my office it is a \$1,000 flight while people from Brampton West could drive to the Toronto airport and go to Portugal for the weekend and come back for less than \$1,000. Are people who are able to drive to an MP's office somehow under-represented when there are members in the House who represent communities they can only get to once or twice a year?

When we talk about seat redistribution, which is a very important discussion to have with all members, we are talking about nation building. It has to be done right.

Unfortunately, I sense this is an attempt to have the idea of nation division here. When questions are raised about how the process is done I hear colleagues asking such things as, "What do you have against the people of Ontario and Alberta", as if that was the only question before us. That is obviously not the question. It is how we weigh votes and ensure not just representation by population but the ability of citizens in the country to access the participatory democratic system.

If we go with a simple model of representation by population, as I said earlier, we can erase Labrador with its 26,000 people. Manitoba ridings average 78,000 people. We will probably take a couple of ridings out of Manitoba so that it is more fair than the way that Brampton is set up. In Saskatchewan, with an average riding size of about 63,000 or 70,000, we could probably take out three seats. With regard to Yukon, we do not even need to talk about as there are only 30,000 people, so it would disappear. In my good friend's riding of Kenora in Northern Ontario there are 64,000 people. I would challenge anybody on the government side or the opposition side to try and represent those 64,000 people across the grand grass terrain of Kenora.

That is not to say that the addition of seats in urban areas is not an important aspect, but it is not the sole aspect. It is the issue of balance. When we are here as members of Parliament to talk about how we will find that balance, it is very disturbing to see this attempt to pit one region against the other.

I will speak to the issue of Quebec. In *Champlain's Dream*, the vision Champlain had was for Canada to be a place that would avoid the wars and hatreds that had consumed Europe. His original dream was to build a new society with the first nations. Unfortunately, we kind of blew that one somewhere along the way, but hundreds of years later I think we are starting to reconnect with the original dream of Champlain.

● (1245)

However, the founding of Canada in 1867 was really the coming together at that time of Upper Canada and what was then Lower Canada and the maritime provinces. We were all somewhat equal in that sense because we were a much smaller population. There was a fundamental recognition that even though there were a number of provinces at that time, there were two founding peoples. That was what the Canadian compromise was based on. That is how we build nations: by compromise.

I am concerned when I hear that Quebec's population representation is not going to drop; what the government is not saying is that Quebec's historic place in the House will drop. That is a fundamental difference, because if we are going to continue on this nation building exercise and if we recognize that there is a distinct Quebec nation in this country—and we have agreed to that principle—then we have to agree to the principle of historic weight in the House of Commons. There will be regions in this country that will grow faster, and that is okay, but the historic weight of certain regions cannot be lost.

● (1250)

That brings us back to Prince Edward Island. Poor Prince Edward Island always gets picked on whenever we talk about representation by population, because it now has how many senators and how many ridings? It is four, as I know. There are many people who say, "My God, there are more people living in Sudbury, and Prince Edward Island has four seats and four senators", but that is the historic compromise we made.

The rest of the country grew at an exponential rate and Prince Edward Island did not; however, there has never been a suggestion that those four seats from Prince Edward Island should be taken away, so Prince Edward Island will always maintain its historic weight, even as other regions have grown exponentially.

We see real growth right now in Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, and we recognize, as the New Democratic Party, that there is a need to address some of those growing disparities.

As someone who represents a region that is bigger than Great Britain and represents communities with no roads, I do not believe that my area should be considered more valuable or less valuable than an area represented by someone elected in a large urban region. They represent very different realities.

The idea of nation building is based on compromise and on understanding each other. We have to agree with each other and say, "Yes, your reality and the people you represent in a smaller urban area are in some ways completely different from the reality that I represent, but we have to find the compromises".

This is why the New Democratic Party came forward with our bill, Bill C-312, that would address this issue of imbalance. I want to assure my colleagues on the government side that we take this matter very seriously. That is why we came forward with our bill.

Through our bill, we wanted to ensure that the new areas of British Columbia, the growing regions of Alberta and the growing urban regions of southern Ontario grew, but we also wanted to maintain the historic representation percentage of Quebec in the House of Commons, because that is part of our founding commitment to one another. It is not enough to say simply that whatever Quebec's population is, it will maintain some percentage in the House. That is not the balance of two founding peoples.

We are interested to see time allocation being used to get this bill moving quickly. We have not even had the census. I would like to see the population trends that the census could show us.

My hon. colleague from Nickel Belt raises the question of northern Ontario. I would argue that one reason we have political alienation in various parts of the country is that people do not feel as though they are represented. In northern Ontario we have very often felt politically alienated from the urban south. We have always considered ourselves, and have been considered to be, a colony of southern Ontario. We have felt that Queen's Park ends at Steeles Avenue. Anybody in northern Ontario will say that.

What added to the political alienation was the Mike Harris gang, and unfortunately many of them are sitting in the front row now. They are the front line of the Conservative Party. Mike Harris decided that the best way to have political representation was to just take a whole whack of seats out of northern Ontario; that would be representation.

Taking those provincial seats out of northern Ontario made it very difficult for people to be served by their elected representatives. We have seen northern Ontario's presence in the Province of Ontario continually diminish, to the point that when the McGuinty government made a plan over the last few years for the development of northern Ontario, its officials did not bother to come up to consult with anybody in any of the first nations. They were too busy.

I remember *The Toronto Star* asking what the problem was with all these first nations people and whether they did not trust the smartness of the Liberal government.

Those people were making decisions about lands that they did not even want to bother visiting. That is the sense of political alienation we have in northern Ontario. It occurs once we get north of Highway 17. With all due respect to my hon. colleague from Muskoka, although we get money out of the FedNor fund, we have always believed that northern Ontario starts at Highway 17. North of Highway 17 it is a completely different community, a different set of cultures, a different set of economic realities, yet as elected representatives from northern Ontario, we are tied to the population base of Ontario overall.

•(1255)

When we see massive urban growth in regions around the 905 belt every time we redo the census, people begin to say that northern Ontario is somehow over-represented, because it is based on the population of southern Ontario, which is, of course, absurd.

I represent a riding with over 80,000 people. That would make mine a normal Manitoba riding or a big Saskatchewan riding. In New Brunswick or Newfoundland, it would be a very large riding. However, in Ontario it is considered over-represented and is perceived to have an unfair advantage over my colleague from Brampton, or whatever other suburbs are represented here in the House. That is not the reality.

New Democratic Party members want to address the need to deal with the changes in the House. However, we are very concerned with the Conservative government's attitude that it is right, that we should get with the program, and that if we do not like it, then it shows that

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we are against Alberta or against Ontario. I do not know who it thinks we would be against next. That is not how we build a nation.

This change has been a long time coming. It can take some good debate, but it needs something more than debate; it needs some good will. Unfortunately, I find that is lacking in the Conservatives' approach.

I am more than willing to look at what would happen at committee with the bill, but my spidey sense is tingling. As I said earlier, I see a government that seems to be moving toward some manner of autocracy. It wants to limit debate on all manner of bills. The Conservatives seem to think that being given a majority on May 2 gives them the right to override the interests and concerns of other elected members of Parliament.

We think we need to have an improvement in the seat distribution, unlike the Liberal Party, which wants the status quo. That is their business, and I do not mind that, but I think we need to find a balance. If we are going to find that balance, we have to recognize that the number one principle is representation by population. However, my concern is that if it is solely representation by population, Canada would not work, period. We would have no balance whatsoever. We need to find that balance.

For example, if we added 15 seats to Ontario, all in the 905 region, we would certainly change the political makeup of the country, and this is a discussion that needs to happen. How is that going to play out? Is it fair? Does it unfairly affect the representation of Quebec? Are there enough seats given to ensure Quebec's historic status?

This is not about dividing; it is about asking straightforward questions. I think every member in the House is committed to the idea of fair democratic representation.

I used to live in Toronto—Danforth, the riding of my former leader, Jack Layton. I could walk 20 minutes either way to two MPs' offices. I saw it as normal for living in the city. I could walk up Danforth and see one MP's office and then walk along Queen Street, and there was another. However, as I said, when I hit the break week, I could probably put 3,000 to 5,000 kilometres on my car and still not visit all of my communities. Therefore, I find it a little rich when I hear someone tell me that because they represent a suburban riding, they are unfairly under-represented in the House.

If it is a question of resources, that is certainly a fair question. Is the caseload in an MP's office the issue?

This is another important element about northern Ontario. Most of my region does not have government services, as the government does not bother to come up into the James Bay coastal area. When I go up to Attawapiskat, Kashechewan or Fort Albany, I fill out health card forms because Ontario health services will not go there.

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It is funny: because of the risk of health card fraud, in Ontario one cannot have a health card without a photograph, but there is no place to get a photograph on the James Bay coast; as a result, the provincial government does not bother worrying about photos on the James Bay coast, because it does not want to bother servicing those communities. To provide services to them, I go up with my staff and the provincial member goes up with his staff, and we fill out health card forms and birth certificates, because there are no government services.

• (1300)

In rural areas, members of Parliament are not only seen to represent the political interests and the political will of the community, they are often the only front line. With the cuts to Service Canada and Service Ontario, our offices take on more and more caseload all the time. We do not have more resources to do it, which adds another question: what is the role of the member of Parliament?

Certainly we have a role to be here as legislators. That is our primary role. That should perhaps be our one role. We were elected to be legislators. However, with the continual shrinking of government services and community people falling further and further through the cracks, it is just assumed that if individuals go to their member of Parliament, he or she will fix it for them.

We spend our time having to do the front-line work of the federal government because the federal government does not bother servicing many of these communities. They are not adequately serviced by Service Canada. People are out of luck with EI claims if they do not come to our offices, and out of luck with immigration and passports. We are a passport service.

As legislators we are doing the work of government, because it does not want to spend the money. Its narrow focus is that we will just add 20, 30, 50, 60 seats to the House of Commons and everything will be magically balanced. That is not a realistic solution to the problem.

Number one, we have to ensure that our front-line services are there, because our citizens are looking to us not simply to come here and vote for them, but to represent them and be their face of government, because the face of government is not there.

It is not about pitting one region against the other, but about working together as parliamentarians. I certainly see the scowl on my colleague's face on the Conservative side. I am not surprised. They do not understand that unless members are in the autocracy of the Prime Minister, they are somehow against everything. They do not know the idea of balance and compromise. That is not how we build nations.

We are here. We have offered our own bill because we believe that the bill's plan can work. We want to make sure that we have maintained a historic balance, but we are very uncomfortable with the simple statement that we have to get to representation by population. If the Conservatives were serious about that, they would rejig the entire borders of Canada, and they are not going to do that.

We need to work together. I am putting out the olive branch to my colleagues, but I will be surprised if they take it. This is not the way

that we have done business. If the government worked with people, it would not have to shut down every debate that happens.

I am interested in what might come next, because over the last six years the government has bothered to complete pitifully few bills. Usually it prorogued and started over, and then government members would rant on about crime. Then the Conservatives would prorogue and start over. If they get all their time allocations, I am wondering what they will do. I imagine they would probably shut this place down and prorogue again.

We are interested in this issue, but we are certainly a little concerned about the government's attitude toward questions on the bill.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's remarks with interest, but I have to disagree with him. The fundamental constitutional principle of the House is representation by population.

Prior to Confederation, it was not. In fact, between 1840 and 1867, under the Act of Union that created the Province of Canada, the principle was not representation by population. The legislature of that day was divided into two equal halves, administratively, between Canada East and Canada West. Each of those regions had 50% of the seats in the House, and as Ontario, or Canada West at the time, moved from being a very sparsely populated area to being a much more heavily populated area, the representation for Canada West went from being over-represented to underrepresented. That was perfectly acceptable in the context of the Province of Canada, for which this building and the original Library of Parliament was built.

In 1867, because the leader of the Liberal Party, George Brown, had argued for decades for representation by population, we went to a federal system of government with two sovereign orders of government. In the upper order of government, in the chamber that we sit in, it would be representation by population as a fundamental constitutional principle, and that has been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada in numerous rulings.

I encourage the members opposite to reconsider their position on giving any one provincial division a specific percentage of the seats in this House, because that violates this very important constitutional and democratic provision in the Constitution of Canada.

• (1305)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, that was very well argued. Maybe the member lives in a different Canada than I do, but Saskatchewan's seats are counted at some 60,000 people. If he wants to take three or four seats out of Saskatchewan so we can meet the demands of the Constitution, I say, good luck. If he wants to erase New Brunswick with 50,000 people per riding, he can go ahead and will see what happens. He may want to get rid of Labrador at 21,000 people or Yukon at 30,000 people per riding.

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This idea that representation by population is the fundamental principle is absurd. This is a House that represents people based on various geographic and historic reasons. In terms of the English and Quebec identities, those have had weighted balances, which is why I go back to Prince Edward Island.

The member can talk about this grand myth of George Brown in 1867, but it has never been a practised reality in the House. If he wants to change it, he will see a pretty bizarre shift in terms of the seats we have.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was interested when my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay was talking about reaching out with an olive branch to other parties, and yet, at the same time, talked about our party's position as if it were the status quo. In fact, he used the words "status quo", saying that was our position. Those two notions conflict: that he is handing out an olive branch and yet totally misstating our position. In fact, we have not suggested the status quo at all. Perhaps he has not been able to hear all the debate or he has not been listening, but he ought not portray it differently than it is.

My colleague used the phrase "historic weight". I am from the province of Nova Scotia, which has 11 seats. It seems to me that having 11 seats out of 250 is not the same weight as having 11 out of 330 seats, as the government would propose. Does he think that is the same weight? Is that the same historic weight as my province had at Confederation, for example, or as it does now? That makes no sense to me at all.

When he talks about the alienation of people across the country, does he hear from people that the reason they feel alienated is because of an insufficient number of members of Parliament?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am y sorry if my hon. colleague felt that I did not represent his position very clearly. I have heard so many different positions from the Liberals that I am trying to extend the olive branch by saying that it seems somewhere in the status quo, but I cannot go any further than that.

Do I hear about under-representation? Yes, I do. In northern Ontario, I hear about it all the time. I would invite the member to come to northern Ontario where people feel that they were written off the political map of Canada and that the Mike Harris Conservatives wrote them off the map of Ontario. That plan has been continued by Dalton McGuinty. I am aware of the issues of political alienation. It is the heart and soul of what has happened in northern Ontario because of the sense that we have not had proper representation.

I represent first nation communities and my constituents say, "You're our elected guy, the white guy from Timmins. You're 500 kilometres from our communities. Why is there no first nation representation?" It is because of the way we divide up our seats. There is no reason we cannot have a northern Ontario seat representing first nations. They are the only people who live north of 50 but they are not on the map. So, yes, I hear about political alienation. I hear about it all the time in my riding.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Timmins—James Bay for so eloquently bringing to this House the problems we face in northern Ontario.

The last time there was a redistribution of ridings by population, northern Ontario lost one seat. For example, in order for my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking to go from Algoma—Manitoulin to Kapuskasing, she must cross Nickel Belt, and now we are talking about making it bigger.

Earlier today, I asked the Minister of State for Democratic Reform if this would affect northern Ontario and he would not answer. I asked another Conservative MP the same question and I did not get an answer. Does my hon. colleague from Timmins—James Bay think this would affect northern Ontario and that our ridings would get even bigger?

• (1310)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to receive that question as I lived through the last seat redistribution in 2004.

My hon. Liberal colleague talked about people being angry about what happened to their seats. He should come up to northern Ontario. The riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking was written by people who, obviously, had never been to northern Ontario. They did not understand the region. That riding is simply impossible to service.

I challenge any suburban member to go to the riding of Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking and try to cover it off. It is immense and spread out with no commonalities. The top part of her riding is 90% francophone and yet it is not connected in any way to the southern part of her riding, which is almost entirely anglophone. She must travel through two or three different ridings to get to the other part of her riding.

In my riding of Timmins—James Bay, Timiskaming was cut in half. Timiskaming was one region for over 100 years but someone decided that part of Timiskaming would go to North Bay and another part would go to Timmins. That line divided our francophone community and our agricultural community. It was done in a ham-fisted way. I heard this had to do with representation by population because some people down in Vaughan perhaps felt that they did not have enough seats.

What we are saying about balance is that we need to recognize the continuity of cultural and rural realities if seats are going to be redistributed so it is fair and so people have adequate representation. That did not happen in the last round and I would be surprised, given the government's attitude, that it would happen in this round.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Timmins—James Bay talked a lot about nation-building and now we are facing nation division.

He also mentioned two founding nations. As he well knows, the first nations were also involved with those two founding nations.

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Unlike the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, who cited George Brown, I would like to mention George-Étienne Cartier, who was the hon. minister of defence in Macdonald's government. Cartier's position is debatable among historians but, according to historian, Claude Bélanger, in accepting the compromise of 1867, several guarantees were sought and obtained by the provinces that feared they would be overpowered by other provinces. Quebec received a fixed number of seats and would serve as the basis of calculations for seats in other provinces so that as the country grew the historical weight would be maintained.

Could my hon. colleague speak to that again for the House?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, we need to recognize that our country's success has been built on the compromise that existed between Quebec and the rest of Canada, not between a whole bunch of provinces. If there were a whole bunch of provinces, we would not have our own distinct court system in Quebec. We recognize the French tradition in court. We recognize it in language. We recognize that right.

Ontario recognizes the right of francophones to have their own schools. That was a hell of a fight but it was based on the principle that we must maintain these historical balances, even as the other populations changed and as new Canadians came in. It is great. We love multiculturalism but, in Ontario, people have the right to get a francophone education in any community because these are the original compromises we made, and we are proud of them. That is why Canada is successful.

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale in support of Bill C-20, the fair representation bill. The bill fulfills our government's commitment to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons.

During the last election, we made three distinct promises to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair for all provinces.

First, we would increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

Second, we would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

Third, we would protect the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population.

Our government will fulfill each of those promises with this bill, and I am very pleased about it.

Fairness in representation for all Canadians is an important goal. The vote of every Canadian, to the greatest extent possible, should have equal weight. This is a fundamental democratic concept and a key Canadian value. All citizens should have an equal say in who is elected to represent them in Parliament and in this House. It is important that we act to ensure we are moving toward that goal and not away from it.

The current formula for allocating seats in the House of Commons is outdated and does not meet the current needs of constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale and across Canada. The current

formula moves us away from fair representation a little bit each and every day. This problem is particularly serious in and around my riding of Brampton—Springdale. Directly to the west of my riding is the riding with the largest population in Canada, Brampton West. Directly east is the fourth largest riding, Bramalea—Gore—Malton. Within a 15 minute drive of my riding, I can reach seven of the ten largest ridings by population in Canada.

My riding of Brampton—Springdale was created in 2004. The census data from 2006 showed that Brampton—Springdale was the 13th most populous riding in the country.

All of those ridings, including my own, suffer from what the minister described as a representation gap and this representation gap must be fixed. The seat allocation formula that provides for new seats in the House of Commons every 10 years now dates from 1985.

Back in 1985, the members of the House decided on a formula that did not put a priority on fair representation. The formula we have now does not properly account for population growth. In fact, it is especially bad at dealing with large population growth in large cities in our largest provinces. My riding of Brampton—Springdale fits that description exactly. It has large population growth, is a large city and is in one of Canada's largest provinces, the province of Ontario.

Many of the ridings surrounding it also fit that description. Most areas surrounding the GTA suffer from the inability of the 1985 formula to properly account for population growth. The problem is not limited to the GTA only. The problem is seen across the country, especially in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. Because the existing formula does not compensate very well for large population growth, Canadians in our largest and fastest growing provinces are moving further away from fair representation.

I have said that this representation problem is especially serious in my riding and the area surrounding it. The minister agrees, as do many of my hon. colleagues in this House. However, what are the implications of the representation problem?

● (1315)

In March of last year, and last month, we were provided with evidence that describes the problem. In the report, "Voter Equality and Other Canadian Values: Finding a Balance", Matthew Mendelsohn and Sujit Choudhry wrote the following:

This problem is getting worse and, unless there is fundamental reform, will continue to do so in the future. Moreover, the character of voter inequality is changing.

They wrote that the combination of problems with the current formula and the high level of immigration increasingly disadvantages new Canadians and visible minorities. This is because many new Canadians choose to live in densely populated suburban areas, like my riding of Brampton—Springdale and the ones next to it. These are exactly the types of ridings which the 1985 allocation formula leaves under-represented.

Mendelsohn and Choudhry wrote:

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[I]t recognizes the new reality of Canada: that it is Canadians of multi-ethnic backgrounds living around our largest cities, particularly the GTA [greater Toronto area], who are under-represented, injecting a new dimension of inequality into our federal electoral arrangements.

More than 56.2% of my constituents are part of a visible minority group and of multi-ethnic backgrounds. Members can understand why the fair representation act would be greatly welcomed by my constituents. This representation gap needs to be fixed as soon as possible. Not only are my constituents becoming more under-represented, but they are becoming more under-represented much faster than Canadians in other parts of the country.

We need to follow the principle of representation by population as closely as we can, but the current formula does not do that. This is a serious problem that requires immediate solution. I think that Bill C-20, a bill that is applauded by my constituents, is that solution.

With the fair representation act, our Conservative government is delivering a principled and reasonable update to the formula to allocate seats in the House of Commons.

The bill would do a number of things. It would move every province toward representation by population in the House of Commons. As I have said, this is an important democratic principle that we need to be moving toward, not away from. It would address the representation gap by moving Ontario, British Columbia, and Alberta significantly closer to representation by population. This is important because this is where the most under-represented people are living.

Using the formula put forward in the bill, Ontario would receive 15 new seats, British Columbia would receive 6 new seats, Alberta would receive 6 new seats, and Quebec would receive 3 additional seats. The bill would increase seat counts for these provinces, both now and in the future, by ensuring that population growth would be more accurately factored into the seat allocation formula. In this way, the principle of representation by population would be followed to a much larger degree, which would be much fairer for all Canadians.

Not only would representation be better now, but it would also be better in the future. The representation gap would become much, much smaller and the fast growth of the problem under the current formula would be stopped. At the same time, Bill C-20 would ensure that smaller and slower growing provinces would maintain their current number of seats. This is only what is fair to those parts of the country, and it is reasonable and principled to maintain their effective representation in the House.

● (1320)

The legislation would also fulfill our platform commitment to maintain Quebec's representation at a level proportionate to its population.

It is important to highlight that this is exactly what we promised in the last election and this is exactly what we are delivering. We are keeping the promises we made to Canadians during the election campaign.

Quebec would receive three new seats, since the purpose of the bill is to move every single province toward representation by population in a fair and reasonable way. We are also being fair by making sure that the seat allocation formula would not move

overrepresented provinces under the level which their population warrants. That would not be fair to those provinces and it would not be right for us to do that. This is in support of the principle of proportionate representation. It is another one of the fundamental principles in our democracy right alongside representation by population.

As I said, we are keeping our promises and we are keeping them in a fair and very reasonable way.

This bill would better respect and maintain representation by population. This bill would directly help under-represented Canadians, like the constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale, and in many other ridings in the GTA and elsewhere in this country.

This bill would ensure the effective and proportionate representation of all provinces, especially for smaller and slower growing ones. This bill would have national application that would be fair for all provinces. As the minister said, all Canadians from all backgrounds in all parts of the country expect and deserve fair representation. This bill would provide that in a very principled way.

Since we are talking about fairness, I would also like to talk about accuracy. After all, using the best data available to us is fair. This bill would ensure that when allocating seats to each province, the best data available would be used. This would ensure that Canadians are fairly represented. Instead of using the census population numbers, Statistics Canada's annual population estimates would be used. These estimates work to correct for some of the under-coverage in the census, and they provide the best data for the total provincial population. In that way we would make sure that Canadians in the faster growing provinces would be getting the representation they deserve.

This change would assist in making sure the growing representation gap was closed sooner rather than later. This would be especially helpful for people in ridings like mine and the many other faster growing ridings across Canada.

In Bill C-20, we are also maintaining the independent process that draws the riding boundaries in every province, and making sure that process also has the best data available for its purpose, too.

The readjustment of the electoral boundaries would be done using the census data, as it always has been done. Why is the census data best for this job? The census provides a population count street by street and house by house. This accuracy is necessary to most properly draw the new electoral boundaries and is the best data available for the job.

There would be no change to that aspect of the process, which has been the process since 1964. It will remain fair, impartial and independent. There would be some changes to streamline the process, however.

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● (1325)

We want to make sure that the new seats and boundaries are ready for the next election so that Canadians get the fair representation they deserve as soon as possible. If we wait too long, Canadians will have to go for another decade or longer with worse and worse representation. That is not acceptable, so we will not allow that to happen.

In conclusion, this bill, the fair representation act, is a principled update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats. It is fair. It is reasonable. It is principled. It would solve an important problem that needs to be fixed and which will only grow worse if we fail to act for all Canadians. It would achieve better representation for faster growing provinces where better representation is strongly needed. It would address and correct the under-representation of many new Canadians in large suburban ridings like my own. It would also maintain effective representation for smaller and slower growing provinces. The fair representation act would deliver these things and would deliver on our government's long-standing commitments.

I hope that we can pass this sensible and good piece of legislation as soon as possible. The vote of every Canadian should have equal weight to the greatest extent possible, and we cannot delay that. The constituents in my riding of Brampton—Springdale expect that from us and we need to deliver.

● (1330)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to the member's speech. As he knows, there has been some concern about the different formulas the government has introduced through the various manifestations of the bill which we have seen in the last couple of Parliaments. Different formulas have been brought forward each time. That is something we have raised concerns about. Our critic for democratic reform, the member for Hamilton Centre, has raised the issue of the government's use of differing formulas each time it introduces legislation.

The member spoke very eloquently, but obviously we have some concerns. I am from British Columbia and as the formulas have come forward, B.C.'s representation has actually gone down. As the member is aware, British Columbia is one of the least well represented of provinces. We have a handful of seats in the Senate and that is why the NDP has been strong in calling for the abolition of the Senate. We are just not represented there.

I am wondering if the member could address the issue of the differing formulas and the fact that B.C.'s representation has gone down as each of the different formulas has come forward.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that during the past couple of Parliaments under minority governments, we not only had challenges with this piece of legislation, but we also had challenges with a number of other pieces of legislation.

However, in the last election, Canadians clearly gave us a very strong mandate to represent them here in the House and as the population changes and the numbers in the provinces change, we have to update the formula. The formula in the bill is the best one under the current circumstances. It is the best representation we

could have in the House based on population and considering all the different dynamics of the provinces and their makeup.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things I like about the bill is that there are three truly unique positions being taken inside the House. The Conservatives are saying they want to increase the number of seats quite dramatically, by 30. The New Democrats are agreeing that the number of seats should be increased, but they believe that rural representation and the votes of people in those areas are of greater value than those in urban areas. I believe that a vast majority of Canadians would suggest that the biggest thing lacking in the bill is whether there is a need to increase the number of MPs in the House of Commons.

Why not redistribute based on the same number seats that are here? Why not look at the possibility of sticking with 308 seats? Why do we have to increase the numbers? The vast majority of Canadians would not necessarily support the increase nor is it necessarily warranted. It is one of the reasons that we should be having this debate, but unfortunately, as the member knows, the government is only allowing a couple of hours of debate in total on the bill.

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, after the next election in 2015, assuming the bill passes through the House and Senate, there will be an additional 30 members

I encourage the member to go into some of these suburban ridings, such as my riding of Brampton—Springdale, or other ridings in other parts of the country and speak with Canadians who are affected by this, who have raised their voices and have asked why they should be under-represented, especially the visible minorities and new Canadians who choose the suburbs to call home when they immigrate to Canada and bring their families with them. They are unfairly under-represented. They feel neglected. They do not deserve that.

That is one of the things we are looking to fix with the bill. It is those visible minorities, new Canadians and Canadians of all walks of life right across the country who have raised their voices. When I attend events, I constantly hear about this in my ridings and in the surrounding ridings.

● (1335)

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member represents one of the largest ridings in country. In fact, that region in the GTA, the Brampton and Bramalea ridings, consist of some 500,000 people. Not only is it a large riding, but it is a very fast-growing riding and is one of the most diverse ridings in the country.

Could the hon. member elaborate on the importance of this legislation, specifically in his community, as it relates to new immigrants, new people who move into the riding?

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his hard work in the House on behalf of his constituents. He is from Richmond Hill and understands the problem we have in the GTA. This problem is huge. I hope my colleagues, hon. members in the House, would realize the extent of this problem.

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The riding directly west of my riding of Brampton—Springdale has a population of over 150,000 people. The riding east of mine has over 130,000 people. Within a 15-minute drive from my riding, I can probably reach about eight to ten of the ridings with the largest populations in the country. Especially new immigrants, visible minorities who live in the suburbs in the GTA area are affected by this and have made their voices heard. I and other members of the House of Commons are here to represent them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is telling us just how important the changes proposed in Bill C-20 are for his riding. That is indeed the change that will be made to his riding, but what about my riding and the other 74 ridings in Quebec? There are two sovereignist parties and two federalist parties in the Quebec National Assembly and they are all clearly saying that the political weight of Quebec must not be reduced. We are not talking about demographic weight, but about political weight.

My question for the hon. member is very simple. What does he think of the motion adopted here in 2006 that recognizes Quebec as a nation? What does the Quebec nation mean to him?

[*English*]

Mr. Parm Gill: Mr. Speaker, I point out that the Conservative government is very responsible and is concerned about all Canadians, regardless in which part of the country they may live.

I talked about Brampton—Springdale because I am responsible for representing it. However, I used that as an example. There are examples such as Brampton—Springdale all over Canada. That is the reason we are adding 15 new seats in Ontario, 6 new seats in British Columbia, 6 new seats in Alberta and 3 new seats in Quebec. Under the bill, I feel this is the best formula we could have.

I am very thankful and I appreciate the hard work the hon. minister, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, has put into the legislation. I would encourage all opposition members to support the bill and its speedy passage as soon as possible.

● (1340)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the very talented, eloquent and hard-working member of Parliament for Edmonton—Strathcona and I look forward to hearing her speech on the bill.

This is a technical bill that has ramifications for the whole country and I am pleased to rise to speak to it. It is something we have expressed concern about before. In the time I have, I will give a bit a background to the bill itself and the issue of seat redistribution in the House of Commons.

As members are well aware, this has been part of the growth and development of Confederation and Canada. Over time, we have tried to maintain a couple of principles in the House of Commons. One is to ensure that provinces with fast-growing populations get more representation. At the same time, we have also had a tradition in the House of Commons of providing support and a floor level representation from regions across the country. That floor has been the story historically for Atlantic Canada, and I will come back to that in a moment. It creates some differences, but it is something that

Canadian accept as part of the nation-building exercise. That type of floor has also been in place for the territories.

Members who have had the opportunity, as I have, to travel to the northern territories know they are vast areas of Canada. Unbelievably large portions of our three northern territories do not meet the population criteria of the House of Commons, but clearly Canadians believe those areas of the country should be adequately represented. Therefore, we have put floors in place for them as well.

This has been the development over time. The nation-building exercise has always been to look at those two components and ensure that both the historical representation and the floors for ensuring clear representation and adding additional seats come into play. What has developed over time is that system of great Canadian compromise and nation-building of working on both aspects to ensure Parliament's representation is clearly representative.

I come from British Columbia and it has historically grown faster than its representation in Parliament. When we look at the figures, clearly there is a need for increased representation in British Columbia.

Coming back to what I mentioned earlier about Atlantic Canada. My riding of Burnaby—New Westminster, because there are many new Canadians who are not yet Canadian citizens and are who not on the voters list, has a population of about 120,000 or 130,000. That is slightly under the population of Prince Edward Island. Historically, P.E.I. has strong representation with four seats in the House of Commons. The system of ensuring historical representation for areas that are faster growing has always been part of the dynamic in play. There is no doubt that British Columbia needs additional seats.

In my riding of Burnaby—New Westminster and the riding of Newton—North Delta, the number of constituents is very great and there needs to be more seats in British Columbia to ensure that B.C. is adequately represented and members of Parliament can properly represent their constituents.

● (1345)

As we know, the job of being a member of Parliament is far beyond speaking in the House of Commons and having other members listen attentively. The job of being a member of Parliament for the most part is in the riding. As members of Parliament are intervening on behalf of their constituents with federal agencies and federal ministries, the machinery of government sometimes does not work effectively. Members of Parliament are there to ensure that our constituents are fully and adequately represented and we go to bat on their behalf.

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If we have more members of Parliament in British Columbia, that means we can focus on slightly fewer constituents and ensure that we do that strong, necessary advocacy work on their behalf with the federal ministries, federal agencies and on federal programs where constituents may have applied, or intervened or made application and were not treated in the fair and just way that they should have been. We are advocates first and foremost. Therefore, having those additional seats plays an important and key role.

That is where we get into some difficulty and have some concerns with Bill C-20. In looking at how the various iterations of the bill have played out and the various formulas that have been applied, we have gone through three different formulas to calculate representation in British Columbia. What we have seen in B.C.'s case is a smaller number of seats through this process. That is of some concern, not so much the fact of having a seat in the House, because even that is an important aspect of our work, but having that representation out in the community and being able to effectively represent and advocate on behalf of the 120,000 or 130,000 constituents, which is a different order than advocating effectively on behalf of 110,000 or 115,000 constituents.

That is very clearly where seat distribution and MP distribution in the House of Commons comes to play. It makes a fundamental difference when we have that balance and we have those additional seats. Because we have seen the various iterations and the number of additional B.C. MPs brought down, this is where I see some real concerns about the latest formula that has been brought forward at this time.

Members may say that the bill will go to committee. Certainly, we on this side of the House have always been ready to work with the Conservative government in a way that we expect it to work with us. One day the NDP will be in government and the opposition parties will get the opportunity to see not only lively debate but what healthy, transparent, effective representation and working with opposition parties will bring. There is no doubt that many Canadians look forward to that date in 2015 when the NDP steps forward.

Our concern is the practice of the government in committee has not been good to date. It has often bulldozed and steamrolled opposition parties rather than listen to the healthy points of view that we bring forward, particularly on this bill.

This is a nation-building exercise. This is a point which shows how the government and we as Parliament respect all regions of the country. It talks to the historic representation of Atlantic Canada and the northern territories. It talks to the historic and important representation of Quebec that we have brought forward in our bill. It points to the representation of Saskatchewan and Manitoba despite population changes there. As well, it points to additional seats in places such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

We have brought forward and supported legislation for the healthy, nation-building establishment of a consensus. We certainly hope the government will start listening, consulting and really working with the Canadian public and with opposition parties so a bill such as Bill C-20 can appropriately be part of a nation-building exercise. To date, that has not been the case, but I hope the government will change in this regard.

● (1350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, this is nation building legislation. It is legislation I would like to support. I regret very much the limitation on debate, which has made it difficult for smaller parties to be part of the debate and discussion.

I would like his thoughts, though, on whether we can continually, in the future, beyond the bill, add new members to the House of Commons every time we see Canada's population grow. At some point do we not have to bite the bullet and go back and revisit those areas with sparser populations?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I think there are two parts to what the hon. member is asking.

First is the issue of seats in the House. Can we keep adding members to the House of Commons? I would like to say that in other parliaments on this globe there are no seats, there are benches.

As I have mentioned earlier, the important work that members of Parliament do is not so much the speaking. I certainly do not need to have this desk. I can sit on a bench, and stand and speak. It is what we do in our ridings across the country, serving our constituents that is absolutely vital.

The important aspect of additional representation means that there are more members of Parliament to advocate strongly on behalf of their constituents. If they are not advocating on behalf of their constituents, they do not deserve to be in the House.

The second component she raises quite rightly is the issue around rural-urban representation, and certainly on this side of the House, the NDP has always seen this as a very important, careful, national building exercise.

That is why we have talked about seats for Quebec. We have talked about seats for areas like my province of British Columbia along with Alberta and Ontario. We have talked about ensuring a floor for Atlantic Canada and the territories. This is a nation building exercise and that means rural representation being adequate and effective in the House of Commons as well as urban representation in the House.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about representing constituents and that it was the most important part of his job. If he believes that, then last night when two members voted for the wishes of their constituents on the long gun registry, why would his party punish them if coming here and representing their constituents is first and foremost after being in the House, as he suggested?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this party takes no lessons from Conservative members who have not, since they were elected, stood up on behalf of their constituents a single time.

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We have seen with the Canadian Wheat Board that a promise was made to consult with farmers across western Canada and the Conservatives broke that promise cruelly after their election. They promised farmers a consultation on the Canadian Wheat Board and on May 2 they said, “To heck with western farmers. We will not consult them. It does not matter if 60% of western farmers want to keep the Wheat Board, we will do away with it”.

I respect the member, but there is not a single member in this House from the Conservative Party who has done anything on behalf of their constituents on issues like the Wheat Board and the gun registry. Time and time again, the Conservatives betray their constituents. That is unfortunate and it is wrong.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member in terms of the Canadian Wheat Board. The government has not been listening to what our prairie farmers have been saying.

Having said that, with regard to Bill C-20, does the NDP have any limit as to what it believes the size of the House of Commons should be?

Today, it does not have a problem with 338 which is being proposed by the government. Do the NDP members have an optimum number, or do they see this as a thing in progress, that as the years go by, the House will just continue to grow and grow?

• (1355)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had been to Britain, he would see that its House of Commons is a smaller House with twice the number of members. The House of Commons in Britain has simply done away with desks. We can sit on benches. We can vote from benches. We can speak adequately on behalf of our constituents, but the most important issue is representing an advocacy on behalf of our constituents.

If there are more members of Parliament doing that work on behalf of their constituents, and certainly that is the case on this side of the House. That is one thing that NDP MPs do very well, which is why we have grown from 19 to 29 to 36 to 103. We did that because we have been very strong and effective in advocating for our constituents.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for graciously sharing his time with me. It is regrettable that we could not have heard more of his eloquence.

It is my pleasure to rise to speak to this bill. Nobody believes more in representation of constituents than I do. As well, nobody believes more strongly than I do that we have a responsibility in this House to ensure that we are actually representing the interests of all Canadians no matter what corner of the country they come from, no matter their diversity of background, and no matter their interests.

I just want to be clear, on the record, that there have been falsehoods reported by some of the members on the other side, to the public and the media in the past, that I would oppose additional seats for Alberta if there was going to be a seat distribution based on population. I have never said such a thing and let us just make it clear in the House today that if the only decision is based on representation by population and if we do that in the true way we

should, based on a census, clearly my province of Alberta, and I am very proud to be a third generation Albertan, would have fair representation, and then there would be duly more seats for Alberta.

Our party in this House has said time after time, on the basis of what we have heard from our constituents and what we have heard from Canadians across this country, that Canadians want a more democratic system of federal governance. What we see from the government is little pieces here and there, an elected Senate that frankly is not representative. Now it wants a changed seat distribution based on what? It has three formulas and we are not sure what on earth the government is basing that on.

It is an important decision for our future. It is an important decision if we are going to incur further costs. Having heard from my constituents, I have to say very honestly that this has not been a priority issue in my riding. I do not think I have ever heard from a constituent demanding that we make the House of Commons larger. What they demand is that we better represent their interests in Ottawa and that we bring the federal government back to Alberta more often so we can actually hear from it directly.

Yes, we need to ensure we have fair representation in this House of Commons, but what does that mean? We have heard from some of my colleagues and they have said that we need to balance off the representation by population with the representation by region, and the representation by other undertakings and agreements that we have made in this House, including to Quebec, to our territories and to the maritime provinces.

I want to point out that if the Conservative side of the House truly believes that we need to make this move to provide fair representation to everybody in Canada, we need to recognize that 23 of 28 ridings in Alberta voted, as their second choice, New Democrat. My riding voted for me as their choice and so it is also important to keep in mind that even in our first past the post system, there are many interests that are not represented unless all of us in the House bend over backwards to ensure that all those perspectives, all of those voters, are being heard in committee and in this House, and that we reach out to them and ensure we hear from everyone, not just the ones who happen to step up to the plate and vote for us.

Should the decision for adding seats in this House simply be based on representation by population? We have heard many arguments stating that possibly that is not enough. If we look at the historical formula, it is not simply based on representation by population, it is also based on a certain percentage to Quebec, and to recognize, as the Prime Minister previously said, “Quebec as a nation within a unified Canada”. That was the decision made in consultation between the Prime Minister of the day and the leaders of all the provinces and territories.

I agree with my colleagues who have spoken on this and asked, where is the consultation with the premiers? Where is the consultation with the leaders of first nation governments? The government always likes to stand up and say it is representing the best interests of first nations people. Should they not be heard directly through their leaders as well?

Statements by Members

● (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona will have five minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

ROGER BÉLIVEAU

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my heartfelt congratulations to Roger Béliveau, of Warwick, on being inducted into Quebec's agricultural hall of fame.

For 50 years, Mr. Béliveau has owned a dairy farm along with his wife, Rita Jolibois, and their sons. He has earned an excellent reputation within the Quebec farming community. Mr. Béliveau has been active on several boards of directors for nearly 40 years and has made a mark particularly within the Coop fédérée, Agropur, Warwick Salt and Olymel. He was president of the Coop des Bois-Francs for six years.

As a mentor for members of the young farmers group, the Association des jeunes ruraux du Québec, he is also passing on his passion for agriculture to the next generation of farmers in our region and across Quebec. Mr. Béliveau has definitely earned this recognition. It is thanks to people like him that Quebec has become so renowned for agricultural excellence. Thank you, Mr. Béliveau, and keep up the good work.

* * *

[English]

URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House as the member for Winnipeg South Centre. Today it is my honour to recognize the dedication and generosity displayed by many of the families in my riding.

Winnipeg is famous for the elm trees that line its streets and boulevards, but elm trees need to be protected from Dutch elm disease.

A number of years ago families in my community started protecting those trees. These were concerned families, true leaders in community engagement. Now the youth of these families have taken over from their parents and these young people are learning valuable skills as entrepreneurs and philanthropists.

On behalf of all of my constituents, I would like to thank and to honour these young men and women for all of their hard work. The future is indeed in very good hands.

[Translation]

FOOD BANKS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my beautiful riding of Hochelaga, people working at food banks—Cuisine collective Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, Bouffe-Action de Rosemont, Chic Resto Pop, CAP St-Barnabé, Maisons Adrianna and Centre NAHA—devote themselves body and soul to helping feed their neighbours. There are also community gardens and fresh fruit and vegetable cupboards at HLM Boyce-Viau, HLM La Pépinière, Jardins Guybourg, Petit marché de l'Est and Marché solidaire Frontenac.

Despite all the hard work, there is not enough healthy and affordable food, especially in winter. In poor neighbourhoods, food is less readily available, of poorer quality and more expensive. Convenience stores abound. There are four food deserts in Hochelaga.

In a rich country like Canada, why is the health of so many adults, children and seniors compromised because they do not have access to healthy and affordable food while the owners of banks and big oil companies make billions of dollars in profit? Something is not right.

* * *

[English]

UKRAINE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recent events in Ukraine have brought to light an unfortunate reality.

With the arrest and conviction of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, we are witnessing an erosion of democracy and human rights in Ukraine. The court showed bias and was politically influenced.

For the last number of years, the government of Ukraine has been waging a campaign to smother political dissent, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The result has been the intimidation and imprisonment of academics, journalists and human rights advocates.

Despite the abrasion of the rule of law in Ukraine, there is reason for optimism.

This year, 35 members of Parliament were fortunate enough to host Ukrainian interns in the Canada-Ukraine parliamentary program. These bright young interns represent a vibrant, principled future for Ukraine.

I had the privilege to speak with these future leaders, and they have demonstrated an unparalleled desire to learn and educate themselves about Canadian democracy and society.

I have no doubt that they will return home and lead Ukraine to a brighter future.

* * *

● (1405)

FAMILY DOCTOR WEEK

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the occasion of Family Doctor Week in Canada, I want to acknowledge the critical role of family doctors in the health care of Canadians.

Statements by Members

I would ask all members to join me in celebrating the College of Family Physicians of Canada's annual family medicine forum currently taking place in Montreal, as well as the Family Physicians of the Year for 2011, including Dr. Philip Hébert from Toronto.

In June we lost the brilliant Dr. Barbara Starfield, whose research proved that health care systems, in which 50% of the physicians are family physicians are the most cost-effective and provide the highest quality of care.

It is unacceptable that many Canadians do not belong to a family practice. The federal government must take strong leadership as soon as possible to ensure that there are no more orphaned patients in Canada.

* * *

BURLINGTON TEEN TOUR BAND

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I stand to honour a very special group of young Canadians from Burlington, Ontario.

The 180-person strong Burlington Teen Tour Band is known as “Canada's musical ambassadors” and is one of Canada's most decorated, awarded bands internationally. They have performed at the Rose Bowl, for the president of France, at the 50th anniversary liberation ceremony in Holland and on the beach for D-Day anniversaries with our veterans in Normandy.

This fall, the Burlington Teen Tour Band will represent Canada at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the attack. It will be the only non-American, non-military band to participate in this significant anniversary event.

I, the citizens of Burlington and all Canadians are proud of these young people.

On behalf of all members of Parliament, we want to wish the Burlington Teen Tour Band a very safe trip and thank them for being great ambassadors for Canada.

* * *

RICHARD HYNDMAN

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Albertans are mourning the passing of Dr. Rick Hyndman, who brought great wisdom and civility to Canadian energy and environmental policy discourse.

Rick contributed to climate change and air pollution policy at the Alberta Department of Energy, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canada School of Energy and Environment. He lectured on economics and business at the University of Alberta.

I will greatly miss our friendly but opinionated debates on his back porch about the most effective means to reduce carbon emissions.

In honour of his work, the friends of Dr. Rick Hyndman are establishing an entrance scholarship in energy, environment and public policy for the MBA program at the University of Alberta, School of Business.

In Rick's own words:

Canada's advantage over competing energy resource basins should be a high-quality policy framework. For this we need thoughtful, fact based, public policy. I hope these scholarships contribute to making Canada's energy sector the positive force that I have always believed it could be by giving future business leaders and government officials the skills to contribute positively—

The Speaker: I will have to stop the hon. member there.

The hon. member for Brandon—Souris.

* * *

GEORGE DOW

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour and pay tribute to Dr. George Dow, who passed away on August 18 of this year.

Dr. Dow served as a physician in the town of Killarney and district for over 40 years, retiring in 1999. Most of his career was spent in a small community medical practice and, as such, he was always available to his patients all the time.

Dr. Dow also served as the medical examiner for the region for many years. For his dedication and commitment to his community, he was named physician of the year in 1990 and awarded a life membership by the Manitoba Medical Association in 1999.

Although Dr. Dow was very busy in his practice, he was also an active volunteer, giving his time to many organizations, including the building committee for the Tri-Lake Health Centre and the new Killarney United Church. Dr. Dow also served as a councillor, a mayor and school trustee, and, in July of this year, he received his 60 year service award from the Masonic Lodge.

George loved hunting, fishing, golfing, curling and reading, but, most of all, he loved his family. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, children Anne and Edward, and three grandchildren.

* * *

ROBERT WILSON WIGHT

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I stand in this House to recognize a friend and World War II hero, Robert Wilson Wight.

Mr. Wight saw action following D-Day in northern Europe, including Holland, Belgium and Germany. During the war, he served as a platoon commander, a commanding officer in the demolition platoon and as an officer commanding A-Company.

Bob left the Canadian army in 1953 as a major and wanted to be remembered as a “front-line infantry officer in WW II”.

Bob and his late wife, Gertrude, were married for 65 years and were proud of their family, who are visiting Ottawa today.

Bob passed away at the George Hees veterans residence at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre in my riding of Don Valley West, and it is no coincidence that he died on June 6, 2011, the 67th anniversary of D-Day.

As we approach Remembrance Day next week, I ask all MPs to join with me in recognizing this great Canadian veteran.

Statements by Members

●(1410)

*[Translation]***MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Charlotte Côté and Camille Desrochers-Laflamme, two individuals I greatly admire for their social involvement, came to my riding office to give me a petition asking the Government of Canada to fully participate in meeting the millennium development goals.

These young students from École d'éducation internationale de McMasterville took the initiative to start this petition and collected no less than 450 signatures as part of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on October 17.

By so doing, on this important day of social mobilization, they joined other students throughout Quebec in working to combat poverty and in drawing the attention of world leaders to the importance of achieving the millennium development goals.

I would therefore like to recognize the social commitment demonstrated by the students at École d'éducation internationale de McMasterville and their efforts to eliminate poverty in Quebec, in Canada and throughout the world.

* * *

*[English]***CANADIAN FORCES**

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, July 2011 marked the end of Canada's combat mission in Afghanistan. While the combat mission has come to an end, the Canadian Forces continue to play an active role in training their Afghan counterparts.

The past 10 years have brought about many changes for Afghanistan. Afghanistan has held three elections, government agencies have been improved, its economy has gained momentum, girls are going to school and the Afghan security forces have been provided with invaluable training and mentoring.

One hundred and fifty-nine Canadian Forces members have made the ultimate sacrifice to help Afghans obtain a taste of the freedoms that we hold so dear, tragically, joined recently by Master Corporal Byron Greff, of Edmonton's Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

In addition to Afghanistan, Canadian Forces are serving in 15 overseas missions, including Libya, Haiti, and Sudan.

At home, they save lives during search and rescue missions, provide assistance when natural disasters strike, and protect our nation's sovereignty on a daily basis.

This Veterans' Week, let us remember the service and sacrifice of our Canadian Forces members and their families.

“To live in the hearts of those we leave behind is not to die”.

*[Translation]***CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, or CPAWS, is Canada's voice for wilderness. Since it was created in 1963, it has played a crucial role in protecting over 45 million hectares of Canada's wild spaces—an area nearly seven times the size of Nova Scotia. Its vision is to protect at least half of Canada's public land and water—forever.

More and more, we are all looking for ways to conserve nature for future generations. Conservation issues go beyond political lines. CPAWS is able to create a consensus that we can all get behind.

I urge all my colleagues in the House to join me in congratulating the large number of CPAWS representatives who came to Parliament today. We encourage them to continue to protect our ecosystems. Congratulations, CPAWS.

* * *

*[English]***IMMIGRATION**

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been 10,000 permanent residents admitted through the Canadian experience class, which our government introduced in 2008 to attract and train international students and skilled foreign workers.

Our Conservative government also announced that it would accept up to 1,000 PhD students per year as permanent residents through the federal skilled worker program.

These announcements were praised by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, as well as the Association of Canadian Community Colleges. Even our NDP immigration critic has praised these announcements.

The Conservative government's number one priority remains the economy, and we will continue our efforts to retain the best and brightest talent in the world to ensure Canada remains competitive in the global economy.

These initiatives represent what we hope is part of the future of immigration to Canada: bright young people who have a Canadian education or work experience. Such newcomers are set for success.

* * *

●(1415)

HEROISM

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in times of crisis, ordinary people can become super-heroes, performing feats of extraordinary valour.

Last Thursday was one such day in Richmond, B.C. when Thunderbird Air flight 204 crashed with seven passengers on Russ Baker Highway during an emergency approach to Vancouver International Airport.

Without thought for personal safety, people leapt out of their cars and off their bikes to pull the seven passengers out of the burning plane, stopping only when the heat and flames made their work impossible. Their unselfish and prompt response saved the lives of every passenger on board. Unfortunately, the veteran pilot perished and the co-pilot suffered 80% burns and is in critical condition.

Stories like this cut through the cynicism that afflicts our daily lives and reaffirms our faith in the humanity and kindness of strangers. I would ask the House to rise with me and salute the Richmond heroes.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a member of the non-partisan review committee, the NDP House leader infuriated his colleague from Acadie—Bathurst when he signed off on the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Moldaver, and yet, when a parliamentary committee met to question Justice Moldaver on October 19, the NDP House leader quickly changed his tune. He attacked Justice Moldaver after he committed to learning to speak French, claiming he had heard the same commitment from Justice Rothstein in 2006.

When confronted on those facts, he could not prove them and the NDP House leader recanted and alleged that it may or may not have come from confidential interviews in which he was involved.

Beside the fact that he cannot prove what he alleges, the NDP House leader is also attempting to reveal moments of confidential interviews that he had agreed not to divulge. This is yet another worrying example that the disunited NDP is not fit to govern.

* * *

[Translation]

MINISTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety launched an attack on defence lawyers. John Diefenbaker was a defence lawyer and successfully defended 18 people who were facing the death penalty, but according to the minister, he should have been ashamed of choosing to make a career of defending criminals. The member for Kitchener Centre is also a defence lawyer. Justice Moldaver, whom the Conservatives recently appointed to the Supreme Court, was also a defence lawyer. According to the minister, those two people are guilty of choosing a shameful profession.

[English]

After the 1999 Manitoba election, the Minister of Public Safety was charged with breaking election laws and he hired a defence lawyer to plea bargain for him. Was he at least grateful then for lawyers who choose to defend criminals?

The minister brought shame on himself, his government and the House with his ridiculous remarks attacking our country's defence lawyers. He should stand and apologize.

Oral Questions

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, 156 members stood in their place and voted to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We were doing what we told our constituents we would do.

At first, we wondered why members, like those for Western Arctic and the NDP leadership contender for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, did not join us. Now we know why. The NDP members and party insiders told the media that two of the members who voted to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry have been severely punished by the NDP. When the NDP boasts about silencing its members, it is no wonder it is so worried about floor crossing.

Luckily for the constituents of the silent northwestern Ontario MPs, Conservatives like myself will be their voice for our beautiful region. When the opposition chooses their big union bosses over the people who sent them here or even their own MPs, it is further proof that they are not and could never be fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Public Safety launched a full frontal attack on defence lawyers in this country. The irony is that the government's misguided prison agenda will see provinces shelling out for more prisons, for more already overworked prosecutors, and yes, for more defence lawyers. The only thing we will not see is more police officers on the street to prevent crimes.

When will the government stop saddling the provinces with these costs and actually deal with them to make sure that we prevent crimes before they ever happen?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the question is when is the hon. member and his party going to start listening to the NDP government in Manitoba that supports these measures to keep Canadians safe?

The member talks about a full frontal attack. It is that member who yesterday launched a full frontal attack on the integrity and credibility of a member of the Supreme Court of Canada, fabricating commitments at a confidential hearing which were never made. That member has been repudiated by Mr. Justice Rothstein. Will he stand in his place, apologize and retract his irresponsible remarks?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I will just ignore that, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

The Conservatives' imprisonment plan is the wrong approach. It ignores the concerns of local stakeholders who, for decades, have been fighting crime, working to rehabilitate young people and keeping our communities safe. The Government of Quebec was very clear: if Ottawa passes this bill, it should not count on Quebec to pay the bill.

When will the Conservatives finally work with Quebec to combat crime?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP will continue to ignore the victims of crime.

For example, the New Brunswick Attorney General said that her government supports, without hesitation, the efforts to strengthen these legislative provisions in order to protect victims of crime, protect our children and give victims a voice.

However, the hon. member cannot ignore his attack on the credibility of a member of the Supreme Court of Canada. Will the hon. member apologize and retract his irresponsible remarks with regard to the integrity of Mr. Justice Rothstein?

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will continue to ignore that.

It is not just the province of Quebec that is opposed to these costs.

[Translation]

Ontario, British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island have also made it clear that they oppose the government's expectation that they will bear the costs related to this program. In all, that is over 75% of the country's population.

Why is this government ignoring the opinions of these provinces? What does the government plan to do if the provinces simply refuse to pay the bill?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to act in the interest of crime victims and Canadians, just as it is acting in the interest of the 77% of Quebecers who said that they were in favour of tougher sentences for criminals.

However, for the third time, I will give the hon. member the opportunity to retract his irresponsible remarks that attack the integrity of a member of the Supreme Court. We must respond to this member's false statements.

When will he apologize for attacking the integrity and credibility of a justice of the Supreme Court?

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after hearing yesterday's scandalous personal attack on my New Democratic colleague by the Minister of Public Safety, I would hate to hear what names he is calling the five premiers of the provinces who are saying no to this bill. These provinces know how to keep communities safe.

Newfoundland and Labrador's justice minister said he has never seen a study favouring more jail time as a way to improve public safety.

Why will the out of touch government not support the provinces' efforts to invest in crime prevention and more police officers? Why is it burdening them with billions more in costs for a failed approach?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we heard from the mayor of Winnipeg who indicated that naysayers of Bill C-10 are sitting idly by while more innocent people are being murdered. He said that the rights of citizens need to trump the rights of criminals in our country.

I want to repeat the challenge of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to the member across the way who slighted the reputation of a Supreme Court of Canada judge when he breached a written confidential undertaking that he made to the people of Canada. Will he apologize?

• (1425)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the provinces are not buying what the minister says about costs. Newfoundland and Labrador's justice minister said that past social transfers are not sufficient to cover the costs of these megaprisons. Premier Ghiz in P.E.I. said that if the federal government wants to increase costs for the provinces, it should pay the bill.

Provinces are refusing to write a blank cheque for the government's prisons agenda. Will the government help the provinces pay for crime prevention, or will it bully them into paying for a plan that has been a proven failure elsewhere?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear with respect to the NDP. Even spending a dollar on fighting crime would be too much for the members of the NDP.

That being said, with respect to the provinces, I see the province of Manitoba, through its attorney general, said, "Because we called for many of the things that are in there", he is talking about the bill, "we're hoping that the law gets passed and we can get on with it". Marie-Claude Blais, the attorney general of New Brunswick, said, "This bill will help to better protect our children".

Why will the New Democrats not get with it and start helping us to fight crime in this country for a change? When are they going to get—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Toronto Centre.

* * *

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a serious flaw in the process that was used to appoint the Auditor General. The government announced that the position was a bilingual one and that official bilingualism was an essential qualification for the position. The *Canada Gazette* used the phrase "proficiency in both official languages".

Why does the government keep insisting that there are no problems with the basic process used in this appointment?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the process encouraged bilingual Canadians to apply and all candidates were considered. It was determined that the person selected had the best skills of all the candidates. And that is why Sheila Fraser, the former Auditor General, said, “He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him.”

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not about the agreeability of the person in question; that really is not the issue. The issue is that the government set out in a written announcement with respect to the posting of a public position, an officer of Parliament, that the position required official bilingualism. It required a capacity in our two official languages in order to be able to hold the job. That was set out as a fundamental characteristic of the post.

The Conservatives then changed the rules at the end of the game. Since when is it fair or reasonable to do that? It is not. It is whimsical, arbitrary, capricious, and it is wrong. It is illegitimate, and the government should know it.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate to see the leader of the third party attacking an officer of Parliament who has been a faithful public servant, whose candidacy has been supported even by Mr. Victor Boudreau, the interim leader of the Liberal Party of New Brunswick.

I would remind the leader of the Liberal Party that when he was here as a member of Parliament for the NDP, Pierre Trudeau appointed Ken Dye as one of our greatest auditors general in modern Canadian history. Mr. Dye was a unilingual Canadian.

We do not believe that Canadians who do not have perfect fluency in both languages should be excluded from serving their country.

[Translation]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I still see a problem here. First, when the minister clearly states that I have attacked someone, he should know—and I am looking straight at him—that he is not telling the truth. We are not opposed to the individual in question. We are opposed to the government's position and how it made this choice. It broke its own rules with this process. The minister should see that there is a problem here. It creates a problem for the entire Canadian public service when the government changes the rules like that. That is the problem.

• (1430)

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if there is a problem here, it is the credibility of the leader of the Liberal Party. Professor Donald Savoie at the Université de Moncton said, and I quote, “What surprises me is that the leaders of the opposition parties immediately cried foul. If they had concerns, they should have voiced them when they were given the opportunity.”

Oral Questions

All the Liberal members have refused to vote against Mr. Ferguson's appointment. We believe in equal opportunity and we do not want to exclude Canadians who are not perfectly—

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

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Europe has been rocked by the threat of an economic disaster that could have significant repercussions in countries everywhere, including Canada. Canadians are afraid of losing their jobs, a record number of families are turning to food banks and there are record levels of inequality. Almost two million people are unemployed, but there is no real plan to create jobs that will sustain the economy.

My question is simple: when will this government finally take action to help these Canadian families?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have said over and over, we have a plan. The NDP voted against our plan. This plan will help the economy and our Canadian families. I am referring to phase two of Canada's economic action plan. I wonder why the NDP is refusing to vote with us to create jobs. We have created 650,000 jobs since July 2009.

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that slow growth means fewer jobs for Canadians. Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said we should expect another 100,000 Canadians to lose their jobs next year. The Governor of the Bank of Canada said that the economy is slowing. These are individuals with more credibility than the government has.

The Conservatives are clearly taking Canada down the wrong track. When will the government admit it does not have a plan, adopt the sound economic suggestions of this side of the House, through the NDP, and act now to protect family-supporting jobs to avoid 100,000 more unemployed people?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was at that meeting yesterday. I heard very clearly what the PBO had to say. I heard very clearly the other day what the Governor of the Bank of Canada had to say. It was very clear that the PBO said that he makes mistakes. Why did he say that? There was a report in *The Globe and Mail* recently which said very clearly that the PBO is less accurate many times over the government estimates, which are private sector, independent economists' estimates. The government is 9 times out of 15 more accurate.

We are going to stick with our low-tax agenda. We are going to help families. Whether or not those members vote for it, we are going to do the right thing.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about mistakes. From May 2008 to today, the Conservatives have created barely 250,000 jobs in this country. It is not the numbers they advance, not the bogus mistakes that they put forward.

Before the Conservatives start to celebrate, the reality is that over the same period of time, the labour market grew by 450,000 jobs. This means they are 200,000 jobs short from treading water, from standing still. That is very unfortunate for Canadian families.

Given that their numbers are bogus, given that they are going to lose another 100,000 jobs if they do not act, why do the Conservatives not get to work now so that Canadians can get back to work?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we have to resist is that \$10 billion tax hike the NDP has proposed that would kill jobs, that would negatively impact Canadian families. Let us not forget that the IMF and the OECD have been very clear that this is and will be the country in the next five years in the world to do business.

We are going to continue with the plan we have because that is giving us the advantage in the world. That is going to help Canadian families. We are not going to succumb to the punishment of the NDP on our Canadian families by voting for higher taxes and killing jobs.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families are finding it harder to get ahead. Household debt is the highest it has ever been. The average Canadian family owes \$1.49 for every dollar it earns.

The Conservatives have no plan. When will we see measures from the government that will help struggling Canadian families?

• (1435)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we clearly are concerned about Canadians overextending themselves. However, I have to ask myself, and I ask the NDP to respond to this eventually, why is that when we put as a priority of our government things like the financial literacy plan where we are setting up a financial literacy leader in the government to improve that situation, when we introduce credit card reforms, when we strengthen mortgage rules to protect Canadians who are buying a home and when we cut taxes and create things like the TFSA, which is an incredible advantage to Canadians, the NDP always votes against them?

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth is we voted against billions in corporate tax cuts. We voted against the inaction of the government.

[*Translation*]

Household debt has reached record levels and families continue to pay the price.

The problem is that instead of helping households make ends meet, the Conservative government continues to give large tax cuts to big business, which does not really create jobs. If that is their plan, it just does not work.

When will this government finally help families crushed by debt?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, our government's priority is primarily to meet the needs of our Canadian families. For that reason, we are anxiously watching current world events. We are hearing more and more that events affecting Europe and the United States may affect us also.

That is why we must continue with our plan to freeze taxes for families and maintain jobs. To that end, we must follow our plan to help employers create jobs for Canadian families.

* * *

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before the committee yesterday, the President of the Treasury Board tried in vain to put out the fire that is raging regarding the G8 scandal.

The problem, however, is that his statements raised more questions than they answered. The hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka told us, for example, that without any intervention on his part, the 242 projects initially presented were somehow whittled down to 32, as if by magic. There is no paper trail of any kind on that.

Can the President of the Treasury Board finally explain to us what criteria he used to choose those 32 projects?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday two ministers and three deputy ministers spent two hours before committee and answered all the questions of the members of the committee.

The Auditor General has confirmed that all the money went to public infrastructure projects, and every penny is accounted for.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we learned yesterday why the President of the Treasury Board is never the one to answer in this House.

Let us review the facts. The President of the Treasury Board signed contribution agreements; he even created a nice homemade form. He met with local officials and helped select the projects. His constituency office even intervened to make sure those projects got money.

Does anyone still really believe that the President of the Treasury Board was not involved in this scandal?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the President of the Treasury Board did, what I did and what three deputy ministers did yesterday was respond to every question the members of Parliament on the public accounts committee had. The member opposite had the opportunity to ask those questions.

This has been thoroughly looked at. The Auditor General looked at it and came forward with some helpful observations. We fully accept that advice.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the problem is that yesterday the Muskoka minister presented a defence based on the claim that 242 pet projects magically became 32 pork projects, without any paper trail and without any involvement by him whatsoever.

However, on April 20, 2009, the town of Gravenhurst stated that it was told by the Muskoka minister to "remove the centennial project from the G8 fund and he would find the money elsewhere".

The committee asked him a direct question. Why did he not disclose his direct involvement in the selection of that project?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General spent considerable time looking at the issue. She came forward with a report. She made some very good recommendations to government on how we could be more open and more transparent to Parliament. We have completely accepted that advice.

Yesterday there were two hours' worth of hearings on the issue where every question was answered.

• (1440)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said the rules were broken and the rules were broken by him. Therefore, if the government accepted the Auditor General's advice, he would be bounced out of his seat. That is a simple fact because the documents show he directly intervened and he told the committee otherwise. Either he has misled committee or he has a really bad memory.

Either way, what is that man doing in charge of \$250 billion of taxpayer money?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has looked into the issue. The public accounts committee has spent a good amount of time examining the issue.

Yesterday two ministers and three deputy ministers responded to every question that the committee had, and all the questions have been answered.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs admitted that he always knew that the \$50 million he asked Parliament to approve for the border infrastructure fund would actually go to projects in Muskoka instead. The minister admitted that he topped up the fund by 166% in order to hide his Muskoka gravy train from both Parliament and the Auditor General.

The minister makes jokes about this, but breaking the rules and wasting tax dollars is no laughing matter. Will the minister take this opportunity to apologize to Canadian taxpayers for this abuse of power?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to this issue when the Auditor General released her report. I spoke to this issue at great length at committee. I certainly would commend *Hansard* from that committee to the member opposite.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that \$50 million that had been earmarked to improve border infrastructure was used to finance projects proposed by friends of the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka. Furthermore, he told us it was simply a matter of a small adjustment, when in fact, he increased the funding by 166%. This scheme was meant to distract parliamentarians and the Auditor General.

Why does the Prime Minister not reprimand his ministers for this flagrant abuse of their fiscal authority?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as any surprise to my colleague opposite that I reject much of the premise of the question he just asked. Yesterday we fully laid out, as we have in the past, the facts involving the Auditor General's report and answered every question members at committee had.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member for Peterborough is not busy pretending to be the Pope, he tries to instead impersonate a federal court judge.

He and other Conservative members of the access committee are trying to seize documents concerning the CBC's business dealings, even though these very documents are before the courts as we speak.

Will the Minister of Justice explain our Constitution to the member and how it mandates a strict separation between the courts and Parliament, or is he a part of this abuse of power as well?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join with my Conservative colleagues, but disappointingly not opposition colleagues, in commending the member for Peterborough for demanding accountability at the CBC. This is something that our government said that we would do.

The truth is the CBC receives a lot of money, and our government has been clear. If it is to receive that money, then it needs to be accountable for it. That is what the committee is investigating and that is what the member for Peterborough is standing up for.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that Industry Canada delayed the F-35 project for over a year because it was not happy with Lockheed Martin's work. This government is arguing with its own experts. Another day, another problem with the F-35 project. The costs of this program are astronomical and our pilots' safety is at risk.

Will the Minister of National Defence finally recognize that the F-35 program is simply a disaster?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our participation in the joint strike fighter program continues to be a success.

The end result of this complex process is successfully ensuring that Canadian industry benefits from the enormous opportunities provided by this program. It is ensuring our Canadian Forces have the best aircraft they need to protect our sovereignty by land, sea and air now and well into the future.

Though we are still in the early stages, Canadian companies have already secured \$370 million in contracts, supporting industries that employ 80,000 Canadians.

•(1445)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government truly believed in economic spinoffs, it would require equivalent economic investments throughout the country, which it has not done. The government's F-35s are not safe and are not adapted to the realities of Canada's north. The costs are soaring without any guarantee of economic spinoffs.

When will the government do its homework, face the facts and opt for an open and transparent bidding process that works for Canada?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the hon. member, which provides yet another opportunity to highlight the fact that the F-35 provides the Canadian Forces with the best replacement for the aging CF-18 aircraft and provides an excellent advantage in defending Canadian sovereignty.

The F-35 program is progressing well and on track.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the son of an RCAF veteran of the Second World War, I can assure the House and all Canadians that neither that minister, nor that minister and nor the government have a monopoly on support for our troops.

We will keep challenging reckless behaviour of the government on the F-35 file precisely because it fails to support our troops, because of years of delay, because it cannot handle the Arctic and it has a poor safety record and because that out-of-touch minister would rather blow billions on planes that do not fly than admit he is wrong—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is much of the work that has gone into developing what is state-of-the-art fifth generation aircraft that will look after our needs well into the future has come directly from the airmen, the people who fly the aircraft and the technicians with whom I have spoken who know first-hand. They say that this is the best aircraft at this time and well into the future for Canadian needs, Canadian workers and Canadian industry.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is a remarkably surprising answer. Yesterday we

learned that the government attacked its own officials over its botched F-35 deal. Government experts were so concerned over the contract with Lockheed Martin that they blocked the deal for a year, but Conservatives refused to listen.

Enough is enough. This dispute hurt the Canadian aerospace industry. Just how far is the minister planning to go to save face? When will he finally admit he is wrong and put the contract out to tender?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the opposition's renewed interest in the Canadian military, Canada's first defence strategy represents a tangible commitment to provide our military men and women the resources they need, including the F-35, resources that will ensure mission success, personal safety and jobs for Canadians.

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, just yesterday there were reports calling for the government to compromise on Canadian rights by backing down from our legitimate WTO challenge that seeks trade fairness for fishermen.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway advise the House whether the Conservative Party really is the only party in the House willing to stand up for our international trade rights and the rights of fishermen to choose their own livelihood?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it really is disappointing that the only Liberal spokesperson we have heard from recently is a Toronto senator who opposes the seal hunt.

We are a little worried about the NDP members as well, because their self-appointed Newfoundland fisheries critic claimed that the seal hunt is doomed and has said that we would be better off if commercial hunters retreated.

In the face of this affront to our fishermen and sealers, we stand emboldened in our resolve to defend Canada's international trade rights.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the annual Corrections report, under the government's watch, things are getting worse in Canadian prisons. Our prisons are more crowded than ever. Offenders with mental health problems are simply put in solitary confinement with no access to treatment programs.

Conservative mismanagement is putting Corrections staff at risk and leading to more violence in our prisons.

Oral Questions

When will the government stop with these photo ops and actually address these serious public safety concerns?

• (1450)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. Part of that means assuring that offenders are rehabilitated when in prison. That is why we have made historic investments, improving mental health in the correctional system.

In fact, I am proud to note that the International Corrections and Prison Association recognize this work with its leadership award for Canadian Corrections.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all we hear from this government is rhetoric, with no regard for the facts. Here are the facts: access to rehabilitation programs is key to helping ex-convicts reintegrate into society. Yet these programs represent only 1.8% of the total budget of Correctional Service Canada.

Why does this government refuse to make public safety a priority by ensuring that prisoners have access to rehabilitation programs?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member to receive a briefing from Correctional Service Canada to indicate the steps that we have been taking, concrete steps on the issue of mental health in prisons. Both access to treatment services for inmates and access to training for staff have been vastly improved under this government.

I must point out that these increased resources are a result of the strong leadership of our Minister of Finance and our Conservative government.

* * *

[*Translation*]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in less than 48 hours, Pascal Lacoste will begin his hunger strike in the hope of receiving treatment. Despite the government's refusal to recognize that he was poisoned, Canadian Veterans Advocacy has said that it is plausible that a number of Canadian soldiers were poisoned after being exposed to depleted uranium. Time is running out. Instead of passing the buck to his officials, the minister needs to act now.

Will the minister finally tell us what the government intends to do to help this soldier?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I told the member for Québec, our veterans and military personnel go through very difficult experiences when they are deployed.

As Minister of Veterans Affairs, it is my duty to do everything in my power to ensure that our veterans have access to all the services and programs they deserve. And this must be based on the latest scientific data.

I urge veterans to avoid putting their health in danger and to accept help from our professionals so that we can continue to provide the services and programs our veterans deserve.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in February 2000 the current member for Edmonton East said in a motion that he presented to the House that the government should take a leading role in banning depleted uranium from the world's militaries because of its harmful effect on veterans and our environment.

If the current member for Edmonton East, a Conservative member of Parliament, knows that, then why does the government not know it? As the Minister of Veterans Affairs knows all too well, he alone can apply the benefit of the doubt to help people like Pascal Lacoste and many other veterans who are suffering the effects of depleted uranium.

Will the minister do that now, before November 11?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that we are implementing the newest and most recent scientific evidence. I praise the member for Edmonton East for raising those important issues and for raising \$200,000 for the returning veterans who took part in the campaign in Italy.

I invite every veteran who is putting his or her life at risk in such a case to get in touch with our skilled professionals, who will ensure they get all the programs and benefits to which they are entitled and which they fully deserve. We will stand by our—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Wascana.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the world economy in turmoil, it is no time for complacency. Standards of living are flat, disposable incomes are stagnant, household debt is high and the gulf between the very wealthy and everyone else is widening.

To make Canadians less vulnerable and to encourage growth, will the government forgo its \$1.2 billion EI payroll tax increase, allow 10 million low-income Canadians to access tax credits now reserved for only the better off and help seniors whose RSPs have been devastated in the stock market? Will the government do those three sensible things?

Oral Questions

•(1455)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that we are cautiously optimistic with the news coming out of Europe. However, it is interesting to find the Liberal Party standing up and talking about tax credits and helping people like our seniors and our most vulnerable. When we talk about our volunteer firefighters tax credit, I remember firefighters begging the Liberal Party, when it was in government, to do something, and it did absolutely nothing, so I will take no lessons from the Liberals on how to improve a credit they denied them for years.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is a lesson: it is to stop raising taxes and killing jobs. On the government's watch—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Vancouver Quadra has the floor. We will hear the question.

The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, on the government's watch, job creation is declining quarter after quarter. According to leading economists, the few jobs being created are almost all low-paying, part-time, or temporary. In fact, today Canada still has over half a million fewer full-time jobs compared to August 2008.

Given this sad situation, why is the government hurting private sector job creation with a whopping EI payroll tax increase, an almost \$2 billion burden in the last two years?

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I found it interesting when the member mentioned raising taxes. Was it not the Liberal Party, in its platform, that wanted to put a carbon tax on everyone—all Canadians, vulnerable or not?

That said, let us give the facts and the accurate statistics. Statistics Canada's facts are clear: 650,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009, 90% of those have been full-time jobs, and 80% of them are in the private sector. This is a wonderful story, and we are going to tell it again and again.

* * *

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning, by approving the appointment of a unilingual auditor general, the Conservatives once again showed their contempt for bilingualism. They ignored all the concerns raised by the NDP and francophones across the country. Although the government claims that Mr. Ferguson was the most qualified candidate, he does not speak French. How will he be able to do his job?

Will the Auditor General conduct investigations only in English and ignore all the French documentation?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have already said, the government looked for bilingual candidates. I said that yesterday. Upon completion of a very rigorous process, the most qualified

candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson told a House committee and the Senate that it is important to learn French, that he wants to learn French and that he is going to learn French.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is still hiding things from us. We do not yet know whether the candidate was asked any questions in French during the interview. Yet, the job posting in the *Canada Gazette* clearly indicated that the candidate had to be bilingual—that proficiency in both official languages was essential.

Why is the government still trying to suggest that the appointment was based on merit and that the candidate selected was the most qualified? The candidate does not even meet one of the hiring criteria. Is this what bilingualism means to the Conservatives?

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I absolutely reject the premise of that question. The person who chose to be considered for this position is absolutely the most qualified. This individual was given a battery of questions and tests. Sheila Fraser, the former auditor general, has endorsed his candidacy. Others who have been involved with him in the New Brunswick legislature have endorsed him, including the opposition Liberal leader.

He is the best candidate, and we stand by this appointment.

* * *

•(1500)

FEDNOR

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada proudly announced new funding for the cyclotron medical research facility in Thunder Bay. This \$4 million investment will go towards creating long-term jobs in that great city and will help to bring private sector investment to a growing high-tech industry in northern Ontario.

Can the minister responsible for FedNor please rise and give an update to members on this important investment?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Conservative member for that question. The member for Sault Ste. Marie is doing some excellent work in his riding.

Indeed, the government did make that important investment in the last budget. Unfortunately, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North and his party voted against that worthwhile project twice.

Of course, we will not be hearing from the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North here in this House, thanks to the heavy-handedness of the NDP in disciplining that member. Members heard it here first. However, his constituents can count on us to represent them. We will do the right thing.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS**

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Remembrance Day approaches. The Conservatives are commemorating this occasion by cutting more than \$200 million in funding to Veterans Affairs and axing more than 500 jobs. They suggest that the cuts will be absorbed through attrition, which is false, and by calculating the mortality rate of veterans, which is offensive. The ombudsman says that new vets are outpacing the death rate of older vets.

No one believes the minister except the echo chamber around him. When will Conservatives stop their assault on veterans and exempt the department from cuts?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is out in left field—a potato field, I suppose—because the echo that is reverberating from one end of the country to the other indicates that our government has made a variety of improvements over the past six years: it introduced the new veterans charter, set up the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman and resolved the agent orange issue. Never have we invested so much in our veterans and we will continue to do so because we love our veterans and we believe in them.

* * *

[*English*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans' response to the potential discovery of infectious salmon anemia has been slow and inadequate.

There is a potential catastrophe unfolding on the Pacific coast, and the government is still weeks away from having confirmation from the CFIA. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans has a mandate to protect wild salmon. In all other jurisdictions where ISA has been found, it has had devastating consequences.

When will the minister finally take action and test these salmon?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that we are taking this issue very seriously because our government places a high priority on the good health and management of our fish stocks.

That is why in recent years we tested over 5,000 wild and farmed B.C. salmon. There was not a single case of confirmed ISA in B.C.

At this time, the reported findings to which the member refers are not conclusive. Federal officials are conducting tests in our certified ISA lab to verify these claims.

Instead of using unsubstantiated claims to undermine an important Canadian industry, I encourage this member to wait for the test results.

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve politics in which special interests do not have special access to political parties.

We already know that the NDP received at least \$85,000 from big labour unions for its recent convention in Vancouver. Added to that, the secretive NDP Federal Council met behind closed doors to set the rules for the NDP leadership race.

Can the Minister of State (Democratic Reform) please update the House on the status of removing big money influence over political parties?

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his hard work in this regard.

Every day Canadians are expected to pay back loans under strict conditions, and we should expect the same from politicians.

Our government has committed to removing big money influence over our political parties. That is why we reintroduced the political loans accountability act. The act will reduce undue influence of big money, including big unions, in the political process.

We encourage the NDP, its national council and its leadership candidates to live up to the spirit of this reintroduced legislation. Canadians deserve politics in which special interests—

• (1505)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance transitional measures and the pilot projects are essential to my riding and other regions. Even the Conservative candidate who was defeated in my riding in the last election, who is now the Conservatives' spokesperson for eastern Québec, is calling for the recent pilot projects to become law. By refusing to take action, the Conservatives are abandoning the workers of Charlevoix and Haute-Côte-Nord.

Will the minister listen to the NDP and his own employees and extend the employment insurance transitional measures and pilot projects?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is getting Canadians back to work and promoting job growth and job creation.

We are committed to timely services and proper access to our systems for all Canadians. While there are seasonal fluctuations and changes in services, we know that Canadians need access to modern services.

Business of the House

Our government is focused on providing excellent value for taxpayers' dollars, unlike the NDP, which wants to raise our taxes. Why do NDP members not want to modernize our system?

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, from 1913 to 1956, a period of over 40 years, time limits on debates were used 10 times. In the last 40 days, a time limit has been used seven times, making a new historical record.

What used to be the exception to the rule appears to now be the rule.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: I am only sitting because I cannot be heard.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. We will hear the rest of the question.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the government House leader. Can we again restore a parliamentary tradition that limits on debates occur when matters are urgent or otherwise justified and do not become routine?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last election Canadians gave us a strong mandate to deliver on jobs for Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The House wanted to hear the question and I am sure the House wants to hear the answer. The Chair wants to hear the answer.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, Canadians asked us to deliver on tackling crime, on creating jobs for Canadians, on restoring the democratic principle of each vote having equal value on a range of commitments, and we are delivering on those commitments.

But what has happened each and every time is that the opposition has brought in a motion to stop debate, to say those bills should not go to committee, they should not go past second reading.

We will not stand for that. We will deliver on our commitments and ensure that the House has a chance to decide and debate these issues thoroughly at every stage.

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PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Vu Trong Kim, General Secretary and Vice President for the Central Committee, Vietnam Father Land Front.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Halim Benatallah, Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, responsible for the national community abroad, for the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the hon. Marie-Claude Blais, Attorney General and Minister of Justice and Consumer Affairs for New Brunswick.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, you deliberated over whether “lemon” and “blueberry” were unparliamentary language. I would like you to consider the word “potato” as well. On many issues, the Conservatives' carrot-and-stick approach will come back to bite them.

• (1510)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Perhaps it would be best to avoid any reference to fruits or vegetables in general. They do not seem to be helpful to the debate.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh on the Thursday question.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): It being Thursday, Mr. Speaker, and a Thursday before a break week when we will all be back in our ridings commemorating events around Remembrance Day on November 11, I would like to ask the government House leader what the agenda will be for the balance of this week and what it will be in the week when we return? In particular, will Bill C-18 be back in the House by that time?

Finally, perhaps as a follow-up to the question asked by the member from the Green Party, how many more times are we going to have time allocation? We are at seven and counting. He is going to catch the Liberals pretty soon if he does not stop, so how many more times do we get time allocation?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nobody would be more delighted than I if we could actually not have to use time allocation, but so far we have not seen an indication from the opposition parties that they are prepared to deal with bills on an expeditious basis. We feel the need to actually get things done here and deliver on our commitments.

In fact, in each of these cases since we started in September, each one of those bills continues to be debated in the process in the House of Commons. At committee, they have not even returned here for report stage yet, let alone third reading. Extensive debate is taking place.

The fact is that the parliamentary process is a lengthy one with many stages. We want to ensure that bills have an opportunity to get through those stages so they can become law, so we can keep the commitments that we made to Canadians.

We are making good progress this week, democratic reform week.
[Translation]

We introduced the Political Loans Accountability Act, which will prevent future leadership contestants from bypassing the law's contribution limits by running up huge interest-free loans from supporters. We saw this in the 2006 Liberal leadership race. Many of those loans do not get paid off and are really donations over the legal limit.

[English]

We have also begun debate on Bill C-20, the fair representation act. I am pleased that this bill will be voted on tonight before being referred to committee for study. The bill restores respect for the founding principle of our country at the heart of Confederation, that Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, forged, that of representation by population. The bill moves every single province closer to the principle of representation by population, that each vote should have, to the extent possible, the same weight.

I know that some members may be disappointed that we have not yet had an opportunity this week to debate Bill C-7, which is the Senate reform act, but they can rest assured I will be calling that bill for debate as our first item of business on the Monday following constituency week. It is part of what one opposition member properly calls our comprehensive democratic reform plan.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, I hope we can deal with Bill C-16, the Security of Tenure of Military Judges Act, and Bill C-15, the Strengthening Military Justice in the Defence of Canada Act. I hope both bills, which make important revisions to the military justice system, will garner all party support.

Of course, next week is a constituency week where members will be in their ridings speaking to Canadians about the issues that are important to them.

[English]

I know that most Canadians, whom I have spoken with at least, think that the jobs and economic growth issues are the top priority and they expect their government to focus on that right here in the House. With this in mind, the next week that we are back will be a jobs and economic growth week.

Jobs and economic growth week will kick off on Monday afternoon when we will again debate the copyright modernization act. The opposition introduced a motion to keep this bill from ever being debated at committee. This is disappointing. The bill would

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modernize our copyright laws and encourage job creation in one of Canada's most dynamic and important sectors of the economy.

I understand that the finance committee is meeting later today to conduct its clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-13, the keeping Canada's economy and jobs growing act, that implements the next phase of Canada's economic action plan. I will give priority to this job creation bill when the committee has completed its study. I anticipate scheduling report stage for Tuesday and Wednesday, which will undoubtedly be the highlight of jobs and economic growth week. This bill would implement important measures from our low tax plan for jobs and growth, including tax relief for small businesses that create jobs and a new tax credit for children who go to dance classes or take arts, music, or language lessons. I hope that it will pass swiftly through the House so that the measures can be implemented for the benefit of our economy and indeed all Canadians.

●(1515)

[Translation]

Finally, Thursday, November 17, will be an allotted day.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, yesterday something very irresponsible happened in the House.

[English]

In that regard, we need to give the House another opportunity to give unanimous consent to the following motion. I move that notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, the House give leave for the member for Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour and the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands to speak immediately, after this motion is adopted, on the subject of veterans and their sacrifice and contribution to building a better Canada in light of the upcoming Remembrance Day observances across the country, that those two members be granted leave to speak for a period not exceeding five minutes each, and that time taken by the two members at the conclusion of their statements be added to the time provided for government orders today.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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[English]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, Fair Representation Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

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Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, where was the consultation with Canadians on fair representation measures before we ever had a bill tabled in the House? Our side of the House has been calling for years for dialogue across Canada. My constituents have been calling for decades for the government to sponsor a dialogue across Canada on ways that we can provide more democracy at the federal level.

Instead, we get these very narrow bills being tabled on electing a Senate, which, by the way, does not provide equal representation, and now seat distribution simply on population when, in fact, an agreement between a former prime minister and the leaders of the provinces and territories had agreed on a different formula, which included representation by population and recognition of Quebec's contribution to Canada.

If the model in this narrow bill, which the government brought forward, is truly to be representation by population, what is the rush? Surely, if we are to fairly represent provinces such as mine where we have a booming economy, why do we not wait for the 2011 census this coming February? That would give us the accurate information.

My province and my constituency continue to have more Canadians and immigrants move in daily. I sign off certificates monthly congratulating new Canadians. What is the rush? Surely we can wait a few more months. If the government is so convinced that the way to have fair representation is based on population, then let us genuinely base it on population not on projections.

The historic compromise, which was mentioned by a number of members in the House, was that we should have representation by population but that we should also have representation by region. If we look at the bill brought forward by the government, it is not a true representation by population bill. As other members of the House have mentioned, we would be taking members out of the House from some of the very regions whose contributions to the House we honour. They provide a rich contribution to the dialogue in the House and the making of federal legislation and policy.

It is time to step back and actually have a dialogue with Canadians. Many of my constituents have been calling for proportional representation. Why is that? It is because every vote, every interest, every priority and every perspective should count.

I feel strongly that I represent every constituent in my riding whether they voted for me or not. I think it is incumbent that we have a system that represents that. If people have other perspectives in my riding, they have a right to be heard directly as well. Therefore, it is time to stand back from these narrow kinds of bills, which, frankly, the government is not even delivering on, which is representation by population.

The Prime Minister of Canada has said that we need to be respecting Quebec as a nation within a unified Canada. Why does the new formula not respect that?

As my hon. colleagues have previously stated, this merits thorough debate and goodwill and yet the government shuts down debate after less than a day.

I, myself, in representing my constituents, only have 10 minutes because there is not time for many of us in the House to have the full

allocation of time. Many of my colleagues, who want to speak for their constituents to ensure their interests are represented, will not be allowed the opportunity to debate the bill. It is absolutely reprehensible.

We will fast-track the bill through the House and it will go to committee. What will happen at committee? I think the committee should go across Canada and visit every corner of the country to hear what Canadians think is the best way to have fair representation of all perspectives in the country.

I stood for that when I ran for office. I said that I would not just be another MP from Alberta who my constituents send to Ottawa. I said that I would work hard to bring the federal government back to the people. That is exactly the kind of process we should have in this area.

Frankly, I have not heard from any of my constituents that this is their number one priority, that there should be more seats either in our city or in our province. If it does happen, we should have our fair proportion of those new seats. My constituents are more concerned about extended care, positive education for their children and aboriginal children who do not have equal access to education or access to safe drinking water. Therefore, I would like us to take that dialogue out to Canadians.

We also need to take measures to ensure that every vote counts. In the last election, during the advance vote there was no poll on campus. I have three universities in my riding and they were all disenfranchised.

I work hard to represent temporary foreign workers. Who will speak for them?

• (1520)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP has a position on this subject that is completely contrary to the principles of Confederation. I respect the member opposite and I know she is a hard-working MP, but this idea that a provincial division in the House should guarantee a certain number of seats, as proposed in the NDP's private member's bill, which, I think, is 24.3%, is not in accordance with the founding principles of Confederation.

In fact, during the time of the United Province of Canada, there actually was a guarantee for Canada East and Canada West. The legislature was divided into two. There were 42 seats for Canada East, Quebec, and 42 seats for Canada West, Ontario. That was in a unitary state and that was the deal. However, it was changed in Confederation to go to a federal system of government, with two orders of government, wherein the federal order of government, the lower chamber, the House of Commons, would be representative of the population.

That was the foundation on which Confederation was based. It was the argument put forward by the Liberal leader of the day, George Brown, many clear Grits in Canada West and many other people throughout the United Province of Canada. It was the reason for which these buildings were built. It is a fundamental principle of Confederation. We need to respect that principle. The House is representative of its population. It has been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court.

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Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I find that very amusing. Perhaps the member does not agree with the Prime Minister who believes that Quebec should be respected as a nation within a unified Canada. Surely, when we come forward with specific bills and policies, we should actually be putting substance before those fancy words.

I am proud to say that one of my ancestors was a Father of Confederation. The reason he decided to join forces is that he wanted responsible government. He did not want external people dictating how we should run our country, which is the same reason I ran. We need to respect that.

If we are simply going to go by representation by population, then why are we not including the representatives for the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador? Why? It, hopefully, is because we all believe in representation by the different perspectives and regions in this country and we will also honour our commitment to Quebec.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member might recall that I asked a question of one of her colleagues with regard to the optimum number of members of Parliament that the NDP believes is necessary to have a fully functional House of Commons. The member made reference to Britain and said that we could have a lot more members of Parliament, implying that maybe an additional 30 is not enough.

I am wondering if she can enlighten the House as to how many members of Parliament the NDP truly believes is necessary in order to have a fair democratic foundation within the House of Commons.

• (1525)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the question from the same standpoint that I am responding to this very narrow bill presented by the government.

That is an issue that my party is trying to address in an open dialogue with Canadians. That is why New Democrats proposed replacing the Senate with proportional representation. We should not be making these decisions as one-offs. We could be better representing Canadians and providing fair representation from all perspectives, views and interests of people across this great country if, in fact, we had a broader dialogue about how better to do that. Do we still want to do it through an appointed body or do we want to do it through a House that generally represents the interests and perspectives of all Canadians?

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a fellow Albertan, it is important that I put on the record that Albertans are concerned about this issue. I represent the highest populated riding in the province of Alberta. I am sure the numbers in the census will indicate that the population of my constituency is in excess of 155,000. The hon. member, with all due respect, has the lowest population of any riding in the province of Alberta. That is maybe why she is not dialed in to the concerns that Albertans have with regard to this issue of being under-represented in the House.

Albertans are passionate about equality and representation. They want to see—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, perhaps I am not dialed in because perhaps my constituents have confidence that I am available to them.

I am not opposed to this. As I have said, if there are to be increased seats based on population, of course Alberta should have additional seats. We have not had the dialogue yet on where those seats would be distributed, unless the hon. member knows something I do not know. I would like that representation as—

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

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up where one of my colleagues left off when he said that representation by population was a foundational principle of our Confederation deal. It is, indeed, a foundational principle. The issue of representation was, in many respects, the most divisive issue before the Fathers of Confederation. One of the Fathers of Confederation, George Brown, whose statute stands not 50 yards from where I stand today, insisted upon representation by population, equality of votes, equal weighting for all votes, one vote one value, as a fundamental foundational principle for this House.

The other House was set up to have equality regardless of the population changes between the regions. We have honoured that principle to the letter. I think we ought to honour, as best as we can, the other principle that was made by our ancestors 140 or 150 years ago to respect and ensure that each of us has equal weight as a participant in Canada's democratic process. To do anything else is to betray the foundational arrangements and values of this country. It is un-Canadian.

This is not unique to Canada. Every federation has, as part of its founding and constitutional arrangements, adopted a similar process. When we look at the Americans and the Australians, we see that exactly the same process was gone through. However, those countries have honoured their arrangements that every citizen has an equal vote in a way that Canada has not. We have repeatedly moved away from that principle.

The NDP purports in its motion, and this is absolutely astonishing, that it is divisive to try to move back to representation by population. Lest anyone believe that is actually true or historically founded, I will read what Charles Tupper had to say in 1865 in the debates in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly on the subject of representation by population as opposed to the other formulae that were being tossed out at the time, which would have people in some provinces getting votes worth more than people in other provinces. He said the principle of representation by population:

...was the only true and safe principle on which the legislatures and the governments could be constructed in British America. That [an] eminent statesman predicted, twenty-five years ago—

That was in 1840.

—in reference to Canada—

That is to say, the province of Canada, Ontario and Quebec.

—that, if they undertook to ignore the principle of representation by population, the day would come when the country would be rent in twain.

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Who does not know the difficulties that arose from the false principle that was applied at the time of the union of the Canadas, in order to give the ascendancy to Upper Canada—

Upper Canada, Ontario, was going to get more members than it deserved by its weight.

—whose population at the time was lower than that of Lower Canada? Who does not know that the prediction of Earl Durham has been verified? And the time has come when that country [Canada] has been convulsed, in order to rid themselves of a principle so unsound as that a certain number of people in a certain locality shall have an amount representation arranged not according to their numbers, but exhibiting a disparity with some other section?

That principle, which, unfortunately, we have allowed to creep into our Constitution, of abandoning representation by population, is what is truly divisive. We have gone through a long history in this regard. We have moved from the formula that was adopted, thanks to the sage advice of George Brown, Charles Tupper and others. We have moved away from that principle by a series of steps, further away from representation by population and more toward a system of increasing an institutionalized inequality. That is undemocratic, unfair, unreasonable and un-Canadian.

In 1915, we adopted one amendment to change our Constitution to allow for this principle to be deviated from. It seemed innocent enough at the time. No province could have fewer MPs than it had senators. In 1947, we moved to a system based upon a different formula that was designed to ensure that Ontario, my province, would not see its total number of members drop. In 1951, we adopted an amendment to that, and in 1976, a further amendment known as the “amalgam” formula was adopted.

Finally, in 1985, when we realized that the 1975 formula would result in the number of members in the House of Commons growing to an amount that was seen as too large, we moved, very unwisely, to a system that ensured an increasing level of under-representation for people in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta into the future and exacerbated with every census.

• (1530)

That was a mistake. We are trying to correct that mistake. We are doing so by means of adding some members to the House of Commons. How many? Fifteen for Ontario, six each for Alberta and British Columbia, and in order to ensure that Quebec does not suffer from under-representation, three for Quebec.

Members should understand that Quebec would get the percentage of seats in the House of Commons that its population warrants. If there is one thing and only one thing left that is good about our representation system today after the mess we have made of it for so many years, it is that at least Quebec is neither overrepresented nor under-represented. The formula proposed by the government would ensure that Quebec stays neither overrepresented nor under-represented and that it has the percentage of seats in the House that its population deserves.

We are not fully correcting the problem of Ontario, B.C. and Alberta being under-represented, but we are going a considerable distance toward it. It does not go as far as the amalgam formula proposed by Pierre Trudeau in the 1970s would have gone, but it is a great improvement over the status quo. I want the NDP members who have proposed and advocated their motion to reject what we are doing today to stop and think about this.

The people I represent in the riding of Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington are not especially rich or well connected and have no special advantages. I think it is the 74th or 75th wealthiest riding, which is to say it is the 25th or 26th poorest riding in Ontario. There is nothing to cause these people to be in a position where we can say that they deserve to be less represented, that they are already being taken care of. None of that is true. If that is true in my riding, then it is true in every other riding in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta that has no special advantages.

Why are we saying to them that their vote should be a fraction of the vote of another province? Why are we saying to them that their constitutionally guaranteed citizenship right to be able to participate in this system should have a lesser weight? Are they going to get a deduction on how much tax they pay? Would they be less of a participant when the government came along and told them what they must do? Absolutely not. To say that they are worth less, that they are a fraction of a voter, that they are a fraction of a citizen, that they are a fraction of a human being is undemocratic, illegitimate and an injustice that very much needs to be corrected.

This law would go partway toward correcting that. It is a very moderate, reasonable proposal. It is one which ensures that the smaller provinces, which are somewhat overrepresented, do not lose any seats. It is one which ensures that Quebec continues to get representation by population. It is one which ensures that the people whom I represent, and my colleagues from Alberta, B.C. and Ontario represent, get back some of their lost citizenship rights.

• (1535)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his excellent speech. I know he really believes in democratic reform and representation by population.

A few options have been put forward by other parties in the House. I was wondering if he would take this opportunity to contrast the fair and democratic proposition we are putting forward with some of the propositions that are being brought forward by other parties that may have to worry about special interest groups and special favouritism for different parts of the country.

Could the member take this opportunity to explain to Canadians why it is important that we adopt this now so that we can move ahead promptly to get this in place?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, there were two questions.

The first was about the other proposal that is out there, the proposal suggested by the New Democrats. I forget the bill number, but it is a private member's bill. It calls for some extra seats to be given to Alberta, B.C., Ontario and Quebec. However, the percentage for Quebec would be frozen at, I think it is 24.5% or something like that, which is the percentage of the population that Quebec had in 2006, and it would stay that way permanently. This is a version of another proposal made in 1992 and rejected by voters across the country as part of the Charlottetown accord package, where Quebec would have been frozen at 25% in perpetuity. At the time, that proposal was undemocratic, but it was being done, from a constitutional point of view, in the proper way.

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If we want to move away from the principle of representation by population or proportionality, if we want to be less proportionate, we need to have an amendment that is approved by seven provinces and half the population. That is what the Constitution says. To do so by means of a section 44 amendment, unilaterally through the House of Commons, simply is unconstitutional.

By the way, I made that point in the committee that approves private members' bills. I pointed out that the bill is unconstitutional and should not go forward. I was voted down and it will go forward, but that does not change my view that it would be unconstitutional and would be rejected.

The second question relates to why we should move forward now. The answer is simply that it takes time to introduce a redistribution proposal. If we do not act promptly, we will be forced to use the old formula because the Chief Electoral Officer will be unable to follow through with the very slow and detailed process of redistribution which involves electoral commissions in each province, and so on. [Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in between the time of the Charlottetown accord and the current situation, a key event took place in the House: the recognition of Quebecers as a nation within Canada. It is clear that, for the hon. member, this recognition does not mean that the nation should maintain its political weight in the House.

Is there anything concrete in this recognition, which was supported by his party, with respect to linguistic duality and Quebec's political weight?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, the question refers to the motion passed by the House in 2006. That motion was not an amendment to our Constitution. To abandon the principle of proportionality, the Constitution must be amended, and that must be supported by the legislatures of seven provinces, as well as by 50% of the population. There is no motion that is more binding than our Constitutional legislation and no motion can unilaterally amend the Constitution. So, the Constitution stays the same and the principle of proportionality must be respected.

● (1540)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked from a principled position in terms of why the government had to bring forward this bill. I respect what it is he said, but that does not necessarily mean that I agree with a lot of his thoughts.

I welcome the member's involvement in this debate. I would suggest that he should be just as welcoming of other members of this chamber getting involved and participating in the debate.

Could the member explain to the House why the government has seen fit to allow just three or four hours of debate when there are 308 members of Parliament? We can see how restrictive that is going to be on 308 members, so imagine if this bill passed and there were 338 members.

Why would the government move a time allocation motion allowing for just two or three hours of debate? Does the member see

the ramifications of preventing members from being able to voice their concerns?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I do not have much time to answer this question because we are almost through my five minutes.

Very briefly, the answer is that we do face a deadline in terms of moving this bill forward so that the Chief Electoral Officer can summon the electoral boundaries commissions that cause a redistribution to occur.

If this bill were to go forward after the beginning of 2012, I think it would be very difficult as a practical matter to have any form of redistribution other than the one that is contemplated under the current law. There is really no time to switch horses in midstream after the end of 2011. That is the reason haste is required.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Just to clarify, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington had a 20-minute time slot. Did the member mean to split that or not? There was a 20-minute slot and he spoke for about 11 minutes. Subsequently, there is a 10-minute question and answer period. I just wanted to make sure we did not miss the member splitting his time. Is that correct?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, had I been aware, I could have gone on for another 10 minutes. However, I am happy to keep answering questions for the remainder of the 10 minutes. I will enjoy it even more.

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the hon. member's speech, in which he made several historical references. My father is a retired history teacher, so I really appreciate people talking about the past, especially since the member appeared rather nostalgic. He talked about Lord Durham and the Act of Union, when Lower Canada and Upper Canada were joined, which reduced Quebec's political weight considerably within the united government. I will not remind the members of all of Lord Durham's great ideas to ensure that Quebec would lose its *raison d'être* and that the French language would be extinguished. I do not know if the member was feeling nostalgic when he referred to that.

What struck me most were the member's comments near the end of his speech when he answered a question from an NDP member about the motion recognizing the Quebec nation in the House of Commons. If I understand correctly—and if so, the cat will be out of the bag—he said that, in any case, it was not an amendment to our Constitution. What he was really saying is that recognizing the Quebec nation means nothing to him. I wonder if he could explain that.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by referring to Lord Durham's report. The member heard me quote Charles Tupper from the Confederation debates in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly. He did mention Lord Durham; Earl Durham he said.

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I am not attempting to defend Lord Durham's position on anything. There are many things that are highly objectionable from a modern point of view in what he proposed. One thing that cannot be blamed on him, one additional wrinkle that was imposed by the British Parliament at the time, was the notion, designed by the way to oppress Quebec, of saying that Upper Canada, Ontario, which had fewer people would get equal representation. That was very unfair, very undemocratic. It also promptly backfired because the population of Upper Canada grew faster than that of Lower Canada, and by 1865, people like George Brown were complaining about the fact that his province was now underrepresented in proportion to Quebec. There is a certain delicious irony in that, I guess.

In the end, the very sensible result was that we decided to give representation by population to the lower house, to get rid of that injustice which had been intended to be an injustice against Quebec but wound up being an injustice against Ontario, to give equal representation in the upper house, and moreover to protect the rights of linguistic minorities by creating a federal system which is what we have done. That is the best explanation I can give as to what happened.

With regard to the motion in 2006, I will make the same point in English that I made in French earlier. We cannot amend the Constitution by passing a simple motion in the House of Commons. That is what the NDP effectively is suggesting has happened or could happen, but that is not the case.

In order to deviate from the principle of proportionality, in order to deviate from the idea that every redistribution must be at least as proportional, at least as close to representation by population as the previous one, if we want to deviate from that, we have to amend the Constitution by getting the support first of Parliament and then of seven provinces with more than half the population. The NDP's bill does not purport to do that, which makes it unconstitutional. It makes the 2006 resolution in the House of Commons about Quebec being a nation, *une nation au sein du Canada*, constitutionally irrelevant in a discussion about this piece of legislation.

• (1545)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that I have been afforded the opportunity, because of the generosity of my caucus colleagues, to make representation on this very important bill.

Last weekend, I had the opportunity of exchanging thoughts and ideas with constituents. On at least two or three occasions, I had constituents question why we were increasing the number of members of Parliament. The minister responsible made some announcements last week and a great deal of media attention was given to it. Canadians on the whole have a different feeling than what the government has proposed.

However, prior to getting into the debate, I want to highlight something that is really important, something on which we need to focus a bit of attention.

Yesterday, we had some wonderful people in the Speaker's gallery, such as world war vets, individuals who had participated in some of our modern day activities in Afghanistan and individuals who had been involved in our forces. At the same time, we recognized the importance of Remembrance Day and the efforts and

sacrifices that men and women today and yesterday had made, allowing us to even be inside this chamber and appreciate just how important our democracy is.

The very same day in which we were recognizing the important efforts of our men and women in the forces, today and in the past, the government chose to bring in time allocation as more of a normal type of procedure. It is almost as if it feels it is no longer an issue, that all it has to do is bring in a bill and within minutes or maybe an hour, bring in a motion to put time limits on debate. That causes a great deal of concern for many people, me included. I see the value of debate, of allowing members of the House to engage in discussions.

Some bills, more than others, warrant debate. With some bills there are differing opinions from all three political parties. I believe that quite often when we are listening to members debate a bill, it might actually influence someone who is listening. I believe individuals who watch the televised debates will enjoy much of the content that is expressed during the debate, as Canadians try to get a better understanding of the legislation before us.

The government will say that a bill is a priority. If it is a priority, there are other ways in which the government, in good faith, can work with the official opposition House leader and the Liberal Party House leader to try to accommodate the passage of a bill. There are other things we could do prior to implementing time allocation that would allow for additional debate.

When government members stand, and they have had a few speakers on the bill already, and talk about how important it is that we have fair representation, it is one of those principled stands with which I agree. I agree with fair representation. It is one of the cornerstones, one of the pillars of our democratic foundation. However, equally important is what takes place inside this chamber, how the government of the day manages the House affairs and how it proceeds.

I and the Liberal Party are very disappointed in the way in which the government has seen fit to bring in this legislation. I hope the government will reconsider other pieces of legislation as it introduces them.

• (1550)

It is bad policy to introduce a bill and then only moments later bring in time allocation, which, in essence, prevents healthy debate. It is unfortunate and I only hope the government will reflect on that.

It has had a majority, which is somewhat scary, for a few months and we have seen what it has done in the chamber in terms of rushing things through and what it has done in committees, always wanting to go in camera. There is a lot of concern and we are watching. We do not like what we are seeing. We hope it is not something that will continue in the future. Most Canadians will catch on and become very disenchanted with the lack of respect the majority government has demonstrated.

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There are some pieces of legislation on which the three parties in the chamber disagree. I suggest this is one of them. The Prime Minister has been quoted as saying, and I will paraphrase, that this bill would increase the number of seats now and in the future. In essence, what the Prime Minister and the minister responsible for this bill are saying is that the answer to the problem of fair representation is to increase the number of members of Parliament today and in the future. This is something with which we disagree.

I suspect the minister will be afforded the opportunity to ask me a question. Before doing so, he might want to reflect on what he believes the optimum number of seats should be for the House of Commons. If we listen to what the Prime Minister and the minister are saying, today we have 308 members, four years from now we will have 338 and I assume we could have close to 400 or something in excess of 400 some time in the next decade if we follow the recommendations of the government. It is fair to ask where that will stop.

In modern democracies there are fixed numbers. If we look, for example, at the United States, I believe there are 435 seats. The size of the population base does not matter. It has 435 representatives. We all know the population of the U.S. is 10 times the size of Canada. Why does the government not recognize, as other modern democracies have, that it does not have to constantly increase the number of members of Parliament and that there are other ways to readjust it.

I have heard a number of members say that Alberta, B.C. and Ontario need more seats. That is what they argue for fair representation. We can still achieve that balance if we operate within the 308 members. We can give Alberta, B.C. and Ontario fair representation, but the government has chosen to take a different route. As opposed to trying to limit the number of members of Parliament, it is going to support an indefinite amount of growth. We really do not know how much, but maybe the minister will enlighten us after I have had the chance to speak. This is a concern that not only I and members of the Liberal Party have, but it is a concern that Canadians have.

• (1555)

If we asked average Canadians if they wanted the number of politicians in the House of Commons increased and we thought they would say absolutely, we would be absolutely wrong.

Hon. Michael Chong: We want our fair share.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Fair share, yes; increasing the actual numbers, no. Therein lies a substantial difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. As I pointed out, there is a difference in all three political parties.

I have been listening to the speeches given by New Democrats, trying to make an assessment. It reminds me a bit of the debates we had in Manitoba about remote issues versus urban issues. In Manitoba we tried to address that by having percentage variances on fairness in representation. I could be wrong, but I believe it is 5% in the south and then a voter variation in northern Manitoba. Some people want to see the variations increased to a certain degree, but they have been generally well-received.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions in regard to the NDP position on it. The response I have received are have indicated more concern with the numbering issue. For example, one NDP member said that we should look at England where members sit on benches. I have to wonder if the NDP is trying to give the impression that we should be getting rid of the desks and chairs and bringing in benches. Is that what we need in the House of Commons? That NDP member suggested that we just need to look at the other side of the ocean. I thought that was somewhat interesting.

I would like to continue to flush that debate out and the way to flush it out is to allow the debate to occur, but the Conservatives have limited that. I am interested in hearing more opinions from New Democrats.

As a member of Parliament, I love to share with my constituents not only what Conservatives are saying, but also what New Democrats are saying. I am interested in what they have to say. All I know for sure is that they do not have a problem with increasing the number of MPs by 30. They seem to be of the opinion that the percentage in rural ridings has to be increased so the ridings are not as big. They also seem to be of the opinion that it should be at least 25%. I might be corrected on that in terms of the province of Quebec. We will see how this whole discussion evolves.

I want to focus attention on the size factor. How many constituents is the optimum number of constituents that a member of Parliament can actually represent? I suggest a lot of that depends on resources. If members of Parliament are not given any resources, then they will not have the ability to hire people and service constituents, so they will want relatively small constituencies. If members of Parliament are provided with the opportunity to employ people, then they will be able to service a larger number of constituents.

In terms of the size of a constituency, we need to factor in the types of resources provided to members of Parliament to serve their constituents. I would be most interested in hearing about that.

• (1600)

I am quite satisfied, I must say, with the resources that I personally have been entrusted with and I do not take them for granted. However, as compared with being an MLA in the Manitoba Legislature, a member of Parliament gets considerably more resources, but the constituency is considerably larger. I think that somewhat proves the point.

In Manitoba, for example, there are 57 MLAs. An MLA has resources somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$60,000, which allows him or her to have a constituency office and a staff person. Compare that to a federal constituency and we would see is that in Manitoba roughly four and a half provincial constituencies make up one federal constituency. If we do the math, it is not that far off, in terms of resources that are provided to a member of Parliament versus an MLA.

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I believe, given the resources that a member of Parliament is given here in Ottawa, that I am quite able to provide the same sorts of services that I would have been able to provide as an MLA, even though it is a much larger population base. That is why when I bring forward the argument asking whether we have to increase the numbers of members of Parliament, I challenge the government to provide a rationale as to why we need more members of Parliament.

The rationale that the Conservatives are using now is just strictly that they want to give more MPs to Ontario, Quebec, well, Quebec is more of an afterthought for the Conservative Party, Alberta and British Columbia. In essence that has been their rationale. They just want to give them more MPs and that by giving them more MPs, they would have more clout and there would be fairer representation, in terms of the equality of one vote.

Let us look at the numbers. We have 308 seats now. That is an actual increase of 30 seats. Ontario would get 15 seats, Alberta would get six seats, B.C. would get six seats, and the province of Quebec would be given three seats.

We have to put that into the perspective of the economy. Here we have a government, in its most recent budget, that is talking about the economy and how it is going to address, in part, the economy by making significant cutbacks every day that we are in session. I participate in many discussions among my colleagues. I hear about cutbacks in Atlantic Canada. Those cutbacks are serious. They would change lives in Atlantic Canada.

I suspect whether it is the Atlantic or the Pacific, from coast to coast, we are going to find that there are significant cutbacks taking place, that the government is wanting to downsize bureaucracy and our civil service, thereby reducing services. At the same time, with this bill, the government would increase the number of politicians. It just does not make sense.

My best guess is that if the Conservatives were to really caucus this and have a free vote, there would likely be more support to readjusting within the 308 seats, so that at least they could be consistent with their budget debates. That is just my best guess. However, the chances of that happening, I suspect, are not great.

•(1605)

I encourage the government to really reflect on what it is that it is doing on two fronts: the time allocation is wrong, the Conservatives are stifling debate; and increasing the number of seats indefinitely is the wrong thing to do. This is not what Canadians want.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the hon. member came here to make his speech, and I listened very carefully, but did not do his homework. He talked about growth in the future.

In 2021, under our fair plan, only 11 new seats would be added if the current predictions hold. In 2031, only five new seats would be added. We are being very open and honest about the numbers. The numbers are upfront.

The Liberals, under their own plan, are not being honest with Canadians about the numbers. Under the Liberal plan, Manitoba would lose three seats. Saskatchewan would lose five seats. Quebec

would lose six seats. Newfoundland and Nova Scotia would lose a seat.

I ask the hon. member, why is he not being honest about the numbers in his plan?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea where the minister pulls those numbers from, saying, “under the Liberal plan”. Maybe he could share that Liberal plan with the Liberal MPs. I have not seen the plan he is referring to and I am the one who is speaking on it. We are talking about the 308 seats. There is no need for us to increase it, but to the best of my knowledge, I have no idea what Liberal plan he is referring to.

Maybe it is backbench Conservative MPs who got together and said, “Pass this one over to the Liberals, and you are the messenger”. I do not mean to shoot the messenger. I will be more than happy to receive it from the minister.

He admits that this time it is a big one, it is a 30. Next time it will be 11 and then it will be five. That is conservative. Well, an increase is an increase is an increase. We are saying there is no need for an increase.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not necessarily opposed to fixing proportionality by population or geography. That is all right, but what I am really interested in, and we should all be really interested in, is proportional representation by party, whereas if the purple party gets 20% of the vote across Canada, the purple party should get 20% of the seats.

Is the real issue a need to add more politicians to the House of Commons? That is a lot like adding deck chairs to the *Titanic*.

My question to the hon. member is, I know the Liberals did not want it for a lot of years, but are they finally interested in getting some real good system of proportional representation for Canada, and will they get serious about it?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Liberal Party of Canada is very keen on ideas and engaging Canadians on ways in which we can make a difference.

On a personal note, I am very sensitive to that issue. There are many examples that could be cited from all provinces where we have actually had majority governments elected in some provinces and they did not get most of the votes. That occurs a lot, whether it is here in Ottawa or the provinces. All political parties have been at different ends of it. The issue is which political party is prepared to be consistent, through good times and bad times.

I am not sure if the NDP is. We will find out in terms of how it continues to advocate that position here in Ottawa. In the province of Manitoba it did not advocate for it, but it depends.

•(1610)

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to comment on the comments made by my friend from Winnipeg North. What he is propagating is that, based upon a 308 seat House and having representation across this country, we have to have an average riding of 106,000 people.

Manitoba, with an average of just over 76,000 per riding, would have to lose two or three seats. This is what he is proposing.

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I have the largest riding population-wise and the second largest geographically in Manitoba at 91,000. I am still 14,000 less than the numbers we are seeing in other areas of Canada. However, we would definitely have to reduce seats in Winnipeg.

The hon. member's riding has a population of only 79,000. I would suggest that if he were serious about reducing the number of seats in Manitoba, and he wants to go home and sell it, I would suggest that probably we could get rid of Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am not one to back down from a good healthy debate. I would suggest to the member that we contact Richard Cloutier of CJOB and debate it on his radio program. I will make myself available and hopefully, the member will make himself available. We will advance this script of *Hansard* over to Mr. Cloutier and perhaps he might give us an invite.

I know that a vast majority of Manitobans, members' constituents and my constituents, do not want 30 more members of Parliament. That much I know.

I am prepared to debate that. If at the end of the day that means that Manitoba has to lose a seat, the member and I can go to CJOB to see if it will allow us to have that debate publicly, if in fact he will accompany me. As I say, I will be sure to pass the—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my Liberal colleague if his party would maintain Quebec's representation at 75 seats with his plan to keep the total number of seats at 308?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my concern in terms of dealing with 308 seats is that we need to focus our attention on the ability of the province of Quebec to have the clout that it currently has. The percentage of clout that it has today under the bill is actually going down. I would not necessarily make the assumption that if we go to 308 seats that would be the case in that situation.

Quite frankly, the difference between the Liberals and the New Democrats is that members of the NDP are not sure exactly what they want and what they are prepared to say out west. In Quebec they will say that they want 25%, but we will not hear them say out west that Quebec has to have 25% of the representation inside the House of Commons. There needs to be more clarity on that point, but that is the essence of it.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason why the bill is so important is that we are currently denying new Canadians and visible minorities a voice in the House.

Only 10% of the House is reflective of the new Canada. Only 10% of the House is made up of visible minorities when their population numbers are double and within the next 20 years their numbers will move to one-third of the population. This bill would allow the most rapidly growing regions of the country a greater number of seats, so we can elect more Canadians who are reflective of the makeup of this country.

The change is coming. There is a galloping heterogeneity that is taking place in the country. This place is not reflected. The bill would go a long way to ensure that this place reflects the new face of Canada.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, in reality, the leaders and the riding associations, and the cliques that are out there throughout our many different communities have a lot more to do with that than the actual number of seats.

If we want to get new Canadians or people who are immigrating to our country involved, we must speed up the immigration and citizenship processes as opposed to the two year backlog we now have for them to get their citizenship. If we want them to be excited about participating, we must speed up the citizenship process to reduce the backlog.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): 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 Etobicoke North, The Environment; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on the fair representation bill. As my colleagues have noted, this is a fair, reasonable and principled bill, and I could not agree more.

During the election we committed to our constituents and to all Canadians that we would come back to the House and pass a formula that would restore fair representation to this House. The election was a time when we got to debate this with the people with whom we should really debate it. As we knocked on doors someone could bring up the representation in the House. In coffee shops we could talk about what the House should look like, and what was possible and what was not.

At the all candidates meetings we certainly had the opportunity to challenge each other, as my colleague from Manitoba just did with another colleague from Manitoba to talk about the issues of the day in the provinces they come from. I come from Ontario and in that province we surely did talk about the need for there to be more seats and a better representation for the province of Ontario. That debate has taken place outside the House, and today it is taking place here.

As the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Democratic Reform have stated, we made three specific commitments to provide fair representation. We would provide a formula that would allocate an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. That sounds like a pretty good plan. We would protect the number of seats for smaller provinces to provide for their effective representation. That sounds like another good plan. We would ensure the proportional representation of Quebec according to its population. We are keeping these commitments with this bill.

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My colleagues have spoken passionately about these promises. Some members have explained the details of how the proposed formula would work. I am not going to repeat much of what my colleagues have already said. They have done an excellent job in talking about how it would affect the representation in very large ridings and the representation in the provinces that currently are under-represented. I thank them for doing that.

I would like to discuss some of the details and background of the changes to the readjustment process and the timelines that the bill proposes. I am the chair of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. That committee will oversee the examination of this bill during the committee stage. I would like to bring some of the experience and ideas of that committee to bear here in the House.

First of all, I would like to thank all of the members of that committee for their great work. We tend to work more as a consensus than we do anything else. It will be quite a load for us to take this on in the short period of time we will have to consider the bill. I ask ahead of time, and I know I will get it, for the co-operation of members of that committee to work together as we always do. The timelines will be tight. We will be able to do it if we work together.

Regarding the boundary redistribution process, our Constitution requires that we readjust riding boundaries every 10 years. Our rules for carrying out this task are set out in a piece of legislation called the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act. This law was put in place in 1964. Up to and including the boundary adjustments following the 1951 census, the House of Commons itself was responsible for fixing the boundaries of electoral districts.

A predecessor committee to the one which I chair was responsible for drawing the boundaries themselves. There was a considerable amount of political influence on the readjustment process prior to the 1960s. This was often referred to as gerrymandering, a term we use to describe the manipulation of riding boundaries along partisan lines, usually to the advantage of the incumbent or the dominant party.

An hon. member: Promise that won't happen again.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I hear someone who probably did that yelling from the other side.

Happily, we no longer have the problem of gerrymandering. It simply does not happen in our country any longer, largely because of the impartial, independent process set out in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

In November 1964, the legislation was passed to assign the responsibility for readjusting the electoral district boundaries to commissions independent of Parliament and parliamentarians.

• (1620)

For political neutrality, each commission was, and still is today, chaired by a judge designated by the chief justice of the province. When passed, there were to be three members for each of the commissions. One of these was a person called the representation commissioner, a public servant who was to sit on every commission. The post of representation commissioner was abolished in 1979 and most of the duties were transferred to the Chief Electoral Officer of

Canada. That is where we stand today, a three member commission for each province.

Initially, the two other members were to be political appointees, one each from the governing party and the official opposition party. The Speaker of the House of Commons now makes those two appointments in the interest of greater impartiality and independence.

Now each province has a three member boundaries commission chaired by a judge and comprising two other members appointed by the Speaker. As each of the three northern territories constitutes an electoral district, they do not require an electoral boundaries commission.

The goal is a readjustment process that is generally free of partisan considerations. We have largely succeeded in accomplishing that goal.

That said, parliamentarians still do have input. They can make representations to the commissions during the public consultation period for those commissions. They can lodge objections during the parliamentary review process which is run through the procedure and House affairs committee, of which I am the chair. I look forward to the contributions and many visits by members to do just that during the process.

In all cases, the final decisions on the boundaries are made by the commissions. This is the guarantee of independence and impartiality. Partisan members can make presentations and lodge objections which the commissions will consider, but the commissions' decisions will be final. During the course of their work, the commissions receive professional, financial, technical and administrative assistance from the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff at Elections Canada.

Our procedure and House affairs committee visited the Chief Electoral Officer; all parties were in attendance. The committee tends to meet about once a session with the Chief Electoral Officer to talk about his goals and what is coming up. During the past three or four minority Parliaments, it was always about election readiness, but the Chief Electoral Officer, during this majority House, is quite happy to talk to us about being faced with the redistribution of seats and the redrawing of some electoral boundaries. He was quite forward with us as to how quickly this process has to start, that it cannot be delayed and that he has a great amount of work to do based on this project. He shared with members of the committee that he was looking forward to getting at it, as he put it.

As I mentioned, Bill C-20 makes some changes to the timelines of the commission process. The readjustment process would continue to be based on the census results which provide population counts at the geographic level that are necessary to accurately revise the electoral boundaries. The member who spoke before me talked about the size of ridings. His colleague mentioned how even within the province from which they both come, there is a difference in population of 20,000 between some of the ridings. It is imperative that we use the census to set the pace.

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The existing provisions in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act call for the independent boundary commissions to be established in each province within 60 days of the receipt of the census return. The 2011 census is scheduled to be received on February 8, 2012, so it would be within 60 days of that date. The commissions then have one year to produce an initial report setting out the proposed boundaries and the names for the ridings, during which time they are required to hold at least one set of public consultations. Once the reports are finalized, the Chief Electoral Officer prepares a draft representation order which is forwarded to the responsible minister and proclaimed by the Governor in Council. The order becomes effective on the first dissolution of Parliament that occurs at least one year after the proclamation is issued.

Under the current timelines, it may take anywhere from 30 to 38 months to complete the readjustment process following the release of the census results.

•(1625)

There is some flexibility in the timelines as each commission works at a slightly different pace. There are some timeline extensions available if the commissions find them to be necessary. It would mean that the process would not be completed until about November 2014. The changes proposed in the bill aim to shorten these timelines in the current boundary readjustment process with a view to streamlining the process.

In particular, the bill proposes the following amendments: The independent boundary commissions would be established no later than six months following the census, or within 60 days of the census results being released, whichever comes first. The notice period for public hearings would be set at 30 days, down from the current 60 days. All persons interested in making submissions at public hearings would still need to provide the commissions with notice. The commissions would have the option of waiving this requirement if it was considered in the public interest. The timeline for the commissions to produce the reports would be shortened to 10 months, with a possible two-month extension, which is down from 12 months, with a possible six-month extension. The time period for the implementation of the representation order would be reduced to 7 months, which is down from 12.

With these changes, it would be possible to bring forward the completion of the boundary readjustment process to early 2014. That would give everyone, including the very busy and organized folks over at Elections Canada, the House and all registered parties more time to prepare knowing the new boundaries early in 2014. These changes and the other minor changes in the bill are to streamline and modernize the process to allow Elections Canada the flexibility and time it needs to do the work for the next election.

We politicians recognize that certain boundary changes will make work for us. We will have to look at how we are going to act within those new boundaries and whether we are picking up a new piece of a riding, losing a piece of an old riding, or whether there are no changes at all. Elections Canada has to then establish Elections Canada entities within each of the new ridings and under the new riding names too. It has work to do following the completion of the report. I do not think it can be done within moments of the next

election. Elections Canada needs some time to do it; that is what it has shared with us.

The changes we have suggested in shortening some of the timelines are reasonable. We have not compressed the timelines too much. We have left time for the commissions to do their work, to hold their public meetings, for people to make presentations. Oftentimes there is one commission per province. People sometimes suggest changes to a certain boundary because it splits a neighbourhood and that type of things, so there is time for the commission to do it.

All the changes are sourced in either the recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer's reports, past reports from the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, or the report from the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, known as the Lortie commission. The changes we are looking to make in the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and in Bill C-20 have all been suggested by one of those sources.

There is ample public evidence and justification for the reasons and value of implementing these changes. We can be assured that Elections Canada will be fully prepared to implement and facilitate these changes in time for the next election.

As I have said, the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended many of these changes before. In the committee's visit to Elections Canada, he was very adamant that we meet the timeline so that he can meet his and is able to complete the process. For some of us, the spring of 2014 sounds far away, but as this process unfolds, it is a long time between each step and each step takes some period of time.

In order to make it work, it is important that we give Elections Canada enough time to set up the commissions, allow the commissions to do their job, have the report come back to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, at which point members of the House would also have an opportunity to discuss their own ridings. Then it would go back to the commissions for final approval and in time for people to prepare for the next general election.

•(1630)

The fair representation bill fulfills our government's long-standing commitment to move to fair representation. It would bring faster growing provinces, like Alberta, B.C. and the one in which I live, Ontario, closer to representation by population.

As we have heard discussed here today by many members of Parliament, one of the founding principles of our founding fathers was to get as close as we could. We have drifted a bit away and this would help bring us back to that proportional representation, while still protecting the seats of slower growing provinces and providing seats to Quebec in proportion to its population. The new formula corrects a long-standing imbalance in democratic representation between different provinces across the country.

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Last night, I had the opportunity to meet with a group of teachers from all the provinces and territories who were in town and, for the most part, they had a great interest. The ones who came to Ottawa obviously had some great interest in politics, or civics or history in the sense of our Parliament. As this was being debated yesterday, and some were here to hear some of this, it was a topic of conversation at dinner last night among many of those teachers. When we were talking about civics and history, the Ontario teachers were saying how they could relate it back and make some excitement for their students about the history around the founding of our country, the founding fathers of our country and the principles they tried to design Canada around. Now, here it is, some 140 some years later, and we are still talking about achieving representation by population.

If I remember back to my grade 6 history. I was kind of nodding off on representation by population. It has taken a great interest in history through my life to try to get back to it. Our founding fathers did something really great when they created this place. It is really good to hear teachers whose passion it is to try to share that and actually get through to guys like Joe when he was there before. I was really pleased to have that conversation last night. It was so timely with the debate that we are having here today.

In short, this is the best formula to move toward fair representation in a principled manner. It includes reasonable and long-standing updates to the timelines of the boundary readjustment process, which I spent a great deal of time talking about here, about how it happens after we pass the bill and how we really get to those new boundaries.

The bill is both good and very long overdue. I hope all the hon. members in the House also agree and will support the bill to try to bring us a little closer to where our founding fathers started us out.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I understand the member's position of supporting the government bill. It makes all the sense in the world: government member, government bill.

The member is also an Ontarian, like myself. In the government's previous bill, there were three more seats for our province than there are in this bill. I would like to know if he would like to join with us other Ontarians in fighting, during committee review, to get Ontario the seats that would bring it even closer to rep by pop under the old bill than this one, because there were three more seats for Ontario? Ontario lost three seats in the move from the government's last bill to this one.

Will the member join with us other Ontarians in fighting to get us those other three seats back?

• (1635)

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre is a great addition to our committee whenever he is on there, and, of course, as we have heard, we need no microphone system when the member is there. He is really good at getting his point across in any way.

I see a lot of Ontario members of Parliament sitting on this side and they do a fantastic job of representing their people. Perhaps, as he states, they are representing even more people than they should

but they do such a great job. Ontario is a far better province under this bill with 15 new seats.

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest when my colleague talked about gerrymandering and the influence that past practices have had on it. He introduced a new method of gerrymandering when he said that we were generally free of political interference. I would like my colleague to define what he means by generally free.

He mentioned that the Speaker would have to play a role in appointing people to a commission. The last time I checked, the Speaker is a member of the Conservative Party and the Conservative caucus. Is this the type of generally free that the member is talking about when they go to the boundaries commission?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I must point out the disrespect the member has just shown for the objectivity of the Speaker of the House of Commons. We just do not do that here. Our Speaker is elected by all members in the House, including that member, to act objectively. To impugn the motives of the Speaker is wrong. I expect you, Mr. Speaker, will somehow rule on a public flogging for that member because of that.

As I mentioned in my speech, the Electoral Boundaries Commission is set up in an absolutely non-partisan way to ensure this is at arm's-length from this place.

Even that member, with his disrespect for the Speaker, will get an opportunity to go before committee and talk about how his own riding's boundaries will look after it is done.

We did not pull out the old Liberal book of gerrymandering and look up how to do it. We fixed it.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to this debate back and forth and I want to comment on the hypocrisy of the opposition here this afternoon. I know I cannot say whether a member is in the House or not, but if a count were taken, we would find less than a dozen here and even fewer are participating in this hugely important debate on one of the fundamental principles that our country was based on, representation by population.

I come from Ontario and for years we have been under-represented. The truth of the hypocrisy here is that the opposition parties want to stall this legislation because they know that if they stall it right now there will be no change in the next election and we would have eight more years of under-representation. That is what those parties want for Ontario and the rest of this country.

I want to ask my colleague, who believes in the fundamental principles of Canada, what could be the motivation of the opposition parties to stall representation by population, particularly for my province of Ontario.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I would hate to put motive on hon. members of the House as to why they would do that. I will talk on the positive side.

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This legislation that has been brought forward by the minister and will be voted on in the House would not only positively help my province and that member's province of Ontario, but it would also help Alberta, B.C. and all of Canada to get back to the reputation that our founding fathers brought forward, which is representation by population. We are going to get it.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was listening to my hon. colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London, who spoke about the need for proportional representation. We know that the four ridings in Prince Edward Island are protected by the Constitution because a province cannot have fewer members than senators.

We also know that Quebec still has not signed the Constitution. The previous Conservative government attempted to remedy this situation by offering Quebec 25% of the seats in this chamber.

Does the member opposite realize that by continually lowering Quebec's representation in the House, he is providing Quebec secessionists with ammunition? Does he realize that?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I resemble that remark to when we talk about political weight in the House.

As the member can speak for his province, I can speak for mine. In the election leading up to what brought us here as a majority government, I spent much time in coffee shops, on the doorsteps and at all-candidates meetings and when we talked about the representation of members of Parliament in Ontario, I was commended and certainly sent back here. I was commended on the job we were able to do, even with the large size of some of our constituencies. Many people in Ontario said that we should be fair with all of Canada and give Ontario what it needs, too.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

First, just for historical fun, it turns out that the term “gerrymandering” is as old as the War of 1812. It occurred in the state of Massachusetts when Governor Elbridge Gerry managed to redistribute a riding so it resembled nothing so much as a salamander.

As we add MPs, we are adding costs. I think the Canadian people are more concerned with the costs of this place than whether we have our own desks.

Would it be possible to have a formula by which current members of Parliament accepted reductions to their own salaries as we added new members to this place?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I will pass on the message that the member requires no salary to the Board of Internal Economy.

The rest of us came here to do a job and we were sent here as equals, as equal members of Parliament, all 308 of us. Some of the members from Ontario represent 170,000 and some of the members in the House represent less than that. If there is an inequality, we need to fix that part first.

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 hon. NDP member for Hamilton Centre suggested that the present bill before the House of Commons is three seats short for Ontario, as compared to the previous fair representation bill that the government introduced in the last Parliament.

In fact, that is the result of census data that has now come in and been applied in the same fair fashion as we had foreseen all along.

The member across the way says that he will be fighting in the committee for three additional seats. Would the member explain how the NDP will amend census data in the committee on the fair representation bill?

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, I can only suggest that the member for Hamilton Centre will do it loudly.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

COMMENTS BY MEMBER FOR AVALON

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to draw to your attention that the comments made by the member for Avalon were disparaging comments about the impartiality of the Chair.

I will quote from O'Brien and Bosc, chapter 13, page 615. It reads:

Reflections must not be cast in debate on the conduct of the Speaker or other Presiding Officers. It is unacceptable to question the integrity and impartiality of a Presiding Officer and if such comments are made, the Speaker will interrupt the Member and may request the remarks be withdrawn. Only by means of a substantive motion for which 48 hours' written notice has been given, may the actions of the Chair be challenged, criticized and debated. Reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker or other Presiding Officers have been ruled to be breaches of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, I demand that the member for Avalon withdraw those remarks or you summon the Sergeant-at-Arms to have him removed.

• (1645)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair appreciates the intervention by the member for Selkirk—Interlake. If the member would like to involve himself at this point that would be acceptable but, if not, the Speaker will review the transcript of today's occurrence and will return to the House if necessary.

Resuming debate. The hon. member Hamilton Centre.

* * *

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate.

Government Orders

First, we will not be supporting the bill at second reading, primarily, for the very simple reason we believe the government bill is not as good as our bill. We like our bill. We think it would be better for Canada and that is the message we carry into committee. If we support our own bill, why would we vote for the government bill at this stage?

Comments were made along the way by myself and our leader that we were very much looking forward to what happened at committee. I want to underscore that point and that intent on our part. I heard the member earlier commenting about whether the member for Hamilton Centre was going to change the census and some other smart-alecky type of remarks. Perhaps that is the answer. It is as simple as there are new numbers.

However, I know we have at least three different calculations going on at the same time and we are going to need some clarity around it. That is fine for the government. It has all the resources of government. All we really have as members on this side is committee. That is the closest we can get to match the horsepower of the government in terms of the lawyers, analysts and everything else that is available to whomever is in government at any time.

One of the most important messages that I will carry on behalf of our caucus is the importance of committee studying this bill. It is important on any bill, but on this one, given that this is the file marked "Canada", that we take the time to get it right. We do not want to take time such that we do not have things in place for the next election. We agree with the goal. I have told that personally to the minister. I have said that publicly. I reiterate it again. Regardless of whatever machinations we go through in this place on second reading and in the House and on voting, we have all kinds of games that go on all the time, often for reasons that are not even readily obvious.

However, the fact remains that we want to get to committee. We want to do the work. Ideally, in the best world outcome, would it not be great if all the parties, or at least a majority of the parties, could agree rather than a situation where, like we saw with the Auditor General hiring, only the government carries the day and uses the weight of its might. Let us remember that might still comes from a very undemocratic place, perfectly legitimate and democratic to the extent it follows our rules, but there is no sense of natural justice or democracy when 39% of the vote gets 100% of the power.

I take at face value the comments of my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London. He is a fantastic chair. He commented on the work we do, and I have been spending a fair bit of time on that committee, dealing with the Chief Electoral Officer's report, with all the changes to the laws. We hope the minister in some way, by standing in his place and commenting, or by sending a message, or talking to me or talking to our House leader, could indicate that we really will go into committee with the same type of attitude that currently prevails when deal with the electoral commissioner's report. At that committee, we really have give and take. When we cannot agree on something, we put it later on in the agenda. We all do a little homework and we actively try to find how we can all put a little wine in our water to reach a point where we can agree on fair rules for elections.

If we can do it for that, then I would go so far as to implore the government to be serious in that same way, as opposed to what happens at some committees where the 100% might of the 39% vote walks into committees, says this is the way it will be and, no matter what anyone says, rams it through with their majority. If that is what the Conservatives do with this bill, then I would be disappointed and they would do a great disservice to the file marked "Canada". We could all do better than that in continuing to build and strength Canada.

● (1650)

I assume the vote is still on track to happen this evening and we will be voting against the bill for the simple reason that we like our bill better. Why would we vote for the government bill?

However, once we get into committee, as far as we are concerned, we are ready to hit a reset button. We would then have two pieces of legislation and a committee of people with goodwill. Maybe we could then begin to see if there were some way to close the gap between the differences.

For instance, members will remember that when the government brought in its first two bills, it did not have any seats for Quebec. However, we now see in this bill less seats for Ontario and B.C. If that is because of a calculation, fine, we will listen.

Again, there are at least three different calculations going on. There is one calculation based on using the 2006 census numbers, which the government had been using previously. There is the 2011 census that will be received in February 2012. However, in Bill C-20, the government does not use census numbers in the equation. I am not saying that it is a bad thing or a good thing, I am just saying that it is a new thing that we need to have some explanation and discussion on in committee.

Instead of using a census number, the government is now using the estimated provincial population estimates. However, I am no lawyer and I do not necessarily know what that means. Maybe it is a good improvement and the government may be applauded for bringing in a better formula, but maybe not. I do not know.

I just know that when the Conservatives finally came up with the notion that they had to be more respectful to Quebec then they had been, suddenly they changed the formula. Does that mean they changed the formula to meet the mathematical outcome they wanted? I do not know, but we need answers to that.

If the government is just going to come in to committee and ram things through, then the opposition is going to be given no opportunity to not only understand it, but maybe respond with a counter proposal as well. Again, these are things that would allow us to find a way to work together to get as close as we can to a single bill that we all might be able to support. Would that not be a win for everyone, especially for Canada?

I will not dwell on this, but I want to take a second to talk about the Liberal position. I know questions are going to come during the questions and answers, and they are going to do what they do. They seem to have one note to play on this and they play it over and over. That is their right. I am not suggesting that they cannot do this, but I am suggesting that it is disappointing.

Government Orders

The Liberal Party can really take an awful lot of credit for much of what we have to be proud of because the Liberals were the government in many of those years. It is a historical fact that a lot of the things we are now building on were put in place by a Liberal government, not all of them, but a good bit of it.

Certainly the current leader of the third party is a respected individual who has history on the national file, not only as a national leader but as a provincial leader. The member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville is a well-regarded academic expert on matters of constitution, regardless of how one feels about the Clarity Act. I know it is not loved unanimously, nonetheless it was an important piece of our Canadian history in building and strengthening our great country.

I use those two members as an example because I am saying positive things about the Liberals. They are important contributors to a national debate, whether one agrees with them or not. However, I am disappointed because all I have heard so far is the cost. However, that is real, especially at a time such as this economic era.

● (1655)

I think back to the Liberal governments of the past. Would they have led with that issue and said that the most important thing in terms of building Canada was to keep the costs down, like that was the priority? It is always important, but is it really the priority this time?

The Liberals suggest that we cap and then look at proportional representation. I am just happy when Liberals say the words “proportional representation”. It is a good start. It is an intriguing idea, but it feels more like an escape hatch than a new idea because it allows the Liberals to stand on one piece of ground, and that is the cost and how big this place will be. Again, it is an issue but that is it.

When the leader of the third party was the premier of Ontario, he played a significant historical role in the Charlottetown accord, notwithstanding the outcome was not as good as I am sure he and others hoped. It was in the Charlottetown accord where the first notion of a percentage floor of Quebec's seats, in terms of its political weight, would be maintained going forward, no matter what. That number was 25%. Now it is interesting that not only was the leader of the third party a signatory to that agreement, but the prime minister of the day was a Conservative.

If this notion of providing that kind of a guarantee is so un-Canadian, is just pandering to the province of Quebec and is loosening the ties that create our country, if that is what is wrong with our coming out with 24.35% and tying it to the day that we all stood unanimously in this place and proudly recognized the Québécois as a recognized nation within a united Canada, we believe it is building and strengthening Canada. It is certainly showing Quebec the same respect that the prime minister of the day and those premiers unanimously agreed would be a component of the Charlottetown Accord.

I raise that because I would like to hear what the leader of the third party thinks about the notion of 24.35%. Given that he was a signatory to 25%, I would like him to do exactly the same thing. I would very much like to hear more from the third party on what it thinks about the bill, the seats and the formula. Maybe we will hear

from it and I will stand corrected, which would be great. However, we have not heard a lot. All I have really heard is the Liberals found this ground of the cost because people were concerned about it. It is part of being a parliamentarian. We defend what we believe in. We know that democracy can be slow, tedious, messy and expensive, but it is still better than any other system around. Therefore, we are wedded to it and we want to make it work. We see the expense as an investment in Canada, an investment in strengthening Canada. I ask my colleagues to remember that if Canada were easy to build, everyone would have one. It is not. It is a difficult country to build.

Let me underscore the importance of the committee, and I will end on that. It is close to where I began. So much work needs to be done there. The member for Elgin—Middlesex—London cannot do much more than what he did, which is to say he is looking forward to chairing that kind of a meeting. However, the member does not have the power to say that is the way it will be. That will have to come from on high. I know it is a shock to my colleague's ego but I am sure he will survive it.

Truly, honestly and sincerely we need some indication from the government that it will approach it the same we are looking at reviewing the election laws. I applaud the government, the chair and everyone on that committee because it is good work and I enjoy it. It is challenging but in a positive way, where we are all trying to find how we can work together rather than how we can be the strongest, apart, fighting one another. After 26 years in politics, I find that a lot more fulfilling than going into our respective corners and starting to politically shoot.

● (1700)

Regardless of the machinations of today—the speeches, the give and take and the cut and thrust of what happens in this place—given the importance, we are hopeful that when we get to committee, it will be meaningful, real give-and-take discussions and work.

If it is the other approach, in which the Conservatives just say, “This is our bill. We are not changing anything. We do not care if you do not like it. Take the time that you get to speak, and when you are done bothering us with your words, then we are going to utilize the 100% of power that we got with 39% of the vote. We are going to shut you down and we are going to dictate what is going to happen”, that attitude has nothing to do with building Canada. What is needed is co-operation and respect for each other, for all our provinces and for everyone's rightful place in our country.

Let us get to work. When we are finished the politics of the voting and debating today, I urge the Conservatives to signal that they want to entertain meaningful discussions to get as close as possible to, ideally, one bill that we could all support, so that even if we are in disagreement at some point, the overall exercise would leave Canada stronger than when we started on the bill.

Government Orders

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will end my remarks. Thank you again for the opportunity.

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about getting the bill to committee and working in committee. We agree that is a good idea, but I would like to remind the hon. member that after just one hour of debate, it was the NDP that proposed a motion for the bill not to pass second reading and not to go to committee. It was actually the NDP that tried to stall the bill.

The hon. member mentioned the bill from the NDP. He did not talk about the numbers. The NDP's proposal would bring about 10 more seats to Quebec. Why is he opposed to the proposal we brought forward? It is a fair proposal, fair for all provinces, that would bring every province closer to representation by population and would have Quebec at equal representation to the population: with 23% of the population, Quebec would have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons.

Why is the hon. member opposed to fairness for all provinces?

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, first I want to thank the minister for staying for my remarks and for rising and responding. I appreciate his respect and his courtesy.

My answer would be very directly to him and the government: why are they not prepared to give effect to the unanimous motion that we passed and show the kind of respect that gives meaning to that by recognizing, first of all, it is not just about Quebec? It is also about other provinces; they are not up to their full representation by population either, so there is work undone whether the bill passes or not. There is still some work to be done.

Why are the member and his government not prepared to show Quebec the respect that it deserves, recognizing that all it is trying to do is survive assimilation in Canada? They want to be strong within Canada, because if they are strong within Canada, they are strong within North America.

We have already recognized that we do not want that culture to be lost, so why are the Conservatives not prepared to step up to the plate and show leadership on nation building and the kind of respect that we showed when we voted unanimously for that motion?

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Hamilton Centre for his very passionate speech, but I also must say that he hurt my feelings during his speech when he said that he would not be supporting the government bill.

Earlier in the day I spent half an hour here making my speech and answering questions. I thought I had all the opposition members convinced, but obviously that was not the case. We still have some time. I am hoping that the opposition members see the light at the end of the tunnel.

In my riding of Brampton—Springdale and other ridings in the GTA, there is a huge representation gap. I heard that during the campaign. I still hear that today, and I think the bill the government is proposing does everything that it needs to do. It obviously moves provinces a lot closer to representation by population.

I would like to plead once again to the opposition members to please reconsider and to support the government in the bill. Let us move forward with it.

• (1705)

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for its tone. It is very much appreciated.

Let us recognize that if this legislation were perfect, we would not need this debate, but huge problems remain. We have problems related to our Constitution. We cannot disassociate them, especially when the government is about to pass a bill requiring that senators be elected. B.C. is woefully unrepresented in the Senate. Where is the remedy?

To suggest that the bill is the be-all and end-all is just not the case. It is a good start and it moves closer to where our bill was, so obviously we feel better about it than previous government bills, but it does not do enough. It could do more, and that is why the emphasis is on committee.

I accept the member's conundrum over why I am saying that about the committee and saying that the second reading vote is going to happen the way it is. I do not mean to be condescending, but after being around here for a while, we realize that some things that happen here matter, while some things that happen here really matter; what really matters in this case is what happens when we get to committee, not the politics in this place today.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the member opposite that the recognition of Quebec's nationhood was not unanimous in the House.

There is no constitutional principle that guarantees any provincial division in the House a certain number of seats. That was never the basis on which our Constitution of 1867 was struck. In fact, the very basis of Confederation was to solve that very problem in the old united Province of Canada, in which Canada West and Canada East administratively were each guaranteed 42 seats. Because that arrangement led to under-representation of Canada West in the House, George Brown, the leader of the Liberal Party at the time, demanded representation by population.

The solution was found. It was a federal system of government with two sovereign orders of government, one federal and one provincial. At the federal level, the House of Commons would be representative of its population. No particular provincial division would be guaranteed any particular percentage of seats in the House, as it was in the old case of the united Province of Canada for which this legislature was built.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I grant that the hon. member is very knowledgeable in this area, but let us remember that the founding fathers did not talk about an elected Senate, which the Conservative government seems quite comfortable in doing now.

Let us remember that this whole notion of a permanent base of weighted seats in the House was contained in the Charlottetown Accord. I remind that member that it was his party's prime minister who led that document. There was unanimous agreement.

Government Orders

I stand corrected on the other one, and I will not use that term again. I will use the correct term.

The fact remains that there was unanimity by the Progressive Conservative prime minister of the day and every premier of the provinces and territories. True, it did not hold, but I am pointing out that there was a moment in time when that idea was accepted as an important part of continuing the job of building Canada and strengthening Canada.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciated the beginning of the hon. member's speech, when he talked about a bill that seems to be a good start but also about the suggestions made by the other parties.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. If I am not mistaken, there is a problem with the interpretation. It is working now? Okay.

The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, let me start again. I greatly appreciated the beginning of the hon. member's speech, when he talked about a bill that seems to be a good start but also about the suggestions made by the other parties—all the alternatives and all the improvements that could be made to this bill—that deserve to be examined in a non-partisan way by a committee.

Unfortunately, the questions that the hon. member has been asked to this point have not necessarily demonstrated an interest in debate but, rather, have served to criticize the position of the opposition.

Could the hon. member repeat the importance of holding real, non-partisan debates in committee and share with us some of the suggestions made by the other parties that could inform the debate?

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, it says a lot that it is one of the newest, youngest members from Quebec who is underscoring my message as a former Ontario cabinet minister that we want to work on this together. We have a policy of 24.35%; we believe in that and we are going to fight for it and defend it, but the fact remains that we go in willing to talk and willing to put all matters on the table.

I am so glad the member underscored the point that it is not just me and it is not just a political message: it really is what this entire caucus wants to do. No one in the House, and certainly no one in my caucus in the official opposition, believes that anything less than the file marked “Canada” is the top priority for all of us.

I do not have time to get into the kinds of details we might propose, but we would be quite willing to entertain ideas from all members from all parties. In this discussion the key word, as my colleague said, is “non-partisan”. Let us do the job for Canadians, not for our parties, when we—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to work with my hon. colleague on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We do have great discussions there on the Chief Electoral Officer's report. All of us want to work in a collaborative way in the House, and our committee has certainly demonstrated that under the great leadership of our chair.

I think my colleague would agree that we have been working on this election report for probably a year and a half. It has been a long time. We have had good discussions, but unless there is something done about representation, we will go back to the status quo. We are under a tight timeline. Our Chief Electoral Officer has indicated that quite clearly, in writing and in person.

I am wondering if the member is actually prepared to let discussions, as he calls them, bog down and end up with the status quo, as opposed to moving ahead with what is a very fair bill. Canadians can support this bill.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, sometimes we develop friendships in this place. Clearly this is one of them, and I thank my hon. colleague for his remarks.

I would point out a couple of things. One is that although it has been a year or so, let us remember that we adjourned that study many times and moved on to other things because other priorities came to the committee, so it was not a full year.

I think the member is hoping to get from me a clear indication that we are not looking to be obstructionist about the bill. He wants to hear from me that if we end up with the status quo, the government would have failed; however, collectively, we all would have. I would still blame the government, because it has all the power, but collectively we all would have failed.

On behalf of our caucus and our leader, I reiterate that our goal is to go in and do that kind of work. Yes, we are prepared to put in whatever hours it takes. If we want to travel and talk to Canadians in every corner, we are prepared to do that, but we very directly recognize that there is a limit to how long we can go. We are open-minded as to what that is, but we want to maximize the time necessary to do the work to ultimately arrive at the best bill possible with the broadest support in the House.

• (1715)

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for having given us great encouraging words today. Working together, he understands that we are moving toward fair representation. It sounds very hopeful that members opposite will support this bill.

Government Orders

I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-20, fair representation act. I am honoured to be the member of Parliament for Vancouver South, one of the most diverse ridings in all of Canada. Approximately 75% of those whom I have the privilege of representing in this place are of Chinese, South Asian, Filipino and Vietnamese descent. Not only are we diverse, we are large with a population of 125,000 in Vancouver South, many of whom are new Canadians and have been under-represented, as all British Columbians have been for some time.

Our government received a strong mandate from Canadians to move toward fair representation in the House of Commons. The people of Vancouver South and British Columbia, in fact Canadians from across this country, are excited because we are acting.

Bill C-20, fair representation act is extremely important, completely necessary and very timely. This is because the people of Vancouver South, their families, friends and neighbours across British Columbia want fairer representation in this place.

We, therefore, welcome this important bill which delivers on our government's long-standing commitment to move the House of Commons toward fair representation. In particular, the bill reflects the government's three distinct promises to provide fair representation by: allocating an increased number of seats now and in the future to better reflect population growth in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta; protecting the number of seats for smaller provinces; and protecting the proportional representation of Quebec according to population.

This bill provides the changes necessary to move British Columbians toward fair representation in this House. This bill is necessary because the representation of the provinces in this House is readjusted every 10 years. The formula has evolved considerably since Confederation, in which representation by population was the sole basis upon which seats were distributed.

It has been adjusted on six occasions since Confederation to respond to demographic changes as our vast and diverse country grew and evolved. The changes to the formula have attempted to balance three competing objectives.

First, to enable provinces with growing populations to have additional seats in accordance with the principle of representation by population. Second, to ensure the effective representation of smaller and slower growing provinces. Finally, to limit increases in the membership of the House of Commons to practical levels.

It was the latter objective which provided the impetus for the last change to the formula in 1985. In response to the realization that the formula, which existed at the time, would result in very large increases to the size of the House of Commons, a decision was made to design a formula that would provide more modest increases to the size of the House.

The 1985 formula allocates provincial seats by first determining what is called the electoral quotient, which is the population of the provinces divided by 279, which was the number of provincial seats allocated in the House of Commons in 1985. Each province's population is then divided by the electoral quotient to determine provincial seat allocation.

The second step in the formula is to apply two minimum seat guarantees, the Senate floor, which was added in 1915, guarantees that no province can have fewer seats in the House of Commons than it has senators, and the grandfather clause, added in 1985, which guarantees that no province can be allocated a number of seats that is less than the number of seats it had in 1985.

By fixing the divisor at 279, the 1985 formula did have the desired effect of limiting the growth of provincial seats in the House of Commons. However, it also had a negative impact that worsened over time and that has led us to where we are now, where the faster growing provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia are significantly under-represented.

Taken together, the effects of the 1985 formula and the two seat floors are significant. First, it means that all provinces, except Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, rely on seat floors rather than population to maintain their seat count in the House.

● (1720)

Second, the formula allows the three faster growing provinces to get a proportional share of only 279 seats even though the House has expanded to 305 provincial seats since the 1980s with three additional seats for the territories, totalling 308, our current number.

Third, the four seats for slower growing provinces, which are not based on population, further erode the relative representation of the faster growing provinces. As a result, the three faster growing provinces have become significantly under-represented in the House.

For example, British Columbia has only 11.8% of the provincial seats while its share of the provincial population is over 13%. The situation in Ontario is even worse. Ontario has only 34.8% of the provincial seats while its share of the provincial population is over 38%.

The combined effect of fixing the divisor at 279 in combination with the existence of the seat guarantees has prevented the faster growing provinces from receiving a share of seats that is in line with their relative share of the population. The result has been to significantly increase the disparity between the provinces protected by seat guarantees and the faster growing provinces that do not benefit from the guarantees.

Bill C-20 has been designed to bring those provinces closer to representation by population while at the same time protecting the seat counts of the slower growing provinces and ensuring that Quebec maintains a level of seats that is proportionate to its population. This bill was designed to deliver a fair and reasonable balance between the principles, while lessening or eliminating, to the greatest extent possible, the negative effects of the current formula.

Government Orders

The bill's key elements include many things, but before getting into a detailed explanation of the elements of the bill I would point out an important change related to the population figures that will be used to determine the allocation of seats by province.

Whereas the decennial census figures were previously used to determine the allocation of provincial seats, the bill proposes to require the use of population estimates as of July 1 of the year of the decennial census to determine the allocation of seats. The population estimates are considered the best data available because they are adjusted to account for the census net undercoverage, which is the extent to which persons who should have been enumerated but were not included in the census data.

The net undercoverage for the 2006 census was 2.8% and varied from province to province. The lowest net undercoverage was in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador at 1% each, while the highest provincial rates were 3.8% in Ontario, 3.5% in Alberta and 2.9% in British Columbia.

We can see from these higher undercoverage rates that even the census had a hand in furthering the under-representation of these three faster growing provinces. The population estimates are already used to determine the allocation of funding for the federal-provincial equalization program, the Canada health transfer, the Canada social transfer and the territorial formula financing.

Using the population estimates also provides certainty on the provincial seat numbers whereas census figures will not be available until February of 2012.

The updated seat allocation formula contained in the fair representation act will move Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta toward fair representation while protecting the number of seats for slower growing provinces and ensuring that Quebec receives a number of seats proportionate to its population.

The formula introduces a new concept that did not apply in the 1985 formula, which we can call the representation rule. If a currently over-represented province becomes under-represented as a result of the application of the updated formula, additional seats will be allocated to that province so that its proportional representation according to its population is protected. This is a wordy concept, but it is fair and respects the principle of proportionate representation.

Based on population projections, Quebec would be the first province to receive new seats in accordance with this provision, but it applies to all provinces who may find themselves in this situation.

For the 2021 year and each subsequent readjustment, the bill provides that the electoral quotient will be increased by the simple average of provincial population growth rates from the preceding adjustment.

• (1725)

The practical result of applying the new formula will be to add an additional 30 seats to the House of Commons, for a total of 338. This is 23 more seats than would have been added pursuant to the 1985 formula. By introducing a readjustment formula that is more responsive to population size and trends, the fair representation act would move the House closer to fairer representation and maintain its growth over time in a more principled and accurate way.

This is especially important for fast growing areas of the faster growing provinces. We have heard how this would affect the Toronto area, but this is also important for the Vancouver area. My riding and the surrounding area is a large, dense and fast growing area. It is a magnet area for new Canadians and, as such, is especially affected by the shortcomings of the current formula. British Columbia, my home, would rightfully be a beneficiary of the principled changes to representation in the House that would take better account of our high rates of population growth now and into the future.

In addition to the updated formula for allocating seats, Bill C-20 also proposes amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, which sets out the process for readjusting electoral boundaries within provinces once the allocation of the seats by province is known. The readjustment process would continue to be based on census results, which provide population counts at the geographic level that are necessary to accurately revise electoral boundaries. The existing provisions of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, that call for independent boundary commissions, decide on riding boundaries and names would remain unchanged.

This process was established in 1964, changed slightly in 1979, and remains independent and impartial. I know the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands raised a question about this process recently. I can assure her that an impartial independent process would continue unchanged.

We are amending the timelines involved to streamline the process and ensure that Canadians would be more fairly represented as soon as possible. The bill does not propose any changes to the parliamentary review process, where members have the opportunity to bring forward their concerns about the boundary readjustments proposed in the initial reports from the commissions.

The fair representation act would fulfill our government's long-standing commitment to move toward fair representation. It would bring the faster growing provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia closer to representation by population while protecting the seats of slower growing provinces and providing seats to Quebec in proportion to its population.

The new formula corrects a long-standing imbalance in democratic representation among the different provinces of our federation. In short, it is the best formula to move toward fair representation in a principled manner. I hope all hon. members of the House will also agree and support this bill in order to restore fair representation in the House.

Government Orders

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am very impressed and wish to thank the hon. the member for addressing so directly a concern that I raised in question period. I very much hope that the commission would function in a non-partisan manner and only wish to confirm that I would never have raised a concern at all had the idea of redistribution for electoral advantage not emerged in the Conservative Party's Saanich—Gulf Islands newsletter. I am very relieved and I thank the member for her assurances.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the comments of the member opposite and assure her, as I said in my speech, that, indeed, the commission would be independent and impartial.

● (1730)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality today is that this House of Commons does not reflect the makeup of Canada. The reality is that only 10% of this House of 308 members come from visible minority communities, when in fact today one in five Canadians is a visible minority. The fact is that if we look at the 30 most densely populated ridings in this country, 15 of them have visible minority populations greater than 25%, and most of those ridings are in the regions of Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton. That is why we must pass this bill. Otherwise, the problem will only get worse.

Statistics Canada is reporting on the galloping heterogeneity of Canada. By 2031, in a short 20 years, one in three Canadians will be a visible minority and almost half the population will be either foreign born or born to a foreign parent. That is why this bill is so important. We need to ensure that we add seats to regions like Toronto and Vancouver, in ridings in areas like that of the member for Vancouver South, to ensure that this democratic House which should be representative of the population reflects the makeup of Canada today and the makeup of Canada tomorrow.

I am wondering if the member for Vancouver South could tell us how this bill will ensure that new Canadians and Canadians across the country would be better reflected in the makeup of this chamber.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, indeed it is true that across Canada our diversity is growing. We are becoming more and more diverse, but that diversity is being represented less and less. With the addition of 30 seats to this House, we would have better and fairer representation. That would add 15 seats in Ontario, 6 seats in Alberta and 6 seats in British Columbia. Certainly my constituents in Vancouver South look forward to fairer representation.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague conclude her speech by saying that she hopes all hon. members will support the bill.

I am wondering if she hopes that all members, from all parties, will always be 100% supportive of whatever the Conservative Party proposes, without asking any questions, or if she would like all the parties to be able to work together to propose bills that really represent all regions of Canada.

If the second hypothesis is true, I wonder if the member also hopes that the committee will be open to examining proposals from all parties in order to improve the bill.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate a comment that was made earlier, in that we did receive some fairly stringent timelines from Elections Canada to move forward on this bill. Therefore, given that situation and given we have already heard where our population across Canada is, I strongly encourage members of this House to support this bill. If we do not, that would mean for another decade the constituents of Vancouver South and of other ridings across Canada would be under-represented. I certainly know my constituents do not want that. They want to move toward fair representation. They support this bill and I ask all members to support it as well.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon is a beautiful riding of 30,000 square kilometres. About 120,000 people live there.

I want to thank the member from British Columbia for her excellent speech where she laid out the formula we have undertaken in this bill, with six new seats for British Columbia. We are delivering on the promises we ran on in the election campaign. I would like her to expand on the necessity for us as British Columbians to support the six additional seats, what it would mean to B.C., and why we need to pass this bill quickly so we can ensure that when we next go to the polls, British Columbia voters will be represented in numbers closer to representation by population.

Ms. Wai Young: Mr. Speaker, as we have already heard, British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario are drastically under-represented and have been for some time, decades I think I could say. Given that our population projections anticipate that the numbers will increase, under-representation will only get worse.

I am looking forward to six new seats being added for British Columbia. That would mean that instead of having, as we heard from the member for Brampton West, a constituency of 170,000 people, it would become far more manageable with a constituency of approximately 111,000 people. This is a great thing for Canada. It is a huge step forward in terms of fairer representation. We will get there in the next decennial. I would urge all members to support this bill.

● (1735)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate in the House. It has been interesting. There have been pros and cons presented and I have been listening to these arguments. This is a really important issue. It is something that needs debate and discussion in the House. It is something that also needs to go to committee so we can bring in some experts to talk to us about their thoughts on the bill.

Government Orders

There is one particular issue that struck me, and it has been raised in the House. That is that there has not been much consultation with the provinces on this issue. In fact, I do not think there was any consultation with the provinces. There has been discussion in the media about the bill and about this issue, yet I have seen very little from any of the premiers or representatives from the provinces. That is a big problem, one which maybe we could address at committee. Maybe we could invite those elected officials from the provinces and provincial governments to committee.

It is a big problem because we need input from the provinces on this, because we come from our home communities, our ridings, nos circonscriptions. These are located in provinces. They are located in regions and our ability or inability to properly represent our constituents, nos concitoyens, is linked very much to our provincial identities as well.

I am not trying to make an argument for regional representation in the House. That is what the other house is for. That is why we have the Senate. That is not my argument at all, but I do think that strong consultation needs to be had with the provinces, provincial governments, premiers and elected officials. We need to remember the original founding principles that even created this House, created our ridings and seat distribution in the House.

If we think about it, the House in its makeup is a direct rejection of representation by population. It is, quite frankly. When it was first conceived of for example, P.E. I. knew how to do it. P.E.I. wrote it right in that it would get four seats. Right from day one when the House sat for the first time, it was an explicit rejection of direct representation by population. We need to remember that. We need to consider the impact on the provinces and on regions, even if it is not regional representation we are actually overtly considering here in the House.

Another thing I would like to raise is that this bill is called an act for fair representation. There was some very interesting comment from my colleague across the aisle, the member for Wellington—Halton Hills, about the realities of the House, the realities that Canadians are not being fairly represented in a lot of ways, especially when we look around. The composition of the House has changed dramatically since the last election. We see many more faces from different backgrounds. We see more women. We see visible minorities, ethnic minorities, people from different types of communities that historically have not been represented in the House.

My colleague brought up the point that with the addition of more seats, especially in some of the cities where we do see more diverse populations, maybe it will flow naturally that the House will be more diverse. I disagree with that sentiment.

If we are talking about an act for fair representation, it is time for us to raise the issue in the House of a different kind of representation altogether. Maybe we need to look at systems of proportional representation. Maybe we need to look at systems where we could have different communities, overtly, consciously or specifically represented in the House, because really, there is much more to having a healthy democracy than the number of seats in the House.

We have to look at the health of our democracy on any number of fronts. What are the barriers to getting here? What are the social or structural barriers to getting to this place?

● (1740)

These barriers affect the ability of women, visible or ethnic minorities, Canadian expatriates, persons with disabilities, persons in the LGBTQ community, and aboriginal Canadians from fully participating in government and this form of democratic decision making. If we have a bill called the fair representation act, should we not consider these kinds of ideas and look at these barriers? What steps can we take to improve our democracy? What other areas do we have to look at for improvement?

Last March it was thrilling to see Canada ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. That was a proud day. There is one section of the convention, article 29, that says that persons with disabilities are guaranteed political rights and an ability to participate on an equal basis with all others. This is something that came up in my riding, first in theory but then in practice in the last election.

That section talks about the ability of people with disabilities to participate fully in the democratic process, yet there are still huge challenges for people with visual and physical impairments at the ballot box because we do not have national standards for accessibility when it comes to the ballot box.

I was alerted to this issue by a constituent of mine, Helen McFadyen, who said that she did not have the right to a secret ballot. Helen has a visual impairment. She always tells me that she is blind. When she goes into the ballot box, someone reads her the names and helps her out. This is nice in theory, but as she says, she does not have the right to a secret ballot. She is not afforded the dignity of being able to go in and make that decision on her own.

Even with something as simple as casting a ballot, marking that *X*, we are not respecting the dignity of some people. We are not allowing those people to engage with the democratic process in a way that respects their dignity. I believe that people who are visually impaired need to be able to vote independently. They need to be able to vote secretly, if that is what they want to do.

Canadians also need to be able to ratify their own vote no matter what country they may be living in, and I raise that for a reason. In talking about fairer representation, another very interesting issue has come out of my community work. It concerns expatriates, Canadian citizens who are not living in Canada.

Members may be surprised to know, and I did not realize this until I received a call from someone, that if a Canadian has been living outside Canada for more than five years, that person cannot vote in a federal election. It is hard to believe.

A friend of mine, someone I went to school with at York University, called me about this. I thought he was wrong, but when I checked, I found that he was right. This call took place during the election. I told him there was nothing I could do about it at that time and I did not think I would be able to help him get his right to vote for that election. I said we should look at this issue of democratic reform in a more robust way, when the election was over, and try to figure out a solution for the future.

Government Orders

When we talk about fair representation, how can we limit it to the issue of seats in the House? How can we just say that if we have three more seats for one province or six more seats for another province that we end up with fair representation? It is not as simple as that.

I would love to see us take this opportunity to think about truly fair representation. There are Canadian citizens living abroad who cannot vote in our elections, but our laws have an impact on them nonetheless even though they are not living in Canada. Some of our House procedures have an impact on them. A number of expatriates signed a petition to say that this is not something they agree with and that the Elections Act should be changed. Believe it or not, I cannot submit the petition because they are not residents of Canada.

I see my time for debate is coming to an end. I hope to continue this debate on another occasion.

● (1745)

The Speaker: It being 5:45, pursuant to an order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the amendment negatived.

(Amendment negatived)

The Speaker: The next question is on the main motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1825)

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

(Division No. 53)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Adler
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Aspin
Baird	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Glover
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiebert
Hillyer	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leaf
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukowski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	May
Mayes	McColeman
McLeod	Menegakis
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poillievre
Preston	Raitt
Rajotte	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Seeback	Shea
Shiple	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Tweed
Uppal	Valcourt
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)

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Williamson
Woodworth
Young (Oakville)
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Wilks
Wong
Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)

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Members

Allen (Welland)
Atamanenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Brahmi
Brosseau
Caron
Chicoine
Christopherson
Côté
Cuzner
Dionne Labelle
Doré Lefebvre
Easter
Fortin
Garrison
Goodale
Harris (St. John's East)
Hughes
Kellway
Lapointe
Latendresse
Leslie
MacAulay
Marston
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Mourani
Nicholls
Pacetti
Patry
Perreault
Quach
Raynault
Rousseau
Scarpaleggia
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan
Stoffer
Thibeault
Tremblay

Andrews
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Blanchette
Boivin
Brisson
Byrne
Charlton
Choquette
Comartin
Cotler
Day
Donnelly
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Eyking
Fry
Giguère
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Hsu
Jacob
Lamoureux
Larose
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu
Mai
Martin
Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)
Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Nantel
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Plamondon
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC) moved that Bill C-217, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (mischief relating to war memorials), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents of Dufferin—Caledon to open the debate on my private member's bill, an act to amend the Criminal Code, which is mischief related to war memorials.

The bill seeks to add significant penalties for anyone convicted of mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph or other structure honouring or remembering those who have served in our armed forces and those who have died as a consequence of war. The timing of this debate is particularly significant, given that we pause to honour our fallen and our veterans next week on Remembrance Day.

Vandalism and defacement of a war memorial should not be tolerated in our great country. It is a duty of every Canadian citizen to respect those who have sacrificed their lives for our country. For those who do not share the same revered respect for members of our armed forces, there must be punishment.

Bill C-217 would amend the Criminal Code to make a conviction punishable by a fine of not less than \$1,000 on a first offence, imprisonment of not less than 14 days on a second offence and imprisonment of not less than 30 days on subsequent offences. Unfortunately, I feel these increased measures are necessary due to the increased amount of mischief against Canada's cenotaphs and monuments.

In November 2008 in my constituency of Dufferin—Caledon, a cenotaph was desecrated within a week of its rededication. The town of Orangeville, the community where the cenotaph is located, spent nearly \$2,000 repairing the newly restored monument just days before the annual Remembrance Day services.

Regrettably this is not the only case of mischief against cenotaphs and monuments. This type of vandalism occurs all over the country and it is for the 41st Parliament to take action. It is most concerning that in the past few years there have been numerous incidents of war memorial vandalism across the country. It is time to take a stand against this desecration of our sacred memorials and punish those responsible for this type of destruction.

Bill C-217 would place stiffer penalties on the vandalism of war memorials and hopefully force potential vandals to seriously reconsider defacing these important Canadian symbols of pride and honour. By allowing the Criminal Code to remain unchanged, we are doing a disservice to all those who have served in our wars and to all those who have sacrificed their lives so that our great country may remain free. The desecration of our war memorials must not continue. Vandals must face a harsher punishment to ensure that they will think twice before committing this type of violation.

The following are some examples of this.

In Kirkland Lake a teenager was charged with urinating on the Memorial Wall, but was able to attend a diversion program to allow the mischief charge to be dropped.

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In Ottawa, our nation's capital, a man was found urinating on the National War Memorial on Canada Day. The charge was withdrawn after the culprit issued a written apology to Canadian veterans, completed community service and donated a mere \$200 to charity. After this unacceptable conduct, this criminal did not even have a mischief charge against him. This is simply unacceptable.

It is obvious that these vandals do not think about what they are doing and have not thought about the blatant disrespect they display for these memorials. We must give them something to think about. Significant fines and weeks of imprisonment will complete this objective in a way that simple apology letters and deferment programs do not.

Canadian citizens should be proud of their history and remain proud of the monuments honouring those who have given their lives so that we may remain free and not fearful that their monuments will be desecrated by thoughtless individuals.

In Toronto vandals hooked up a chain to a concrete cross and using an all-terrain vehicle, pulled it from its perch on a cenotaph. This was the second time the cross had been stolen in less than a year.

A very disturbing story was someone in Beamsville broke into the Konkle Mausoleum and emptied an urn of ashes onto the ground. Though three people are buried in the mausoleum, it is likely that the ashes belonged to a War of 1812 veteran.

In Waterloo police arrested three young people, ranging in age from 12 to 18, who were responsible for toppling between 300 and 400 graves, many of which were graves of war veterans.

• (1830)

We have heard of multiple cases in which our cherished war memorials and cenotaphs have been vandalized and disrespected. We must discourage such behaviour. Explicit punishments must be written into the Criminal Code for mischievous conduct to address these atrocious crimes. We have a duty to protect the memories of those who have sacrificed their lives so that we may continue to live freely in our great country. These memorials and what they represent command our utmost respect and efforts to preserve and protect them. Canadian citizens also deserve to know that conduct as this will not be tolerated in any way.

In a most disturbing case, on the morning of this past September 25, a Canadian Forces veteran who served in Afghanistan discovered fresh sprayed-painted graffiti tags on the monument at Girouard Park on Sherbrooke Street in Montreal's Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine neighbourhood. This was the second time in less than 18 months this beautiful monument had been defaced. What a slap in the face for the Canadian Forces member to have been the one to discover such disrespect. City workers later had to remove the offending graffiti at a cost of several thousand dollars.

Our country's bravest deserve much better. They have fought and died for our country and, therefore, deserve our utmost respect. We have an obligation to protect and preserve their dignity. Canadians as a whole deserve to know that we take our war memorials seriously and that we understand the significance they embody.

It is time for Parliament to take a stand against mischief relating to war memorials. The use of fines and imprisonment will convey this message to those who appear to have no respect for our armed forces' veterans and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. Anyone who wilfully damages or desecrates a war memorial should face stiff consequences. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to protect these revered memorials.

The 200th anniversary of the War of 1812 will be upon us next year. As Canadians, we are extremely proud of the role that our great country played and we will soon be celebrating this important anniversary, often at the feet of our war memorials and cenotaphs. We must ensure that these memorials will still be beautiful for our ceremonies rather than desecrated by vandals on the eve of the services.

Following the anniversary for the War of 1812, the 100th anniversary of World War I will occur. Canada played an immense role in this war and this anniversary will be a time to remember all those who died defending our country and democracy. Numerous memorials throughout the country have been erected to honour those who fought in World War I. Parliament must help to ensure that these memorials remain untouched by vandalism.

With these important events around the corner, this is an opportune time to pass this legislation to protect and preserve those symbols to the best of our ability and this bill would do just that.

We all know someone who has fought for our great country: a father, a grandfather, a son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a friend. We appreciate these men and women for the dedication they have shown to our country and for their willingness to fight abroad for our freedom here at home. Memorials in our communities are dedicated to those people and none of us should want to see them damaged or defiled. Harsher penalties will keep this from happening. They will make potential vandals think twice before acting against memorials, which so many of us consider sacred.

As all members know, this past summer the Canadian Forces wound down combat operations in Afghanistan. This was Canada's longest-ever combat mission, a mission in which our country lost 157 brave men and women of the Canadian Forces. As a result, our memorials and cenotaphs have a renewed sense of purpose and value, especially in communities which lost one or more of their own. Indeed, that conflict continues and only this past weekend Canada lost another brave soldier to a suicide attack on a NATO convoy in Kabul.

We owe so much to our men and women in uniform. Indeed, it is widely agreed that Canada came of age as a nation on the muddy battlefields of France during the First World War. Our participation in that great conflict was out of proportion to our population and we overcame challenges that had defeated other nations. Our mettle was tested, to enormous loss of life and many of our brave soldiers sacrificed everything in the defence of freedom.

•(1835)

The call came again in the Second World War, when once again tens of thousands of brave young Canadians went to the aid of our allies in the cause of freedom. That conflict reshaped our world and Canada played no small part in its outcome. From the Battle of the Atlantic to Juno Beach, from Italy to Hong Kong, Canadians were at the forefront in that conflict.

In Korea and on to the birth of UN peacekeeping with the Suez crisis, Canadians Forces continued to place their lives on the line for freedom and democracy. Through dozens of peacekeeping missions and during the long years of the Cold War, our young men and women in uniform have always been ready and willing to put country before self.

In the first Gulf War, in the Balkans, then Afghanistan and now Libya, the best of our young men and women have shown time and time again their willingness to defend Canada and our values. All too often that willingness has cost them their lives.

To honour the memory of these young men and women, our communities erect memorials and cenotaphs, and rightly so. We create honoured spaces in our cities, towns and villages where we can gather to remember them. Whether it is on Remembrance Day or any other day of the year we might choose to pause and reflect, these spaces and those memorials signify the cost of our democracy, freedom and way of life.

Those of us who enjoy the hard-won freedoms that are part of modern Canada owe it to those who have paid in blood and life to keep those honoured spaces free from harm or insult. We have a solemn duty as citizens and residents of our wonderful country to protect and preserve our memorials and cenotaphs in the memory of those who have fallen.

When vandalism occurs in one of these honoured places, we are all diminished. An act of such disrespect is offensive not only to our local veterans, but it is offensive to all those who care about those veterans and everyone who cares about the sacrifices they have made.

Bill C-217 delivers a clear message. The vandalism and desecration of any Canadian cenotaph or war memorial will not be tolerated. We are compelled to protect these revered places. We owe it all to the Canadian men and women who have fought in our armed forces.

In consultation with the Minister of Justice, I propose to move an amendment at committee, should Bill C-217 carry in second reading, that would increase the minimum penalty under indictment from my proposed five years to ten years. This is a technical amendment which would simply ensure that this new offence would be consistent with the current similar Criminal Code offence of section 430(1)(a), which criminalizes the wilful destruction or damage of

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property. Without this amendment, we would be creating inconsistencies within the existing legislative framework.

I urge all of my colleagues to consider the adoption of Bill C-217. The desecration of war memorials is something that can happen in any community at any time. We all owe it to the constituents of our ridings, especially to the veterans of our respective ridings, to support the passage of the bill. This amendment to the Criminal Code would help protect Canada's war memorials and cenotaphs from vandalism, defilement and damage. Those who have fought and died in our great country deserve to know that the 41st Parliament is working to protect the monuments and memorials erected in their honour.

As I said at the outset, all colleagues in the House will join millions of Canadians next week on Remembrance Day as we honour those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep Canada the true north strong and free. Our long and proud tradition of standing up to defend freedom and democracy and to defend our values is one of the things that makes Canada the greatest country in the world today. We are a free, open and democratic society that prides itself on the rule of law. Those who would disrespect our honoured community spaces that are dedicated to the remembrance of the fallen through vandalism or other such acts must be held to account under the law. The debt we owe our veterans and the fallen soldiers requires that we look upon any disrespect to our cenotaphs and war memorials as a deeply grave matter with very serious consequences.

I believe that the passage of Bill C-217 is necessary to ensure that those who would damage our honoured places think twice before they act to desecrate our war memorials and cenotaphs. I encourage all of my colleagues in the House to join me in taking decisive action on this important issue.

•(1840)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I admire the passion my hon. colleague from the Conservatives has for this event. He is correct when he says that nobody in Canada and nobody in this House wishes to see any monuments defaced in any way, shape or form.

We all know about the incident a couple of years ago, I believe, when some rowdy teenagers, who were drunk or stoned, urinated on the National War Memorial and how that caused national news. They did not go to jail. The Legion asked for a chance to talk to them, and it did. Now these kids are the biggest protectors of war monuments in the country. The bill proposes that we incarcerate them immediately.

We heard testimony today in our veterans committee about how a Japanese monument in Vancouver was continually defaced and defiled. Eventually, the Legion and other groups got together with the people who did it. Now those kids are the biggest protectors of that monument.

Private Members' Business

I understand what my hon. colleague is trying to achieve but, if the Royal Canadian Legion and other groups believe that education and an opportunity to explain to vandals why their actions are wrong and to convert them into protecting these monuments, would that not be a more cost-effective and humane manner to deal with this issue?

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments but I do not know that I necessarily agree with him.

I spent considerable time researching the damage that has been done from sea to sea to sea, mainly from the east coast to the west coast. It is incredible, over the recent years, the amount of damage. I suppose we could find a couple of cases where that has happened, and it may be the one that I referred to in Ottawa where something happened on Canada Day when someone did something disgusting to the monuments.

I am only suggesting minimum penalties. It would leave room for the courts, if they wished, to do the things that the member is recommending these young people do. It is generally young men but it could be older people. In the cases that I have seen, they are all ages. It is young offenders, people in their 20s and people in their 30s, and generally they are intoxicated.

This bill would tell them that if they do that they had better think twice because they will go to jail and receive a tough fine. This bill would tell them that these are places of our sacred institutions that honour our soldiers and honour our whole way of life and they cannot do that because it is wrong.

• (1845)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the passion and sense of commitment that the member opposite brings to what he believes is an important issue and that, no doubt, Canadians as a whole would recognize as an important issue. We have this beautiful memorial in the form of a wall mural in Winnipeg North and there is a high sense of pride in the role that Sergeant Tommy Prince played in World War II.

The concern that I have is very similar to the question that was just asked. We have monuments, war memorials and wall murals. I wonder if we might be doing a better service by just emphasizing to the people who are vandalizing and graffiti those things how horrific those types of actions are. Is it possible that it might be a bit too extreme when there might be some—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please.

The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Speaker, both questions are similar.

I have a whole binder of offences that I have collected from coast to coast describing these terrible offences that have happened to our cenotaphs and war memorials and they are treated as mischief and the offenders receive general mischief charges. A war memorial is for the people who have died giving us our freedom and to protect our country, for those who have fought wars and been in peacekeeping, from the War of 1812 to the incidents in Libya. When a war memorial is defiled, surely to goodness, we want to treat those as more than just mischief charges.

I understand the member's thoughts. The judges would have discretion. They would be minimum sentences. They would not be

soft charges but I believe this is something greater than a mischief charge, and this bill would make these charges greater.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for bringing forth this issue for debate. Clearly, he has demonstrated a great deal of passion, interest and respect for our veterans, whether they go back to the War of 1812, to the recent events in Afghanistan or to peacekeeping efforts where we have, unfortunately, seen the loss of lives of people from our country engaged in war on behalf of the country.

I am wearing a poppy, as many of our colleagues are, to show respect for our veterans. As the member said, next week we will be attending services in our communities to show respect for our veterans and to acknowledge their contributions. We will be there because we choose to be there. I believe every person in the House has a great deal of respect for veterans and for our serving soldiers. I was born before Confederation, and I was born in a place that was not part of Canada. There has not been a time in my lifetime when there has not been the kind of respect for serving soldiers and veterans as there is today.

Members will know that in the last 10 or 15 years there has been more public attendance at war memorials where people are showing interest, concern and respect for veterans and the contributions they have made, as well as the contributions that serving soldiers make. This is the context in which the member brings forth the legislation and I respect his views in bringing that forward.

However, I will talk about the context a little more because of something a member said that is very important. The member said that young people or anyone should think twice before disrespecting or defacing a war memorial. My colleague from Sackville—Eastern Shore, who is the veterans critic for our party and is a tireless, if I may use that term, advocate for veterans ever since he has been in the House, pointed out that many people do not even think once before doing something, as the member was talking about, either showing disrespect or, in some cases, actually defacing a war memorial.

He also said that this amendment was necessary in order to avoid inconsistencies in the law. Reflecting on that, I would like to comment on the section that we are talking about, section 430 of the Criminal Code, which is the mischief section.

“Mischief” is defined in section 430 as:

Every one commits mischief who wilfully

- (a) destroys or damages property;
- (b) renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective;
- (c) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or
- (d) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property.

It is a broad definition of what mischief is.

There are other aspects to it but if someone commits mischief that endangers a person's life, that person is guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for life. Therefore, the maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

Private Members' Business

In terms of other types of property, if the property is of a certain type, the general penalty for mischief is that the person is guilty of an indictable offence and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years. Therefore, the maximum penalty for mischief is two years imprisonment. In a proper case, the judge could actually put someone in jail for two years for committing mischief.

If the offence proceeds on summary conviction, which is another way of proceeding, the person can be guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction. The penalty for that is a \$5,000 fine or six months in jail. Therefore, depending on whether it proceeds by indictment or proceeds by summary conviction, the fine can be as much as \$5,000, six months in jail or two years in jail.

● (1850)

The Criminal Code also deals with other types of property. So, for mischief in relation to certain other types of property the penalties are increased.

What the member is saying is that this is a special type of property, sacred to our veterans and sacred to all of us because of the nature of the property's design to honour those who died in the service of their country, and, therefore, there should be a greater penalty than ordinary mischief. Two years maximum is not enough, summary conviction, \$5,000 fine or six months is not enough.

Here is how the Criminal Code deals with other types of property. One of them is what they call testamentary instruments, a will. If someone destroys the last will and testament of a person trying to leave his or her property to the people that he or she wants, the punishment is a maximum of 10 years. It goes from 2 to 10 years maximum penalty for destruction of a testamentary instrument that is proceeded by indictment.

There is another type of property here. It seems to me, and I know the member may be able to enlighten us, that the legislative draftsman, the legislative counsel or whoever drafted this bill, probably looked at this section to draft that one. This section reads:

Mischief relating to religious property

Every one who commits mischief in relation to property that is a building, structure or part thereof that is primarily used for religious worship including a church, mosque, synagogue or temple, or an object associated with religious worship...

nothing could be more sacred than that—

... if the commission of the mischief is motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on religion, race, colour or national or ethnic origin,

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

(b) is guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction and liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding eighteen months.

Therefore, a summary conviction is 18 months instead of 6 and indictable is 10 instead of 2. However, it is not just defacing a church, destroying a church, urinating on church grounds, in a cemetery or whatever, the motivation has to be based on bias, prejudice, or hate based on religion, race or colour. In other words, if someone puts a swastika on a synagogue with spray paint, if that is done based on bias, prejudice, or hate based on religion, race, colour, then the offence is considered extremely serious and the person is liable to punishment for a term not exceeding 10 years or, by summary conviction, a maximum of 18 months.

In none of those cases, testamentary instrument or otherwise, is there a specified fine, or imprisonment or term, but the maximums are increased. In the case of testamentary instrument, it is by 5 times, to 10 years. In the case of a synagogue, or church, or a mosque or other religious site, it is up to 10 years, or 18 months for a summary conviction if there is proof of hatred, bias or prejudice.

That is the way the Criminal Code deals with matters that our society considers more sacred than ordinary property. If I were to I scratch a car with a key while walking past the car committing vandalism, that is mischief in relation to property. It brings a maximum sentence of two years or, by indictment, a \$5,000 fine or six months in jail. However, if I destroy a will, deface a church or a synagogue with prejudice then the punishment goes up.

What the member is proposing here is something a little different. If we want consistency we might have to do something a little different than that.

I understand the concern the member has raised and we share that concern. If this is something so widespread by people who are wilfully doing this then we will certainly need to think about whether this is the appropriate way to deal with it.

● (1855)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support, in principle, of Bill C-217, which is an act to amend the Criminal Code, particularly with respect to mischief relating to war memorials, which was introduced by the member for Dufferin—Caledon on June 15.

The bill would effectively create a new crime, where a person commits mischief in relation to war memorials and similar monuments honouring those who died during the war, by introducing a new paragraph to section 430 of the Criminal Code.

As the member for Dufferin—Caledon put it, this debate takes place at an appropriate moment of remembrance. It takes place on the eve of our commemoration of Remembrance Day, where we remember those who are no longer with us; where we remember those who, as the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore put it in this House, gave the greatest gift of all, the gift of life, so that we may live and so that we may enjoy our liberty; where we pay tribute to the veterans among us, and their families, who reflect and represent the sacrifice of those who are no longer with us, and we honour them; and where we pay tribute to our men and women in uniform across this world who are protecting our fundamental rights, who are safeguarding our democracy, who are protecting our human security or, indeed, who are protecting our international peace and security.

In effect, in 2005, when I was minister of justice and attorney general, I, at that point, developed a national justice initiative with respect to combatting hatred and racism which spoke with respect to the danger of this kind of assault on our war memorials, of those kinds of hate crimes that end up being an assault on the inherent dignity of every human being, and an assault on our equal dignity and, indeed, on our character as a multicultural society.

Private Members' Business

Section 430 of the Criminal Code currently outlines the definition of mischief and associated penalties. The section also includes specific provisions for mischief relating to data, religious and cultural property, and their associated penalties.

Bill C-217 would add another specific provision; this one for mischief, as I said, related to war memorials. It would also outline possible sentences for a person convicted of such a crime and it would create, as well, mandatory minimum sentences.

It is important to recall that the member for Ottawa South, at the time, in 2006, first proposed that the newly-elected Conservative government pass a law to make damage done to war memorials a specific offence. This push to protect monuments came in the wake of an incident on Canada Day in 2006, in which a man and two youths were observed urinating on Canada's National War Memorial in Ottawa. The man involved in the incident has since had his mischief charged dropped after partaking in voluntary community service.

I mention this because it would seem to me that the appropriate response with respect to that kind of vandalism is not to institute a mandatory minimum but to respond by way of community work, by way of education, by way of having to meet with veterans and confronting exactly the nature of the outrage that was committed and thereby learning from that. That would be a more appropriate remedy than introducing a mandatory minimum.

Since the member for Ottawa South introduced his proposal, there were other incidents involving monument vandalism, including an incident of a cross being torn from the cenotaph at a Royal Canadian Legion in Bell Ewart. At the time, in 2006, the then justice minister was not yet prepared to accept the proposal of the member for Ottawa South.

That leads us to where we are today with a related initiative to the recent passing of Bill C-442, An Act to establish a National Holocaust Monument, a monument which is intended for us to recall and remember horrors too terrible to be believed but not too terrible to have happened.

● (1900)

The importance, therefore, of protecting war memorials and the dignity of the individuals they represent and the values of freedom, democracy and human rights are omnipresent in this regard.

I support the need for an initiative to have a specific law protective of war memorials to express the condemnation of society of those who deface those monuments and memorials that are dedicated to our veterans, to our soldiers, and to the victims of mass atrocities, both domestic and international. But I caution as to the use of a mandatory minimum with respect to a remedial approach regarding this offence.

I support the bill in principle. I trust that the member for Dufferin—Caledon may perhaps be open to amending the bill with respect to removing the mandatory minimum, whereby we proceed in terms of alternative forms of punishment. I trust that a further discussion of the bill could lead us in the direction of where we could support the principle, certainly, which is very compelling.

I commend the member for introducing this private member's bill, but that we tailor the remedy with respect to the offence to the individual and do so in a manner that we can achieve an outcome that may be more appropriate in that regard while still achieving the objective which we seek.

Again, may I close by saying it is an appropriate initiative on the eve of Remembrance Day.

● (1905)

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support Bill C-217, which was introduced in the House by the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon on June 15 of this year. When the hon. member introduced the bill, he said that he did so in an effort to add significant penalties for anyone convicted of mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph, or other structure intended to honour or remember those who had died as a result of war.

Anyone who intentionally damages or defiles a war memorial should face severe consequences. Respect for those who have given the ultimate sacrifice so that we may live in peace is the responsibility of every Canadian. We owe it to our men and women in uniform to protect these revered memorials. I suspect that many Canadians would share these sentiments.

While some Canadians may question why Parliament should create this new Criminal Code offence when the code already contains similar provisions dealing with mischief against property generally, I commend the hon. member's effort to create a new offence specifically relating to war memorials and cenotaphs.

Through my remarks today, I intend to explain why the creation of the new criminal offence that distinguishes war memorials and similar structures from other property is justified and should be supported by all members of the House.

War memorials have an especially important place in Canadian society. Their desecration disrespects the memory of Canadians who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and disrespects Canadians who continue to serve our country today.

As members may know, the National War Memorial here in Ottawa was unveiled in 1939 by King George VI on the eve of the second world war to symbolize the response of Canadians in the first world war that ended on November 11, 1918. Of course, it has since come to commemorate the sacrifice of all Canadians who have served in times of war.

Under the Criminal Code, a person commits mischief who: wilfully destroys or damages property; renders property dangerous, useless, inoperable, or ineffective; obstructs, interrupts, or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property; or obstructs, interrupts, or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment, or operation of property.

Where a property that is the object of the mischief has a value greater than \$5,000, the Criminal Code provides that where the Crown proceeds by indictment, the maximum penalty is 10 years imprisonment, and where the Crown elects to proceed by way of summary conviction, the maximum penalty is six months imprisonment. There is no mandatory minimum penalty for mischief.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-217 proposes the creation of a new hybrid Criminal Code offence of mischief committed in relation to property that is a building, structure, or part thereof, that primarily serves as a monument to honour persons who were killed or died as a consequence of war, including a war memorial or a cenotaph. The bill further proposes that this new offence would be punishable by a maximum of 18 months imprisonment on summary conviction and five years imprisonment when prosecuted by indictment.

Members will note that the bill also proposes the creation of mandatory minimum penalties. There would be a \$1,000 fine for a first offence that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. I think this perhaps addresses some of the concerns that we have heard from the opposition.

This \$1,000 minimum offence in real terms would be about 100 hours of work at the current minimum wage in Ontario. I do not think it is unreasonable if someone has desecrated a war memorial to ask them to go and work for 100 hours in as much as we do ask them to go out and provide volunteer community services. In addition to that, if a judge wanted to ask the perpetrator to go out and speak to Legions, I think that would be eminently reasonable.

What we are debating today, and which I fully support, is the fact that we would separately and uniquely honour our war memorials and cenotaphs.

On a second offence, there would be a minimum of 14 days of imprisonment and 30 days imprisonment for a third or subsequent offence. These mandatory minimum penalties are similar to some that already exist in the Criminal Code.

For example, section 255 of the Criminal Code also provides for mandatory minimum penalties that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. Under that provision the offender is liable to a \$1,000 fine for a first offence, 30 days imprisonment for a second offence, and 120 days imprisonment for a third and subsequent offence.

● (1910)

In preparing for today's debate, I had a quick look at some incidents that could come within the scope of this new legislation. Members will be aware that there have been a number of high-profile incidents involving the desecration of monuments and war memorials in the recent past. While these incidents are relatively rare, they have nevertheless been very disturbing to Canadians.

A war memorial in Coniston, Ontario, has been the target of vandals a number of times over the years. The memorial originally consisted of five walls. There was a wall for the navy, one for the merchant navy, one for the army, one for the air force and one for the RCMP. At one point the monument had 11 flagpoles; only six remain now, and these too have been vandalized. The tops have been broken off and the flags have been stolen. Vandals also tore plaques off the central wall and knocked down the navy's wall. Two plane propellers that stand guard by the air force wall of the memorial had previously been spray painted.

At one point the Legion had a helmet and a gun from the world wars in a shatterproof glass display case at the memorial, yet vandals damaged the case so badly that the items had to be given away to

another legion that could safely display them. A stainless steel sword dating back to the 1940s had also been stolen from a nearby cenotaph.

As a result of the most recent incident, the monument now needs to be completely replaced because of the amount of destruction, and I understand that the Legion is not going to repair it.

We must remember that our cenotaphs and monuments are powerful reminders of the sacrifices that generations of Canadians have made for the peace and freedom we enjoy today. I am proud to be a part of a government that understands that cenotaphs and monuments are important gathering places within our communities. As Canadians, we have a duty as a nation to preserve them in honour of our fallen men and women. Our veterans and those who continue to serve Canada today deserve nothing less.

This legislation underscores the importance of monuments and memorials to Canadians as symbols that remind us of our most important values: democracy, freedom and tolerance. I would invite all members of the House to support this important legislation, especially as we approach Remembrance Day.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for bringing forward this legislation and especially for timing it prior to the week of Remembrance Day. Certain points of his discussion were very sympathetic and understandable, and I appreciate his thoughtful concern regarding our veterans and their families with regard to the desecration of war memorials and cenotaphs throughout this country.

I do not think a Canadian exists who is not disgusted when seeing stupid acts against commemorative monuments of any kind. There was a cross-burning recently in Enfield, Nova Scotia. Everyone was very disgusted by it, and it was dealt with appropriately.

There should be a touch of caution on this. It is easy to say this is what we want to do and move forward with it. When reading a headline, giving a personal point of view or explaining it to constituents, most people would say, "Yes, let's do this, it's a great idea". However, there are technical concerns that need to be looked at.

Other forms of vandalism and mischief can happen. For example, let us say three very drunk people leave a pub and desecrate a war memorial. That just happened in Ottawa at the National War Memorial. People were outraged, no question about it, and they wanted heads to roll, but the Royal Canadian Legion had a different approach to it. These young kids, having talked to members of the Royal Canadian Legion and veterans, are now the biggest and proudest supporters of the National War Memorial.

Similarly, the Veterans Affairs committee heard today from Mr. Terence Whitty regarding a Japanese memorial in Vancouver that was consistently desecrated until the police were able to find who did it. They got hold of the kids and spoke to them so that they understood what they had done wrong; these kids are now the biggest supporters of monuments and understand the sacrifices of our men and women.

Private Members' Business

My hon. colleague knows full well the sacrifices made by our men and women in the services for many years, but we do not teach that in our schools. That is a major problem with our schools. They do not teach military history. An awful lot of people have no idea what happened to these men and women. They know on Remembrance Day because it is a time for reflection, but on November 12 it is completely forgotten. That is problem number one. A lot of kids are doing things because they have not thought them out properly. It does not compute in their minds.

However, there is another form of desecration of a cenotaph, and that is neglect. There are thousands of memorials across the country. If cenotaphs, plaques or monuments are neglected, they start breaking apart or moss grows around them, and they become unfortunate, unsightly edifices in that regard. Who is responsible for the neglect? It is not someone who desecrated something. This is desecration by neglect. Is someone held responsible for that? Does someone pay a fine or go to jail for that? The bill does not say.

As much as I sympathize with and appreciate the concerns of the hon. member, the matter is worthy of further discussion. I would like to get validation from the various organizations in this country. I do not think I heard from the hon. member what the Royal Canadian Legion said, or the army, navy, air force, veterans associations, or UN peacekeepers. It would be very interesting to hear what they have to say about the legislation. It would be worthy of debate.

The other concern about establishing mandatory minimums is that doing so sometimes takes away a judge's opportunity to do something in that regard, depending on the circumstances of the day. Hypothetically, if three kids who were not born in Canada came here, did something really stupid and had no idea about what they were doing, what would we do with them? It can sometimes be related to swatting a fly with a sledgehammer. I sympathize with the hon. member's concerns, but we want to make sure we do it right. We want to make sure that education and rehabilitation are number one. Incarceration and major fines are not always the answer in these circumstances.

Although I have never desecrated a cenotaph or done anything of that nature, I have done some childish things in my lifetime. My father took his belt off of his waist and gave me a licking of a lifetime when I was in trouble. I know we do not hear the word "licking" very often in here, but that is what he did. I guarantee that I did not have to go to jail to know that I had done something wrong, and very bad.

● (1915)

In combination with this bill, there are other opportunities to show people who have done this that what they have done is severely wrong and to make sure that it never, ever happens again. There are thousands of monuments across the country and internationally. How do we apply these laws in fairness to what is going on?

Let us start teaching military history in our schools so that everyone knows why there are cenotaphs. I walk by the national cenotaph every morning and every night going to and from my apartment. When I stop people and ask them if they know what the horses, people and animals mean, they do not have a clue. Some of them are from Ottawa. They know it is a national monument, but they do not understand the makeup of the monument and why it was

put there. A lot of people's actions are based on ignorance. They simply do not know.

A lot of people do not know there is a national aboriginal cenotaph at Confederation Park. It is beautiful to look at, but many people have no clue what it means. We have the Korean one, the Hong Kong one, and the one for peacekeeping. They are beautiful. When I ask people walking by what the cenotaph represents, they have no clue.

If we are going to punish people for a malicious act originating from stupidity and ignorance, maybe there is an alternative. Maybe we could turn that type of behaviour around. Maybe we could use a belt, and if my dad were still alive he would do that. Maybe I would use a belt myself, because I know how disgusted I am when I see actions of that nature not just when it comes to cenotaphs, but stupid things that happen all the time. Vandalism happens in this country all the time for stupid reasons. The question is do we incarcerate everyone who commits these acts? That is a valid question and it is worthy of further debate.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member has brought this legislation forward, but as the hon. member for Mount Royal and my hon. colleague from St. John's East indicated, there are certain concerns and procedures that we need to look at. I appreciate the intent of what the member is trying to do. We need to prevent these actions from happening again. We need to determine the best way to prevent them from happening again. If they do happen again, we need to ensure that people understand the seriousness of their actions and make sure they do not do it again.

If we could have that dialogue, I think we could achieve what the hon. member is trying to do.

As we say across the country,

At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Lest we forget.

● (1920)

Ms. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how privileged we are to live in Canada. Canada is free from the turmoil and strife that we see in so many other parts of the world. Many new Canadians have come to Canada to escape war. Surely they appreciate the freedom and security which we should never take for granted.

Soon it will once again be Remembrance Day, November 11, notably this year, the 11th day of the 11th month of the 11th year of this century. Canadians have a moral duty to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those Canadians who placed themselves in harm's way, stood against oppression, and gave their all in the defence of freedom, justice and peace not just for Canada, but for people in foreign lands as well.

Most Canadians are conscious of the great debt we owe to those who contributed so much to preserving Canadian values, like the rule of law and equality. They wear the red poppy as I do this evening with solemn pride.

Adjournment Proceedings

This is why I am at a loss to understand why there are some people who commit what can only be called despicable acts of vandalism against those memorials that have been erected to honour their sacrifice. I certainly support education, as the member opposite has suggested, but this really is a more straightforward matter.

As an example, in 2006, vandals ripped the cross from the cenotaph at Branch 547 of the Royal Canadian Legion in Belle Ewart, a small hamlet south of Barrie on Lake Simcoe. When we hear of acts of vandalism committed against a war memorial, I think many of us react with a mixture of sadness and outrage.

I would not want anyone to think that this problem is unique to Canada. Unfortunately, I recently have learned that scores of memorials to Britain's brave war dead have been desecrated by callous looters and vandals in the United Kingdom. The contempt for Britain's heroes was highlighted last week when a four foot bronze statue of a Second World War soldier was stolen from the garrison town of Tidworth in Wiltshire.

Brass statues and plaques bearing the names of the fallen are being ripped from their fittings and melted down so they can be sold for scrap. These plaques are often the last personal link with some of the fallen. If they are lost and their names forgotten, then it dilutes everything Remembrance Day stands for.

In the U.K., soaring prices for metals like copper, which has seen a threefold increase in value since 2009, has led to railway lines, phone lines, as well as war memorials and statues being targeted by metal thieves. These are deliberate acts.

In fact, I understand that at least three treasured monuments are looted, vandalized or in fact destroyed every week. This has left communities across the United Kingdom outraged, and rightly so, at the appalling insult to the heroes of two world wars. There are also growing calls for tighter laws to halt the plunder of memorials and tougher sentences for those who wilfully desecrate them in that part of the world.

I would like to invite all hon. members to consider how the families of Canadian service personnel, men and women, must feel when they witness or hear of similar acts of desecration being committed in Canada.

One hopes that all of our institutions, including schools, continue to instil proper appreciation of the role the Canadian Forces have played and are continuing to play in preserving our way of life.

It is my fervent hope that Bill C-217, once enacted, will help deter those who might engage in such outrageous conduct in the future.

I agree with my colleague, the hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon, that it is important to distinguish mischief against a war memorial, cenotaph or other such structure intended to honour or remember those who have died as a result of war from mischief to other types of property. War memorials deserve special recognition.

Bill C-217 provides that where a person has been found guilty of an offence punishable on summary conviction, that person is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 18 months.

●(1925)

Furthermore, Bill C-217 proposes that where a person has been found guilty of the indictable offence of mischief committed in relation to a war memorial or cenotaph, that person would be liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years.

Bill C-217 also provides for mandatory minimum sentences that would be the same whether the Crown proceeds by indictment or by way of summary conviction. That is a very important point.

My colleagues opposite made it sound as though imprisonment would be the automatic minimum sentence in these situations. That is not correct. A first offence would entail a minimum \$1,000 fine, no imprisonment. However, for a second offence, the offender would be liable to 14 days' imprisonment. For a third or subsequent offence, if this has happened by the same accused three times, the offender would face a minimum of 30 days' imprisonment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. 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. The hon. parliamentary secretary will have four minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at our last late show the parliamentary secretary claimed that the government has a tangible plan to address climate change. However, federal and provincial government actions that have been announced or are already under way are projected to reduce submissions by only one-quarter of what is needed to meet the 2020 target. Will the parliamentary secretary tell Canadians tonight how the government plans to address the remaining three-quarters?

Canadians should be highly critical of the government's abdication of leadership on issues related to climate change, specifically its performance in meeting international climate commitments, setting science-based emission reduction targets, developing incentives for low-carbon technologies, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, pricing carbon, and studying and putting in place adaptation measures necessary to respond to the risks of climate change.

This past Tuesday, the parliamentary secretary said that Environment Canada will not close the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre. Since the centre is manned by only one person, will the parliamentary secretary confirm tonight that that person has had his or her workplace adjustment letter rescinded? The parliamentary secretary explained this past Tuesday that Canada has an international obligation to monitor ozone in the upper atmosphere and previously confirmed there would be no cuts to upper level monitoring.

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Repeatedly, I have asked what would happen to monitoring in the lower atmosphere, and repeatedly the parliamentary secretary has declined to address the question. Will the parliamentary secretary commit tonight to maintain lower atmospheric monitoring of ozone at the current levels of activity? The parliamentary secretary recognizes that Canada has been and is a global leader in ozone science. How then can she turn her back on our world-leading scientists, such as Dr. David Tarasick? Why does she not fight for them and stand up for protecting our environment?

Antarctica has an ozone hole the size of North America over it. The Canadian Arctic had a hole the size of Ontario over it. Will she commit tonight to rescind the workplace adjustment letters of Dr. Tarasick and other ozone researchers?

The parliamentary secretary's claim that changing the way ozone is monitored in Canada does not mean that Canada's ability to monitor ozone would be degraded is simply not the case. Two different ozone-monitoring networks, Brewer and ozonesonde, measure two different aspects of the atmosphere and both are needed. The system is, to use the government's terms, already integrated and optimized.

The parliamentary secretary finally admitted that integrating ozone-monitoring networks and changing the management of the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will mean reducing the number of employees dedicated to ozone science. Does the parliamentary secretary appreciate what is at stake, that the ozone problem is a global problem like climate change, and that it requires vigilant monitoring? The government is failing on climate change. Will it fail on ozone too?

• (1930)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her enthusiasm and passion on this issue. I can assure her that I also share her commitment to ensuring that we have world-class ozone monitoring data in Canada and continuing our reputation of doing so.

As I have assured my colleague numerous times in recent weeks, Environment Canada will continue to monitor the ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre will continue to deliver world-class results. We will also strive to ensure that we are wise stewards of taxpayer dollars while doing so.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we have world-leading scientists, but it will be extremely difficult for them to maintain their global leadership when scientific positions are cut, technological capabilities are reduced and atmospheric monitoring is cut back.

Will the parliamentary secretary heed the requests from international scientists, leading Canadian atmospheric scientists and thousands of Canadians who want the cuts reversed, or will the government continue to be on the wrong side of this issue, leaving behind a legacy of damage that will take a generation to repair?

Changing one's position in light of overwhelming evidence is not a sign of weakness, but rather an indication that the government is willing to respond to science and the facts.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, Canada's excellent track record of providing ozone monitoring data will continue, as will our ongoing work to take concrete action to protect Canada's environment.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am pursuing a question I asked the Minister of the Environment some time ago to which I received a response from the parliamentary secretary. The question was about a policy that was put in place in 2007 by the current government to limit access to journalists to scientists working within the Canadian government. This extends beyond the environmental portfolio. It affects scientists at the National Research Council and scientists working for Natural Resources Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

In point of fact, the Canadian Science Writers' Association, a national organization, wrote to all federal leaders earlier this spring, expressing its concern that this policy of muzzling scientists had led, by its calculation, to an 80% drop in media coverage of the climate crisis. I will just list some examples.

I mentioned Dr. Kristina Miller in my initial question. She is a Department of Fisheries and Oceans scientist and is very proud of the fact that her research was published in *Science*, a leading international prestigious journal. She was not allowed to speak to media by her department.

An Environment Canada team published a paper on April 5, in the *Geophysical Research Letters*, that concluded that a very dangerous rise in global CO₂ increases, leading to a 2° global average temperature increase, was quite likely and might be unavoidable. Those scientists were also not allowed to speak to the media.

Scientists who were working on radiation monitoring in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan were requested to provide data to the news media about radiation monitoring and readings. That request to Health Canada was denied.

We also know there was an almost amusing story of a journalist attempting to reach an NRC scientist based in Victoria, whose research had been published internationally. This research related to a flood 13,000 years ago. That researcher was not allowed to speak to the media.

Then there is the very recent story of Dr. David Tarasick, referred to just moments ago by my colleague from Etobicoke North, who has been doing important research on ozone monitoring. That work, along with work by other international colleagues, was published in the prestigious journal *Nature*. It pointed out that a quite unprecedented ozone hole had opened up over the northern Arctic. We have heard of the ozone hole over Antarctica, which has been monitored and recorded since the mid-1980s. However, this was the first and historically unprecedented hole opening up over the Arctic. Interestingly enough, Dr. Tarasick was allowed to provide an interview to the media. It was a supervised interview with Environment Canada personnel present at all times, trying to steer him away from answering certain questions, but at least the interview was granted.

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It is also troubling to me that as a member of Parliament, for the first time in my life when I contact scientists within the Government of Canada, they are no longer able to communicate with me. I have had them explain by emails that they will check and get back to me whether they are allowed to answer my question. In some cases, these are colleagues I have known for decades and because I am a member of Parliament, they are not allowed to answer my questions.

I ask the hon. parliamentary secretary this. How can the Canadian public have confidence in a government that does not allow its scientists to speak to the public, a public that is so proud of their research, that wants to keep Canadian research in the forefront on climate change, on ozone depletion, on fisheries science? How can we have confidence?

• (1935)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal in facts and statistics tonight as well.

First, our department continually makes its experts available to both the media and members opposite, with ministers also acting as principal spokespeople for their respective departments.

However, since January 2011, officials at Environment Canada have completed over 1,000 media interviews. Specifically relating to science, we have provided 600 interviews with departmental scientists. We respond to requests from media for scientific information in a responsive manner. In fact, this year alone, we have met over 80% of reporters, often with very tight deadlines, and we were able to respond to 98% of the requests. Canadians know because of this they can count on Environment Canada for the information that they need.

We are also committed to sharing information with all Canadians about what is happening in the environment around them. That is why we take pride in the accomplishments of our excellent team at Environment Canada and the results that they deliver. Those results include: a sector by sector plan to align with the U.S. and achieve a 17% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020; addressing concerns with the sustainable development of the oil sands; and a world-class monitoring plan that focuses on water, air quality and biodiversity. We will continue to implement this plan with our team and with our partners in the provinces, industry and other stakeholder groups so Canadians can be assured of the environmental sustainability of our oil and gas industry.

We have also worked closely with provinces, territories, Health Canada, industry and environmental and health groups to develop things like the national air quality management system. This system will include new air quality standards that will improve the air quality for the environment and the health of all Canadians. These are tangible results that our team at Environment Canada is producing and these are tangible results it is communicating to the media.

We are committed to ensuring that Canada's natural heritage is protected, while being cognizant of the need to be wise stewards of taxpayer dollars and to protect our country's fragile economic recovery.

• (1940)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. parliamentary secretary provide any rationale whatsoever for why this policy was brought in, in the first place in 2007? We have had Environment Canada operational in the country going back to 1970. At no time between 1970 and 2007 did any government feel it was necessary to have media, representatives and journalists go through a star chamber process to get access to our scientists. They could pick up a phone, send an email and get an interview with the scientists and researchers across the country.

What possible rationale is there for having this process at all, which often requires that our journalists go to scientists in other countries to get answers about work that has been done within Canada?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Again, Mr. Speaker, to deal in facts, since January of this year, over 1,000 interviews have been conducted by officials at Environment Canada and over 600 interviews have been provided by departmental scientists. This shows that we are engaging with the Canadian public, as is our role, but that we are also providing tangible, quality, action-oriented results regarding the protection of Canada's environment, and this is something of which our government is very proud.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:41 p.m.)

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